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**Last Exit**  
by Steve Stiles

## Contents—*eI*37—April 2008

**Cover: “Last Exit,”** by Steve Stiles

**...Return to sender, address unknown....27 [*eI* letter column],** by Earl Kemp

**Fanzine Research,** by Rob Latham

**Diary for *Financial Times*,** by Michael Moorcock

**Jack Williamson: A Grand Master's Centennial,** by Stephen Haffner

**Good Guys, Bad Guys, and the Weight of the World,** by Gilbert Head

***The Smut Peddler*,** by Juri Nummelin

**“A Whole Boatload of Sensitive Bullshit,”** by Jay A. Gertzman

**Back cover: “Sector General,”** by Ditmar [Martin James Ditmar Jensen]

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**THIS ISSUE OF *eI*** is in memory of UK megafan Ken Slater and my old friend from the 1950s, Sir Arthur C. Clarke.

In the strictly sleaze world it is also in memory of UK King of Pornography Paul Raymond.

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The Steve Stiles front cover of this issue is a colored version of an original appearance in black and white on Robert Lichtman's *Trap Door* #10, January 1991.

#

As always, everything in this issue of *eI* beneath my byline is part of my in-progress rough-draft memoirs. As such, I would appreciate any corrections, revisions, extensions, anecdotes, photographs, jpegs, or what have you sent to me at [earlkemp@citlink.net](mailto:earlkemp@citlink.net) and thank you in advance for all your help.

Bill Burns is *jefe* around here. If it wasn't for him, nothing would get done. He inspires activity. He deserves some really great rewards. It is a privilege and a pleasure to have him working with me to make *eI* whatever it is.

Other than Bill Burns, Dave Locke, and Robert Lichtman, these are the people who made this issue of *eI* possible: Jay A. Gertzman, Stephen Haffner, Jacques Hamon, Gilbert Head, Rob Latham, Michael Moorcock, and Juri Nummelin.

**ARTWORK:** This issue of *eI* features original artwork by Ditmar, and recycled artwork by Steve Stiles and William Rotsler.

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I do not think that science fiction is logically a separate form of fiction. It is simply fiction with an emphasis on technology. The term only has meaning because there is a little society of writers who are for some reason, pleased to think of themselves as separate.

-- Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., *Double Bill Symposium*, 1963-64

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## ...Return to sender, address unknown.... 27

The Official *eI* Letters to the Editor Column

Artwork recycled William Rotsler

By Earl Kemp

We get letters. Some parts of some of them are printable. Your letter of comment is most wanted via email to [earlkemp@citlink.net](mailto:earlkemp@citlink.net) or by snail mail to P.O. Box 6642, Kingman, AZ 86402-6642 and thank you.

Also, please note, I observe DNQs and make arbitrary and capricious deletions from these letters in order to remain on topic.

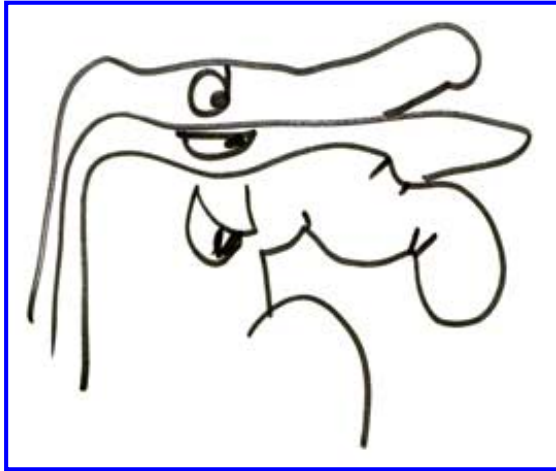
This is the official Letter Column of *eI*, and following are a few quotes from a few of those letters concerning the last issue of *eI*. All this in an effort to get you to write letters of comment to *eI* so you can look for them when they appear here.

**Tuesday February 12, 2008:**

**Joseph T. Major:** I wish I could write half as good and half as perceptively as Sidney.

#

**Michael Moorcock:** Yeah. Enjoyed all of *eI*36. Don't think I saw that review of *Alien Heat* before. Terry's stuff was good to see. Filled in the odd blank, too. There was a time I avoided Berkley and now I wish I hadn't.



I loved Sid. Used to see him when he came over to UK to lecture. I think I was going through my dramatic divorce when I saw him last, about 1980. Was horrified to learn late that he had that rare form of Parkinson's. I thought he'd just got too elevated to remember his old mates... Which I have to say always seemed unlikely. I wish they'd asked me for an anecdote. I have a very good one.

One of the times he was lecturing to, I think, the Royal Society, I asked him how he did his lectures. Was he as funny on stage as off.

"It's very serious," he said. "No jokes for the Royal Society. Instead the auditorium suddenly goes dark.

Then a spotlight moves across stage and picks out a blackboard -- on it, a single, brilliant equation. The spot lingers. Then the spotlight crosses to stage left -- and there's me. Dressed entirely in tight black leather...."

Wish I could tell 'em the way he did.

#

**Robert Toomey:** Nice job with the zine. Great to see Sid's reviews all together in one place. The interview with him and Greg was nice, and the links to other articles was a good touch. I couldn't believe that picture of the young S.C. was really him. He definitely found a better look as he got older.

#

**Edith Kemp Pinney:** This is a very nice tribute to Sidney. I remember him fondly and just as you describe "one of the kids." It is good to see that you are continuing with *eI*.

**Thursday February 14, 2008:**

**Chris Garcia:** That's a fantastic cover on *eI36*! At first, I was thinking these were drawings of my Dad from the mid-1970s. It does look a lot like him from those days! Maybe every guy looked like that in the old days...only with different facial hair.

Sidney Coleman is a name I certainly remember, his reviews always being something to be discussed. I read all those old *F&SF*s when I was in college and bought a huge number of them from one of the fifteen used bookstores that littered Beacon Street between Brookline and the Fens. The book reviews were often more interesting than the stories. I'm from a different age, a different kind of reader, it would seem. Seldom did I agree, but

rare was the time I didn't see his point. There was a shift in the days before I began to read in earnest, where a totally different kind of reader was born. We were literarily hard of hearing, requiring writers to type louder, harder stories before we got it. It seemed like Dr. Coleman never really got that. His take on the Silverberg stories during his 'Compleat Hack' period are a perfect example. These were the kinds of stories that were designed for readers who came around 20 years after they were written. The review of *Three Trips in Time and Space* was actually far more interesting than the reviewed material. I was howling just rereading it. I've stolen that format for reviews myself over the years.

Wait...Greg Benford studied under Edward Teller? I had no idea and now I must find the time to chat with him about Dr. Teller. My only meeting with the gentleman was about 6 months before his death, at Livermore when they showed our objects in the Anniversary of the Lab. He was collapsed, but he told a Von Neumann story in the accent that you knew came from somewhere far into the East of Europe.

The classic 'Being a genius is a profession for the young' quote came up not too long ago in a conversation I was having with someone at BASFA. We were talking about the works of Orson Welles and that he was a true genius. I said it, only half remembering that it was a line from someone in the SF field.



You know what's funny. The criticism of *A Coney Island of the Mind* has to be the most unjust. Now, I speak as a guy who's known Larry Ferlinghetti off and on for much of my life, but I really became a fan of his after taking the time to read *Coney Island* and discovering that poetry did not rise and set with the works of ee cummings. I like Niven's stuff, but Ferlinghetti's work is more than deserving of it.

There is no question that Alan Guth will win the Nobel, likely in the next five years. I'm a Nobel junky, have met many and when I see them walking down the street in Palo Alto or Berkeley, I point them out. As a huge fan of lists, I try to keep up on who will be getting the Nobel (and there are about 200 people in physics alone who will obviously be in serious contention until they pass away) and Guth is an obvious choice. He is also the source of one of the great quotes: "It is said that there's no such thing as a free lunch. But the universe is the ultimate free lunch."

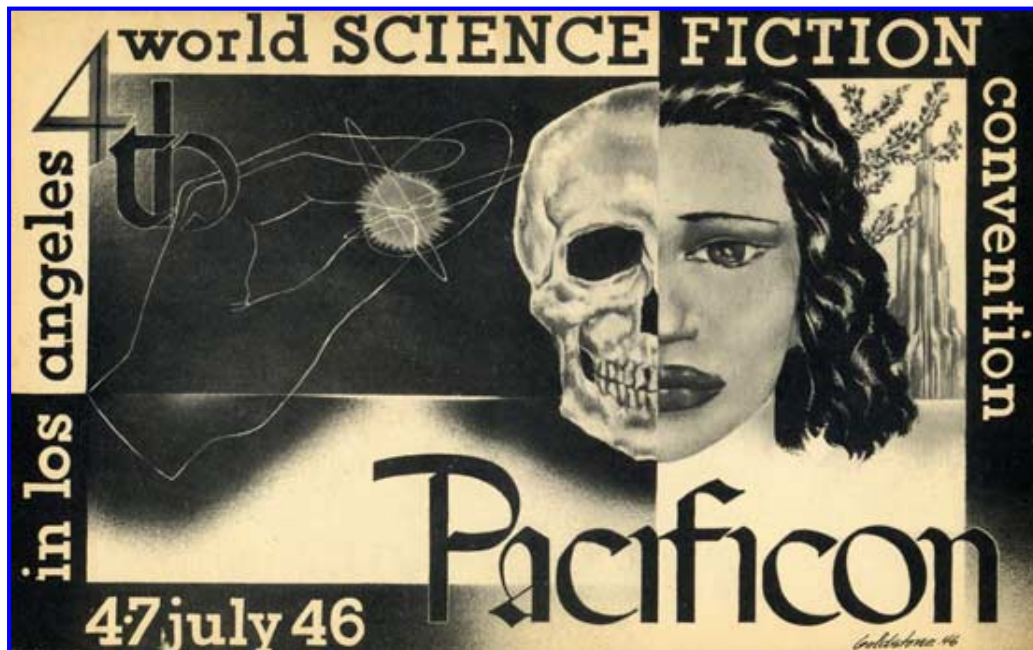
This issue was certainly a fitting tribute to an amazingly interesting human being

**Saturday February 23, 2008:**

**Robert Lichtman:** Thanks for *eI* No. 36, all in all a terrific tribute to our dear departed mutual friend, Sid! I'm happy to have played some small part in helping get this together.

When I turned to the letter column, I was surprised *and* pleased to notice that the letter-writers' names preceded their letters instead of following them. And then I read Ted White's letter and saw that it was he who suggested this modest but important change. Like him, I'd long felt some annoyance at having to cast eyetracks down and then back up again in order to see who was speaking.

In writing about the copy of *To the End of Time*—the 1953 hardcover Stapledon omnibus—I overlooked mentioning that it was Cynthia Goldstone who gave it to me. It had been her late husband Lou's copy and on the first front end paper is his autograph. I don't know if you ever met Lou, but he was an artist of some note. In his later years he did abstracts, but back in 1946 he did the cover for the Pacificon's program book. I'm attaching a JPG of it for your delectation.



I also forgot to note that I have one other Stapledon book—a copy of the 1944 British hardcover edition (Secker & Warburg) of *Sirius*, whose subtitle is “a fantasy of love and discord.” I found this copy about ten years ago at a used bookstore in Berkeley and bought it because of this inscription by Forrest J Ackerman: “Miriam: Why not set a goal? —to one day contribute to the world a work as worthwhile as this one?” Miriam was, of course, the first wife of the late Terry Carr. But at the time Forry wrote this inscription, which is dated April 1958, she was still Miriam Dyches, who Forry at the time (and perhaps forevermore) referred to as “the girl with the golden goojies.” Miriam ran with this—she began publishing fanzines around that time, each with a unique name but under the imprint of Goojie Publications.

John Purcell writes, “I can't help but wander through a bookstore if given half a chance.” I'm sure I'm not the only one who will chime in with a Me Too, but I find these days that

this only applies if I'm in a bookstore that's new to me. I've so exhausted the possibilities in the local bookstores that I seldom check them out, however convenient they may be, and also no doubt like many others have cast a wider net thanks to Bookfinder and its ilk to bookstores in far-of exotic locations.

I appreciated Bob Toomey's brief look inside the pages of Sid's *Aspects of Symmetry*, a book I've often considered getting but have always been put off by the price (currently the cheapest copy is \$67.50, up about 20% from the last time I checked). His first paragraph was the most affecting in his short article, though—"a sad finish for a great teacher and brilliant wit," indeed (and alas).

Although I have them all in the original sources, it's good to have Sid's *F&SF* book review columns, his *Vertex* interview, and Terry's Sid anecdotes from *Fandom Harvest* all in one place. And in Greg's "Reflections" I was stunned to read that there's an SF magazine published in China with a circulation of 400,000. Indeed the baton of magazine SF has passed out of the U.S. as we continue our descent off yet another center of the world stage. In the *Vertex* interview I nodded in agreement at Sid's remark, "I wouldn't be sitting here talking with you, or have half the friends I have, were it not for SF." And I agree with Benford on Hal Clement: "He's not a very interesting writer."

In the footnote at the end of Terry's "Something About Sidney" you note, "All photos in this article courtesy Carol Carr collection." This only tells half the story, and the fact that only the first photo is credited (to Barbara Silverberg) exacerbates the situation. Please note that *all* the other photos were *taken* by Carol, and that's why they're in her "collection," not that she got them from others.

A nice Ditmar rounding out the issue, but I was led to believe there would be more by your comment up front: "Bill and I would also like to call your attention to another special feature, exciting, imagination-grabbing back covers (shades of *Other Worlds*) by non other than the fabulous Ditmar [Martin James Ditmar Jenssen]." And I'd additionally like to note that the Scottish SF magazine also had back covers, many of them by ATom (the late lamented Arthur Thomson).

### **Sunday March 2, 2008:**

**Lloyd Penney:** Many thanks for another *eI*, number 36. This issue will be the challenge... I really never knew Sid Coleman, nor really knew of him. A special issue about him may mean I'll be spouting about something I know nothing about. I will make the attempt and see if I sound like a sage or an idiot.

It is good to see that new readers are coming in, and that you may become a reliable source for a future documentary project. I hope that if the project is legit, you'll be kept up to date on its progress, and you'll pass it on to us.

I agree with John Purcell and so many others, Steve Stiles should have his own rocket collection. Now to see how he does this year for the Denver Worldcon. I wish I could help

with that, but I never did support that Worldcon, and have no intentions of going. I will, however, be running the Montréal Worldcon fanzine lounge, and can make my vote that year.



From what I am reading about Sidney Coleman, fan, it does remind me that often, we know these people through fandom, but that we truly don't know them, at least not all about each person. We do get to know a little more about him through his reviews; he reveres none of the writers he reviews, and skewered those writers whose efforts could have been better. Is there anyone who can review like that any more? I do get the feeling that he leaned toward the negative in reviews, while others were more willing to forgive and enjoy the novel or short story.

And you know, that's about it. It is wonderful to see all this recollection about someone so obviously loved, but one can't be familiar with all of science fiction and its fandom; it's just too big for one person to at least have a passing familiarity. I will offer my condolences to all who knew and loved Sid Coleman, and when *eI37* comes around, I will, with luck, know something more about the topics at hand so I can offer MyHOs, and produce a better letter.

**Saturday March 8, 2008:**

**Steve Stiles:** By the way, appreciated the Sid Coleman issue: He was a dear man.

**Monday March 10, 2008:**

**Dave Langford:** That was a Damn Fine Issue of yours in honour of Sid Coleman. Especially Grant Canfield's cover. Late in 2007 I wrote another short-short story for the "Futures" page in *Nature/Nature Physics*, and slipped "Coleman" into a list of surnames of notable physicists that appears in there. Got the proof the other day, and was glad to see they haven't taken him out.

**Tuesday March 11, 2008:**

**Jerry Murray:** Very good issue of *eI*...even though I'd never before heard of Sid Coleman. Every time I read your issues about science fiction, I regret that I never could get interested in it when I was young, as you, Gary Sohler, and most other sf fans did.

I did get into porn when I was young, no more than 11 years old, and that destructive juvenile experience later blossomed into the most exciting and enjoyable decade of my life...thanks mainly to you.

**Friday March 14, 2008:**

**Bill Foran:** I found the *eI* site a couple of years ago. Every now and again when I'm avoiding my "real work", I'll read some excerpts. Wildly entertaining. I've got a pretty vivid imagination and I can just picture Mexico in the old days, plenty of extracurriculars to be involved in, etc. I love reading it.

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As for literary criticism in general: I have long felt that any reviewer who expresses rage and loathing for a novel or a play or a poem is preposterous. He or she is like a person who has put on full armor and attacked a hot fudge sundae or a banana split.

--Kurt Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*

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## Fanzine Research: Some Sercon Musings\*

By Rob Latham

In March of 2003, I spent two weeks pursuing research in the fanzine archive of the University of California at Riverside's J. Lloyd Eaton Collection. This archive consists of two major donations: the Terry Carr Collection, containing over 20,000 issues of 1,400 different zines, and the Bruce Pelz Collection, which is approximately ten times as large. The latter is not yet fully catalogued, so only a portion of those holdings is currently accessible, but the Carr Collection alone is a treasure trove for students of American sf, especially of the 1950s-80s (the active years of Carr's collecting). Since the world of zines remains largely a terra incognita for sf scholars like myself, I thought I would offer some observations on the challenges and gratifications of pursuing such research.



Rob Latham

I am currently working on a book covering the New Wave movement of the 1960s, and as I began planning for the project, it occurred to me that an interesting way to test prevailing critical assumptions about the period would be to see how the debates and controversies associated with the New Wave were experienced on the ground, among sf readers and fans. I was in part inspired by a general dissatisfaction with the conventional wisdom regarding the New Wave, which seems to me insufficiently attentive to long-range continuities in the field and woefully under-theorized in terms of particular transformations in the institutional structures of sf, including fandom. More specifically, I was stimulated by David Hartwell's fine chapter on "Fandom" in his book *Age of Wonders*, where he argues for the existence of an intimate feedback loop between science-fiction authors and their fans:

[T]he SF writer is aware of a palpable and immediate audience. She meets them at conventions, they write her letters, send her fanzines that mention her and her work, respond in a fashion and in significant numbers unknown in any other field of literature. The fans are the SF writer's friends as well as the core of the SF audience, whose approval indicates wider support among the general readers of SF, whose disapproval is to be risked only with care and, perhaps, at great cost.....

An SF writer, to gain the support of fans, is expected to appear at conventions ... and interact personally with the fans; he is expected to answer personal correspondence from fans and to participate in some manner in fan publications.... A professional who creates a benign persona with regard to fandom is assured of widespread and long-term support from the fan community. (168)

One would expect such a tightly-knit support structure to be especially sensitive to major

commotions in the field such as the New Wave. Identifying shifts and tensions in the pro-fan relationship could perhaps provide an index to just how challenging and disruptive the New Wave phenomenon actually was.

My first line of approach involved sifting through the letter columns of the professional magazines published during the decade—*New Worlds*, *F&SF*, *Galaxy*, *Analog*, *Worlds of If*, etc.—to see how fans responded to the more experimental styles of writing and the more explicit forms of content (sexual, political) that are viewed as key New Wave innovations. A significant problem with this method, aside from the fact that these columns were generally rather scant, is that the letters were selected and framed by the magazines' editors, all of whom (Moorcock, Campbell, and Pohl especially) had their own deeply entrenched views of the entire affair. Moreover, coverage of fandom in the prozines was fairly limited, since the magazines had to speak to a wider community of readers for whom the doings of a clannish subculture might hold little interest. Among the exceptions were Lin Carter's "Our Man in Fandom" column, which ran from April 1966 through May 1968 in *Worlds of If*, and the "Fantasy Fandom" section that ran in *Fantastic* during 1969-70, which reprinted items from major zines and featured other forms of commentary by prominent fans (including John J. Pierce's screed against the New Wave in the August 1970 issue).

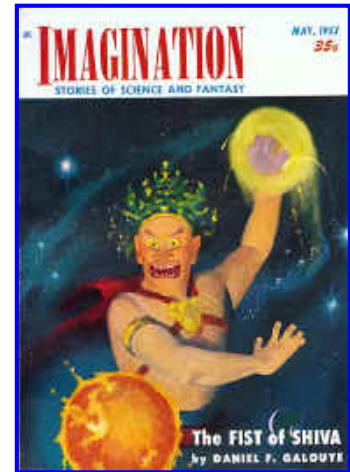


Indeed, both *Fantastic* and *Amazing* during this period, revamped under the general editorship of Ted White (who had been an active presence in fandom for nearly a decade), began to evince a heightened responsiveness to their readers, the former's "According to You" and the latter's "... Or So You Say" sections taking on some of the heft and hectic give-and-take of fanzine lettercols. These prozines could do this, in large part, because they were second-rank publications, several notches below *Analog*, *Galaxy*, and *F&SF*, and could thus afford to be less concerned about maintaining a discreet distance from the realms of fandom. This division continued a trend established during the magazine boom of the 1950s, when the only prozines to run substantial regular sections on fandom were the third-tier publications, especially those edited by William L. Hamling and Raymond A. Palmer—such as the "Fandora's Box" column, penned by Mari Wolf and Robert Bloch, that ran in Hamling's *Imagination* from 1951-58. While several commentators have stressed the frequent crossover between fan and professional careers (e.g., Moskowitz, "From Fanzines to Fame"), not enough critical work has been done on the firm barriers between professional and fan culture long maintained by the major magazines. The Carter column in *If*, for example, in its bemused tone and its coverage of quite elementary ground, indicated editor Pohl's assumption that most of the magazine's readers were generally ignorant of fandom and inclined to find the topic rather quaint, if they were interested at all.

If I wanted to avoid the preconceptions of the prozines, then, an alternative tactic was to access fan opinion directly—for example, through ethnographic interviews. But I have

neither the skill nor the temperament for this sort of work, and could not seriously hope to contribute to the sociological study of fandom already undertaken by William Bainbridge, Albert Berger, Phyllis Day, Camille Bacon-Smith, and Brian Stableford, all of whom are trained social scientists. I decided instead to canvass the major fanzines published during the decade in the hopes of gleaning useful commentary unfiltered by potentially biased mediators.

Once decided on this method, I was faced with the difficulty of locating such ephemeral material and, after discovering the mother-lode of the Eaton holdings, of figuring out how best to navigate this embarrassment of riches. I had only two weeks to devote to my research trip, and I didn't want to spend them wading through minor *apazines* given over to the madcap *natter* of local *faaans*; what I needed to find were the most substantial *genzines* featuring *sercon* discussion of the evolving field by thoughtful *faneds* and other *actifen*. (Donald Franson's *A Key to the Terminology of Science-Fiction Fandom*, published by the National Fantasy Fan Federation in 1962, provides definitions of these various terms. This lexicon, which builds on Jack Speer's pioneering *Fancylopedia*, privately published by Forrest J Ackerman in 1944, is available online at <[http://fanac.org/Fannish\\_Reference\\_Works/FandBook/FandBook.html](http://fanac.org/Fannish_Reference_Works/FandBook/FandBook.html)>. The celebrated histories of fandom written by Sam Moskowitz, Harry Warner, Jr., and Damon Knight were not helpful in this regard, since their collective coverage ends in the 1950s, while the sociological work on fandom mentioned above tends to slight fanzines in favor of more direct forms of subcultural interaction, such as convention meetings.

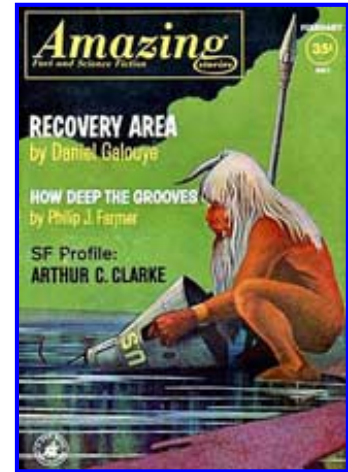


One of the frustrating paradoxes of working in this area is that the recent eruption of scholarly work on fan undergrounds and zine culture, driven by cultural-studies concerns (e.g., Dunscombe, Sabin, and Triggs), more or less ignores science fiction (even though the zine phenomenon originated in pulp-era fandom), while those critics who do deal with sf zines focus on a very narrow corpus, mostly centered on *Star Trek* (e.g., Jenkins, Penley). Harry Warner's brief "History of Fanzines" in Joe Sanders's *Science Fiction Fandom* amounts to little more than a series of scattered observations. There is as yet no substantial historical survey or serious critical theorization of the role of fanzines in postwar American sf. (I must admit, though, to a grudging fondness for Fredric Wertham's *The World of Fanzines*—yes, *that* Fredric

Wertham, the crusading psychiatrist whose 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent* prompted a crackdown on representations of sex and violence in comics. Written toward the end of his life, and giving evidence at times of encroaching senility, *The World of*

*Fanzines* is something of a mea culpa for his earlier career, warmly praising sf and comics zines as grassroots alternatives to mainstream, commercialized youth culture. It is an entertainingly daft book—“a masterpiece of scholarship gone off the rails,” as Dwight Decker has observed—but useless to the serious researcher.)

There is also no comprehensive bibliography, much less a reference index, to American zines of the 1960s-70s. The coverage in Robert Pavlat and William Evans’s *Fanzine Index* extends only through 1952, and to my knowledge nothing similar exists until the chapters on zines in Harry and Mariane Hopkins’s annual *Fanzine Directory*, first issued in 1979, which provide broad publication data only. There is a privately-published three-volume bibliography of British zines, covering 1936-78, prepared by Peter Roberts, and an anonymously compiled survey of mostly Canadian publications through 1985 held in the archives of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association. Doubtless other such fannish efforts at basic scholarship are floating around the world of zine connoisseurs and collectors. The point is that



research in this area is now at the same rudimentary stage as were sf studies in general prior to the appearance of the pioneering book and magazine inventories of Bleiler and Day over fifty years ago. Bluntly put, we don’t even really know what’s out there. Just about the only way to discover the contents of a particular fanzine published since World War II is to read the review columns in other contemporary zines. (Such review sections, sizing up the competition and offering lively feedback, have long been a common feature of sf zines, and the practice has occasionally been copied by professional magazines seeking to curry favor with fans: Rog Phillips’ fanzine review column “The Club House,” published in Ray Palmer’s *Amazing* and *Other Worlds* from 1948-56, was revived by Ted White when he took over *Amazing* in 1969, with the new column penned by John D. Berry and rich brown.)

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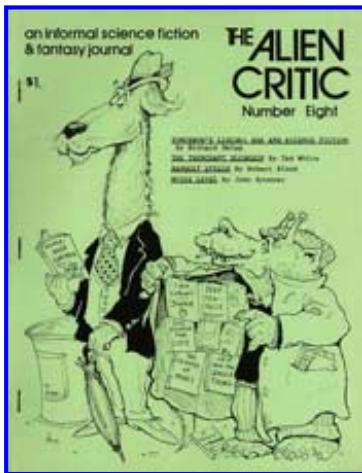
See also “The Club House,” by Mike Deckinger, [e131](#), April 2007

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This is not to say that no trails have been blazed through this wilderness; indeed, at least three thumbnail surveys of major fanzines are readily available: Joe Siclari’s chapter “Science Fiction Fandom: A Selected, Annotated Bibliography” in Sanders’ volume, which briefly annotates 29 different zines; Joe Sanders’s own “Academic Periodicals and Major Fanzines” in Marshall Tymn and Mike Ashley’s reference work on sf magazines, which mixes coverage of about 50 zines with annotations on small-press and academic publications; and Peter Roberts’s theme entry on “Fanzine” in the Clute/Nicholls *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, which is keyed to 36 entries on significant individual titles. These are commendable first stabs at describing the contours of a fanzine canon, but



broadly, I scrolled through the Eaton's fanzine catalog, looking for items whose titles, or dates of publication, or editors' names suggested potential relevance. I came up with another 75 zines published during the period that seemed to be worth at least a look. That left me with, I thought, a viable two-week program: to work my way through about 100 zines, perhaps a total of 500 separate issues, many of which could be determined at a glance not to be germane to my research, some of which I would have to pore over in detail. (Also, since the Eaton librarians cheerfully copy individual items at the request of visiting scholars, I would be able to secure and study especially important articles, interviews, or letters at my leisure later on.)



So what emerged during this orgy of immersion into 1960s zines, aside from a rekindling of the fanboy impulses of my misspent youth? For the full particulars, you'll have to wait for my future book. Suffice it to say here that my initial hunch regarding the pro-fan relationship as a barometer for the waxings and wanings of New Wave controversy was amply borne out. Indeed, I was surprised by just how much the emergence of the New Wave, and the reaction against it, was intimately bound up with the aggressive professionalization of authorship promoted by the Science Fiction Writers of America, founded in 1965. Fannish resentment was palpable toward younger pros who seemed to write solely for one another's approbation—registered through the nascent Nebula Awards—and to pursue narrowly careerist goals in preference to the communal ethos of traditional fandom. In many ways the flap over the New Wave merely continued earlier debates over the presumed elitism and snooty literariness of the so-called “Milford Mafia,” that authorial cadre united around the annual writing workshops sponsored by James Blish, Judith Merrill, and Damon Knight. Not all fans, of course, agreed that the field's growing professionalism and its cultivation of more “artistic” standards of writing was a negative thing, just as the authors themselves were not unanimous in embracing these changes; and zines figured as a prominent site where the divisions and alliances among the various factions played out.

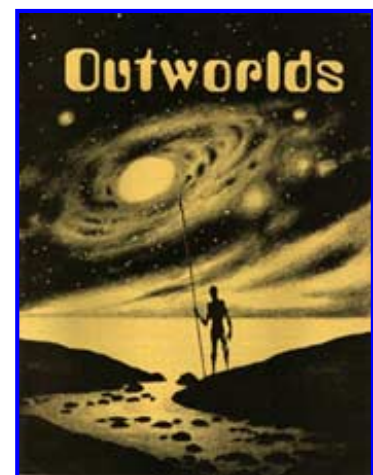
In conclusion, I'd like to offer a few broad observations regarding the value of fanzine research for the sf scholar. As my remarks in the preceding paragraph should make plain, canvassing fanzines is an excellent way to track ongoing developments in the field inaccessible if one reads only professional publications. For one thing, a common practice in fanzines was the reprinting of speeches delivered by sf authors at Worldcons and other major conventions—the sort of material that now sometimes appears in academic journals or in widely accessible semiprozines, forms of publication that did not really exist prior to the 1970s. Such speeches, at least during the period I'm studying, were major vehicles for the venting of sharp political views about the genre that might not appear in such unvarnished form in an author's published writings. Lester Del Rey's speech at the 1967 WorldCon and Donald Wollheim's at LunaCon the following year offered ferocious denunciations of the New Wave as a contingent of spoiled, self-indulgent, decadent brats.

Even when a particular speech was not directly reproduced, most fanzines included conference reports that gave an excellent sense of the occasion, of the audience's reaction, and of the sometimes barbed exchanges during Q&A. Reading a number of conference reports on the same speech was a fascinating way to register the multifarious reverberations of a major authorial statement about the shape and direction of the field.

Moreover, the lusty give-and-take of conference events continued in the voluminous pages of the fanzine letter columns, where quite unbuttoned and sometimes brutally frank opinions were expressed. Predictably enough, Harlan Ellison was often in the middle of the most contentious exchanges, as when he lambasted J.J. Pierce, editor of the anti-New Wave zine *Renaissance*, who had dared to condemn ambitious artists "for caring about their literary quality rather more than they do the appeal of their work to adolescent minds." Affirming unequivocally that "the field is healthier than it has ever been," Ellison dismissed Pierce's efforts to preserve traditional sf from New Wave contagion as the carpings of a "pompous martinet" who "not only cannot write the fiction you profess to adore, but cannot even comment critically with any degree of lucidity.... I suggest it is time you hired a ghost writer" (48-49). Listening in on this ongoing squabble—among professional writers, between pros and their fans, and among the fans themselves—gave me a much broader context for understanding the New Wave debates as they percolated up into prozines and books during the period.



Indeed, I was genuinely astonished by how many sf authors not only read the fanzines but took the time to respond to them—validating Hartwell's observation about the need to cultivate a professional persona. Of course, it was a common practice for fanzine editors to send free copies of particular zines to writers who were mentioned or whose work was reviewed in them; thus, not all pros were carefully monitoring everything going on in the fan press, but rather were reacting to specific goads or solicitations. That said, of all the significant sf authors of the 1960s, the only one who was conspicuous by his or her absence from the numerous fanzine lettercols that I surveyed was Robert A. Heinlein.



Second, fanzines, at least during the period I'm studying, powerfully display the permeability of sf to trends in the broader culture. As one might expect, the 1960s zines showed the influence of contemporary musical and drug subcultures, in some cases becoming essentially counterculture publications in their openness to these phenomena, as well as to political movements such as feminism, gay rights, antiwar protest, and ecology. Susan Glicksohn's zine from the early 1970s, *Aspidistra*, for example, was expressly devoted to ecological causes, while publications

such as *Odd*, edited by Raymond Fisher, and the long-running *Starling*, edited by Hank Luttrell, were vehicles of antiestablishment attitudes virtually indistinguishable at times from the contemporary underground press. What was compelling in reading through this material was not that sf fans should have shared many cultural interests and values with their “mundane” contemporaries, but rather that they should have felt the need to articulate those values within the context of their abiding allegiance to sf, viewing the genre through the lens of their extracurricular commitments (and vice versa). While the 1960s might be unique in this regard, I suspect that every generation of fans seeks to bring sf into dialogue with a larger universe of discourse and action—rather than, as elitist snobs sometimes suggest, looking to “escape” from the real world into aimless fantasy. Scholars whose work on science fiction engages with issues of cultural politics would thus be well advised to examine fanzines.



Finally, I think scholars who study the essays, reviews, and other materials published in major sercon zines will be quite impressed by the high level of critical commentary they sustain. The term “fannish” that academics sometimes use to casually disparage amateur scholarship on sf does not do justice to the passionate, articulate, imaginative analyses of the genre published in the very best zines. Indeed, it soon became clear to me that many of the concerns academic critics have pursued in their work were long prefigured by perspicacious fans—e.g., the social conservatism of traditional hard sf, the genre’s often laughably impoverished depiction of female characters, its complicated relationship to high fantasy and supernatural horror, the influence on sf of other media such as film and

visual art, and so on. By the early 1970s, the level of commentary in the so-called “criticalzines” was so high that it led Gregory Benford, in his “Thoughts While Typing” column in *Outworlds*, to mock the trend toward “the Serious Literary Article,” probably written “by fledgling Assistant Professors of English without a scholarly journal to publish in,” and often bearing forbidding titles such as “Neo-Classical Eschatological Bifurcation in Doc Savage: Some Aspects” (57-58). A wealth of topics that I didn’t have time to follow or that weren’t directly relevant to my research were covered in extraordinary depth in the zines I examined, such as the revival of classic sword-and-sorcery and dark fantasy during the decade, the controversy over paperback reprints of Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, the status and meaning of Kubrick and Clarke’s *2001*, and much more.

Many of the major fan commentators of the 1960s and ’70s deserve to be rediscovered; I was particularly impressed by one Angus Taylor, who wrote for a number of genzines during the 1970s, such as *Energumen* and *Khatru*, and who had a column called “Sgt. Pepper’s Starship,” first in *Kallikanzaros* and later in *Starling*, that was consistently lively and incisive. But he was just one of many shrewd contemporary observers of the sf scene featured regularly in the zines: indeed, a broad-based anthology of fan writing from the period would be an invaluable resource for scholars and teachers of sf. (A few volumes reprinting the work of major individual critics have appeared—e.g., *The Best of Susan*

*Wood*; and there are two wide-ranging “fanthologies” of British fan writing from the 1970s, edited by Smith and by Maule and Nicholas, both published to coincide with the 37th Annual Worldcon held in Brighton, England in 1979. But no comparable volume of US material exists, at least to my knowledge.)

Such a tome would also be a sight for sore eyes—I would have been desperately grateful to encounter some standard typeset copy rather than having to squint over the fading, poorly mimeographed, multicolor monstrosities many of these zines are. After two straight weeks, eight hours per day, poring over this material, I can attest that studying fanzines can take its toll on your vision; but it can also, I believe, significantly expand your view of how to do scholarship on modern science fiction.

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Fanzine cover scans Courtesy Robert Lichtman Collection.

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I think it can be tremendously refreshing if a creator of literature has something on his mind other than the history of literature so far. Literature should not disappear up its own asshole, so to speak.

--Kurt Vonnegut, "Paris Review" Spring 1977

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## Diary For *Financial Times*\*

By Michael Moorcock

House-hunting is at the best of times an experience to rival divorce and map-reading as one of the most hellish experiences the average European can go through, but house-hunting in a foreign language is that much harder. We're looking for an apartment in Paris. In spite of reports informing us that the price of property has dropped or at least frozen, prices seem to rise here every few seconds. Hideous, dark, miniscule basement hovels in Montmartre actually create romantic responses as you imagine a character from Balzac, at least thrice-ruined, spending his dying months picking the thin coverlet on his bug-infested mattress as he waits hopelessly for some uncaring offspring to knock on the rotting wood of the door. For this, they're asking €400,000. Why is it these days that the apartment you want, whether you're in London, Paris, or Central Texas (where we also live) always costs just that much more than you want to pay? Mind you, given the real fall in property prices and the exchange rate, for the same money in Texas we could probably buy ourselves a good sized ranch, stocked with a mature herd of longhorns for about half what a two-bedroom in the 15th would cost us here.



Earl Kemp with  
Linda and Michael Moorcock.  
Photo by Bill Burns, Austin, Texas,  
February 2007.

In our part of rural Texas many skilled people still can't afford to look after their families on a day-to-day basis *and* pay for decent health insurance. The man who maintains our house, cut his hand with his chainsaw recently. He couldn't afford a doctor, so he went to the local Wal-Mart and bought himself something commonly sold there – a kit for sewing up your own wounds. He was very proud of the neat job he had done, though admitting that he almost fainted a couple of times in the process. What astonished us was that such kits, looking a bit like bicycle puncture repair outfits, should be on sale at all. After recently benefiting so much from the French health system and understanding that there are funding problems which have to be

addressed, I'm still worried that the somewhat distracted M. Sarkozy will try to privatise along US lines. We complain a lot about the NHS, but after everything I've witnessed in America, where brilliant treatments are available only to those who can afford them, I would still rather take my chances in a 'socialised' system. If I had to choose between spending my last years in the US or France, there's absolutely no question where I'd rather be. And that thought spurs me on to further, rather more optimistic, home-hunting.

The Parisian transport strike made searching a bit harder last week. It would have helped

if I'd been in a position to ride a bike. My agent's car is garaged some distance from where he lives so he decided to keep his appointments by motorbike. Then his motorbike broke down. Undaunted, he went to his nearest Velib' station and got himself a bike out for the day. This system of municipal bikes which can be picked up at one station and left at another has been a brilliant success in Paris and is a lot more popular than the bus- and taxi-lanes which now create, in certain parts of the cities, almost unblockable jams, especially on Fridays. The other positive thing about Velib' is that it's stimulated the sale of bikes enormously, as people discover the pleasures and ease of cycling in what is, after all, a very small city compared to London. I wonder if Ken Livingstone or his successor could ensure his popularity by installing a similar system. I'm sure Boris Johnson would back it.

The chief reason for buying a place in Paris is because Eurostar gets us to London, my children and grandchildren faster than the average train from, say, Manchester. And most of Paris still retains its old local character. Although I still love London, I don't like what heritage developers have made of her. Every small town in the US nowadays has to have some 'historic' monument to attract tourist money, in order to support the kind of civic infrastructure people used to take pride in paying for. It saddens me that so much of London now runs on the same economic logic, resulting in the heritagizing up of every obscure nook and idiosyncratic cranny Londoners used to think of as their own. On Friday night I shall make a quick dash to The Bishopsgate Institute, near Liverpool Street station, at 6.30 sharp to take part in *London Lip*, a celebration of the 'City of Disappearances' – the title of Iain Sinclair's latest compendium of writing about the capital. Alan Moore, me, and Sinclair himself will discuss changing times and mythologies while Kirsten Norrie and Brian Catlin liven things up with their performances. Then it's back here to do a nostalgic reading at Shakespeare and Co. I used to busk outside to get money for books when I was a lad.

Another good reason for not wanting to live permanently in England was illustrated last Saturday night by the spectacle of the English rugger fans on the loose. Why they decided to stock up on booze in our local shops I've no idea. They shove past queuing purse-lipped old ladies, shouting over their heads to one another. 'Better get another couple of six packs! Oh, and a bottle of wine for the girls.' You immediately see the function of the women. It's to carry the beer. With red crosses all over their faces, on their hats, on their shirts, they threaten to put the entente cordiale back to the time of Agincourt. I do my best to shrink. I think of feigning muteness. At least my wife Linda's accent is American. Mine is so clearly English, there's no escape for me even when I'm buying bread at my favourite boulangerie. Years of goodwill fly away as they stand yelling outside the door: 'They haven't GOT any proper sandwiches!' Next morning, when we take our Sunday stroll beside the Seine, little pockets of them wander dazedly along the Quai D'Orsay. Now, at least they resemble a defeated army, their uniforms hidden in their packs, hoping to sneak home undetected.

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\*Reprinted from *Financial Times*, October 28, 2007 with the permission of Michael Moorcock.

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I have to believe that Man, not God, will be responsible for the end of the world. Religion is useful as a means to happiness on Earth. It, like a cat's cradle, keeps children and idiots amused, but is insubstantial. No, I do believe that Man must take the rap for His own destruction.

--Kurt Vonnegut

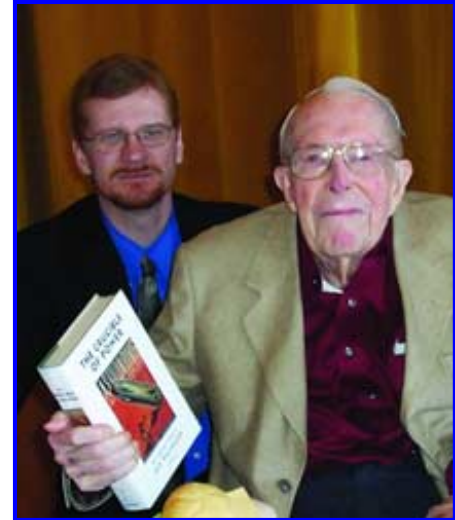
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# Jack Williamson: A Grand Master's Centennial

by Stephen Haffner

April 29, 2008 would have been Jack Williamson's 100th birthday. While Jack Williamson passed away on November 10, 2006 at the age of 98, his centennial will be celebrated in several ways. First, the [2008 Williamson Lectureship](#) will be held on April 11th at the campus of Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU) in Portales, NM. This event—in its 32nd year—is designed to honor Williamson's commitment to literature and the humanities by inviting special guests to a luncheon followed by panels at the Jack Williamson Science Fiction Library.

This year's guests are Steven Gould, author of *Jumper*, which was recently adapted as a big-budget film by 20th Century Fox; Dr. Christopher Stasheff, author of nearly 50 novels, the most popular of which might be his "Warlock of Gramarye" series which began with *The Warlock in Spite of Himself*; and Connie Willis serves as Mistress of Ceremonies. The Lectureship also draws several local (and some not-so-local) sf professionals to the event. Previous visitors have included established authors Frederik Pohl, Connie Willis, Walter Jon Williams, Edward Bryant, Charles N. Brown, Melinda Snodgrass, Fred and Joan Saberhagen, Michael Swanwick; and up-and-coming talent such as Daniel Abraham, Ian Tregillis, and Emily Mah. A special tribute is planned for fellow New Mexico giant of sf, Fred Saberhagen, who passed away last year on June 29 at the age of 77.



Stephen Haffner and Jack Williamson.  
Photo by Richard A. Kaminsky  
at the 2006 Williamson  
Lectureship, on March 2, 2006.



If you wish to attend the event, or would like additional information, please contact Dr. Patrice Caldwell at [Patrice.Caldwell@enmu.edu](mailto:Patrice.Caldwell@enmu.edu) as soon as possible.

Second, the staff and vendors of Haffner Press have been burning the midnight oil on a special book celebrating Williamson's centennial to debut at the Lectureship:

## ***The Worlds of Jack Williamson: A Centennial Tribute (1908–2008)***

Assembled in this centennial tribute are several unpublished stories: "The Moon Bird," "The Forbidden Window," "The

Golden Glass,” and a film treatment from 1957, “The Planets are Calling.” Also included are several classics in the Williamson canon such as the original novella-length version of *Darker Than You Think*; “Minus Sign,” an unreprinted “seetee” story of anti-matter and terraforming; and a tale with the first use of “psionics,” “The Man from Outside.” Contemporary stories include “The Hole in the World,” “Afterlife,” and “The Luck of the Legion,” the last “Legion of Space” adventure. Included are essays from academics and scholars who have studied Williamson’s works, as well as Dr. Williamson’s 1957 Master’s thesis, “A Study of the Sense of Prophecy in Modern Science Fiction.” Fellow Grand Masters of science fiction Frederik Pohl and James Gunn provide introductory remarks on reading, knowing, collaborating with, and admiring Jack Williamson.

*The Worlds of Jack Williamson* is essentially one big giant birthday present from Haffner Press to the friends, family, and readers of Jack Williamson. Clocking in at 720 pages, and bound in archival-quality paper with Brillianta book cloth, this book is designed to withstand years (or centuries?) of readings.

Third, Pulpcon 37 <http://pulpcon.org> will be held in Dayton, OH from July 31st - August 3rd. This year, Pulpcon celebrates Jack Williamson and the 70th Anniversary of John W. Campbell's ascension to the editorship of *Astounding Science Fiction* / *Analog Science Fiction & Fact*. Stephen Haffner will be hosting a 45-minute multimedia presentation on the life and works of Jack Williamson, followed by a DVD interview of Williamson conducted by James Gunn during the 1970s.

2008 is relatively young, and ideally the Williamson Centennial can run all the way through until April 29th, 2009. Haffner Press will be releasing *Gateway to Paradise*, the sixth volume of *The Collected Stories of Jack Williamson*, and it is hoped that other publishers, both large and small, will find ways to celebrate the life and works of one of the pioneers of science fiction.

#### Ordering information:

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Foreword by Frederik Pohl, Introduction by James Gunn

Dust jacket by Vincent di Fate

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And what is literature, Rabo," he said, "but an insider's newsletters about affairs relating to molecules, of no importance to anything in the Universe but a few molecules who have the disease called 'thought.'"

-- Kurt Vonnegut, *Bluebeard*

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# Good Guys, Bad Guys, and the Weighting of the World

By Gilbert Head

This past May, in an electronic exchange with Earl Kemp and some mutual friends, the issue of the involvement of the United States in Iraq surfaced. Some things were said about criminal behaviors, and some heat was exchanged. At one point, I suggested that I found those who had made the political choices which led to our military involvement in that country were substantially more culpable than those carrying out those orders. Earl's pointed response about illegality and immorality and the mutability of it for all involved led to his expressed point of view that all involved were equally culpable, which led to the following observation:

<GilbertHead> I can agree (somewhat) with the above sentiment if (and only if) those following the orders understand the illegality and immorality of the orders being issued, and choose to follow them anyway. For me, the greater sin lies in the origin of the orders, if only because those at the top always have a greater obligation to be on a firm moral and ethical ground before they act, as they control not only the actions of those who will actually act, but they can shape the perceptions that would make that act an acceptable thing to do. Eve shouldn't have bitten the apple (nor should Adam), but the serpent knew what the deal was....<GH>

Earl's response was that he would like to have me elaborate on the above sentiment. Hence, this.....

The matter of blame and national conscience is a tricky one. In the 20th century, the examples of a constantly reflexive national conscience over horrible actions taken by people in the name of the State are numerous; perhaps three from that era would suffice for our purposes here:

1. Japan: The tidal ebb and flow over national guilt in Japan has covered a lot of beach since the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s. Manchukuo was wrong; no, it was justified. Pearl Harbor was a national calamity; no, it was a pre-emptive act of self-defense. State-sponsored education often provides a barometer for the national "temperature" with such issues. It is worth noting that Japan regularly has internal disputes as to whether or not their school texts should include accounts of atrocities committed in the midst of state-sponsored aggression, and there are gains and losses being registered by both progressive and regressive nationalist elements by turns. Nor is Japan alone....



Gilbert Head and family in 1965.

2. Germany: Not only does the German national conscience have to wrestle with the steady decimation of most of the surrounding European populations as nations attempted to respond to Hitler's national and territorial ambitions, but the extraordinary weight of a successful program of genocide lays upon the collective as well. The Holocaust is a crime of such enormity that, over a half-century after its suspension, it is a moment in German history which their statute is still quick to condemn and, in some respects, attempt to suppress. Surely this monstrosity cannot be attributed to a people. Surely no nation would endorse such a course. And yet.... And yet....
  
3. United States: In adding the United States to this list, I acknowledge at the outset that the magnitude of sins which one might wish to assign to the United States in the closing years of the 20th century is substantially less than at least one of the previously enumerated examples. That said, our actions in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s are significant at least in part because our actions there, and how our military involvement there re-shaped our national dialogue about military intervention by this country, greatly inform the current moment in which Americans of conscience debate what we are (and aren't) doing militarily in Iraq. Certainly the ambiguities of some actions taken in a time of war came home to roost on the American steps in an unprecedented way, whether one was grappling with graphic images from My Lai or from Kent State.

(I should provide a personal note here: I am the eldest son of two United States Marines. In 1972, my draft number was 18. The only thing that saved me from a tour in Uncle Sam's Southeast Asian Pandemonium Machine was the Congressional Vietnam Nationalization Act of the spring of that year. I was not free of conflicted feelings over what I personally did and did not do in Vietnam, and the years since then have not fully resolved those feelings. This frames the context with which I have approached every military adventure undertaken by my country since those troubled years.)

I love America. I love its bigness. Its boldness. Its willingness to take on any challenge. Its (occasionally misplaced) sense of righteousness. Its \*capacity for\* generosity and tolerance. I think that it is the greatest moment yet in the experiment of nationalism. And yet.... And yet....

One of my dearest friends is a Cuban who fled with his family out of the calumny of Castro's Cuba in the early 1960s. His perspective on the United States is somewhat different from mine. In one critical respect, he is much more generous with our national character than I am, and it is in this wise: I set the bar of expectation for the conduct of my country to an extremely high standard. Some would argue, too high. Impossibly high. But here's the thing: I know the greatness our nation is capable of. We rise to that greatness regularly. We can be the most magnificent people on the planet, when we will ourselves to be. For me, when we settle for less, it angers me, because I know the heights we can aspire to.

This is at the core of my heartache with our putative “leadership” in this country. There is no more critical time for having the best possible heads and hearts in charge of things than in moments of national crisis. We have arguably been in such a moment for a while now, but certainly we have been a nation transformed since (indeed, \*by\*) 9/11. In a moment in which we are set upon by terrorists, a response toward those responsible (once that has been clearly established) is not unreasonable. What is unconscionable to me, though, is the exploitation of a national moment of fear for the prosecution of substantially less noble agendas. It is immoral. It is unethical. It sickens me, nearly as much as the suggestion by this legion of fear pimps that a reasoned stand in opposition to our military presence in Iraq is somehow “unpatriotic”.



Gilbert Head in 1996.

Caught in the middle are those of us with those we love in harm’s way. Men and women have answered their country’s call because they believe that the safety of their land requires it. They believe that their service serves the higher ideals of freedom and liberty for all. I do not pretend to understand how those connections are made, but I would never gainsay those who genuinely believe it to be true. If I believed that our so-called “leaders” were in that number, I could not so easily condemn their actions, but I hold those who have chosen to take us to war in Iraq responsible not only for what has happened (and continues to happen) there, but also for all which flows for ill from their having made those choices in the first place. Our national “leaders” have the blood of this upon their hands. To the extent that they have borne silent witness to this, that blood lies also on the hands of the “journalistic” community.

It is now as it ever was; all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. The jury is out on us, and time will tell whether we as a people will respond to the better angels of our nature, or succumb instead to the lesser. That part of me which still embraces belief prays regularly and fervently for the former resolution. To do less is to give up, and there’s still too much good left to believe in, in my country, and everywhere else.

—Gilbert Head

On a gray yet rosy December day at the close of 2007....

Gilbert, can I persuade you to rework this message into an article for *eI*? It is far better than I could do and you have that degree of forgiveness that I am lacking to hopefully make the situation a bit more understandable to the unbelievers.

—Earl Kemp

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I am a fourth-generation German-American religious skeptic ("Freethinker"). Like my essentially puritanical forebears, I believe God has so far been unknowable and hence unservable, hence the highest service one can perform is to his or her community, whose needs are quite evident. I believe that virtuous behavior is trivialized by carrot-and-stick schemes, such as promises of highly improbable rewards or punishments in an improbable afterlife.

—Kurt Vonnegut, "Fates Worse than Death," 1991

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# The Smut Peddler\*

By Juri Nummelin

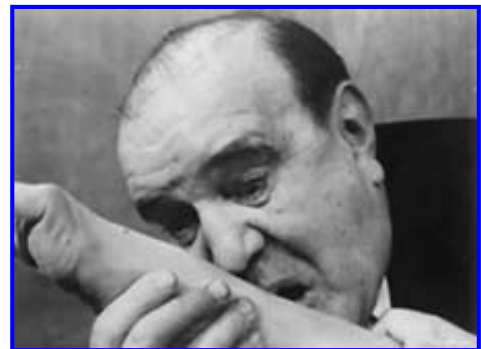
Some time ago I had a chance to see the only known copy of Warner Rose's *The Smut Peddler* (USA 1965) that tells about a making of a sex magazine in the mid-sixties. It's an awful film, and there's nothing to be sad about the fact that all the copies of the film are believed to have been destroyed. The trailer for the film exists and it's much better than the film, since it's over an hour shorter than the actual film. There are some comments on Internet Movie Database that try to depict the film based on the trailer, but the man who calls himself The Smut Peddler is seen only in the trailer. The print I saw is in the holdings of the Finnish Film Archive and it's in a pretty good shape.



Juri Nummelin

The film seems like someone has gotten hold of two strips of approximately twenty minutes of footage each that show nude pictures being taken in Vienna and Paris. These have nothing of interest, except that some of the girls are quite good-looking. These are linked together via a story of a journalist interviewing two former staff writers of *Dream Girl*, a fictional nude magazine that was run by a man called D.G. Rawlins. "D.G." goes for DeGenerate, someone says in the film.

*Dream Girl* was famous for its outrageous photos. For example, there's a scene in which a girl attacks another, strangles her, tries to shove her head into a hot oven, and pulls her teeth out. There's an odd discrepancy between these scenes and the cute footage about nude pictures. Behind all this sadism was a lesbian editor, who insisted on torture being shown in *Dream Girl*.



She also liked to "enjoy" the girls after D.G. Rawlins had taken them. This particular scene is accompanied by a stupid marching song, as if there was something funny about a girl being raped. The sets are poor—the magazine's office consists of a desk and a phone. The actors are poor, to say the least, and there's nothing of a decent plot here. There's some mild satire, but all in all a pretty sad film.

The script writer of the film was someone called Herbert Coleman, but he must be some other fellow than [the Herbert Coleman](#) who worked as an assistant director and producer in some of Hitchcock's films.

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\*Revised from an original posting on <http://pulpetti.blogspot.com/2006/04/smut-peddler-movie.html>

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Artists use frauds to make human beings seem more wonderful than they really are. Dancers show us human beings who move much more gracefully than human beings really move. Films and books and plays show us people talking much more entertainingly than people really talk, make paltry human enterprises seem important. Singers and musicians show us human beings making sounds far more lovely than human beings really make. Architects give us temples in which something marvelous is obviously going on. Actually, practically nothing is going on.

—Kurt Vonnegut: *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloon*, "When I Was Twenty-One"

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# “A Whole Boatload of Sensitive Bullshit”: Charles Willeford Attacks the Mid-century Stigmas Aimed at Pulp Writing

By Jay A. Gertzman

Charles Willeford was never considered during his lifetime to be a pulp, niche, or genre writer who broke through to the mainstream, as Dorothy Allison, Walter Mosely, or Cormac McCarthy have done. Goodis, John D. Macdonald, Highsmith, or Dorothy Hughes, like Willeford, never quite did. We know that many pulp writers were as talented as their mainstream contemporaries, but many critics think their publishers, genres, audiences, and even the physical appearance of their books themselves limited and diminished them. These forces did dictate restrictions. On the other hand, aggressive attention to the largest possible audience did not hurt Shakespeare, Rabelais, Lord Byron, Poe, Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, or Sinclair Lewis. In the case of the pulp milieu, Willeford is a prime example of a writer who could not have had the vigor and originality he did if he had not been published in mass-market paperbacks. With his mischievous humor, his familiarity with a hard-boiled outlook, his awareness of how entrapment in job and middle-class family obligation can lead to madness, as well as his powerful instinct for the dividing line between the bogus and the authentic, he had a lot to say to the readers of 1950s paperbacks. As defiant of the mantra of respectability as his readers were, he thrived on the stigmas that a pulp writer in the '50s faced. There are three epithets I like to use to describe his 1950s pulp novels:



Jay A. Gertzman

## AUTHENTIC / REALITY CHECKING / BULLSHIT DETECTING

William Burroughs said it best: he “let [his newsstand paperback readers] see what is on the end of that long newspaper spoon.”

This becomes clear when we look specifically at three stigmas and the class-bound moral indignation—A WHOLE BOATLOAD OF SENSITIVE BULLSHIT—with which the mid-century mandarins of public morals and high culture them. First are the snarl words “degenerate literature” and the attempts by politicians, police, and clergy to censor with laws and/or boycotts. Second is the concept of “masscult.” Pop (“low culture”) forms of film and novels were sneered at by literary critics and social commentators as escapism, bad taste, and as encouraging idle curiosity about sex and violence. The third stigma is that pulp or popular writing lacks the requisite symbolism, literary allusions, experiment with language and form, or shifting points of view for high literature. The first stigma was reinforced by congressional committees and moral entrepreneurs from pulpit and

political rostrum. The second was the province of academic and middlebrow spokesmen, some ideologically liberal. For the third, academic critics are responsible. I borrow Alan Ginsberg's phrase to describe these stigmas; in *Howl*, he was exorcizing Moloch when the phrase appears. Willeford's credentials as a beat writer are another subject, but warnings about preserving decency, refinement, duty, good taste, and idealism are weapons of Moloch-like "heavy judgers of men" who are enemies of the outsider's creativity.

The conditions CW wrote under made his challenges to the three stigmas deeply sewn into his stories. He thrived on the vitality of tales filled with danger, the use of guns, fists, and fast cars; the hook-ups with sexy partners; the corruption of the rackets; the menace of skid rows and inner city combat zones with their tough bars, cat houses, and gambling dens. He knew pulp publishers, cautious of censorship and boycott, compromised with the censors. They insisted that their books were of educational and social value, even as they planned changes in packaging. Sex and violence had to be calibrated to pass as what entertained "red blooded America" readers but not "perverts" or "juvenile delinquents." As for literary sophistication, the paperback publishers, having discovered moneymaking formulae, forced it on their writers.



Charles Willeford

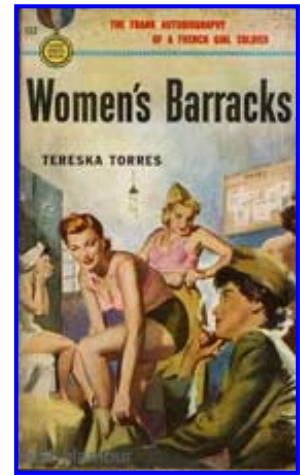
Willeford probed the conventions and the accommodations of the business with a circumspection equaling that of the Luftwaffe when they infiltrated the Allies' heavy bomber formations over Europe before our long-range fighters appeared on the scene. His publishers couldn't have cared less if their product was stigmatized as crass, tasteless, or uninformative. Willeford faced quite a challenge. **It** meant keeping his head down and playing the cards close to his vest. But he knew what to say, and how to write for the people he wanted to say it to. He emerged from the paperback "pulp jungle" with a shit-eating grin and a firm declaration of "gotcha." Maybe that's why the Gold Medal editor did not like him, his protagonists, or his books. People who did not like the "put-on" were always targets of the Willeford wit. He once entered an art contest at the school at which he was teaching. Having fought for the right to do so, he produced a drawing of a bottle of Tab with an arrow stuck through it. He titled it "Tab Hunter."

### **"Indecent, Demoralizing"**

In 1952, the House of Representatives' Gathings Committee investigated "literature allegedly containing objectionable material." It interrogated Ralph Daigh, Vice President of Fawcett. The committee members immediately honed in on their Exhibit 1, Tereska Torres' *Women's Barracks*, which had sold over a million copies in less than two years. Its back cover blurb explains that the book is a memoir "of what happens when scores of young girls [in the French army] live intimately together...without normal emotional outlets." Daigh offered testimonials to the book's value, but the congressmen and -women were very much opposed to the book's getting into the hands of high school history students to whom it might be recommended reading, or worse yet, a personal choice.

They wanted to know if Fawcett had revised the manuscript, and others, to “contain greater reference to sex, pornography, violence, perversion, or the like,” and asked Daigh if he would sell “dope” if there was a market for it.”

Senator Estes Kefauver chaired several commissions on juvenile delinquency in the '50s. Committee's 1955 Senate Hearings on Juvenile Delinquency included a report on motion pictures as a contributing factor. The chairman stated that although he could not find a definite cause-effect relationship between crime movies and juvenile delinquency, the possibilities were so strong that action had to be taken. Screw theory; the people need action. Ask J Edger Hoover. 36 years later, Bush I's Attorney General was at it again: “We are not here [at a National Crime Summit] to search for root causes or to discuss sociological theory.... The carnage in our mean streets must be stopped now.” Before Kefauver, representatives from the industry had to listen to spokesmen for vigilante groups say that films made from books such as such as *Cell 2455 Death Row*, *Rogue Cop*, and *Blackboard Jungle* and were at the root of the disrespect for the American Way of Life that results in youth crime. In criticizing *Kiss Me Deadly*, the moral crusader was at pains to show that although he was outraged, he was too respectable to know what Mickey Spillane was talking about. The book and film were “the usual mixture of Mickey Spillane trash and crime and I think they call them dames.”



Apparently, the remedy for troubled youth fascinated by sex and violence did not require that parents, teachers, and religious advisors reassess why they were being ignored. People were being dismissed from their jobs through blacklisting; factories were moving from long-standing locations in inner cities, causing unemployment and blight; alcoholism and divorce were increasing; the youth market was pushing records, clothes, cigarettes, chewing gum, and cars by appealing to images of the football hero and tough guy; and hydrogen bombs were being tested in the Western deserts. Politicians, clergy, teachers, and businessmen too seldom discussed core reasons for such events, or their effects on young people's attitudes. Instead parents were advised to be more insistent in teaching right from wrong, to go to church more often, and to condone more censoring of what did not accord with their tastes and values since, as J. Edgar

Hoover preached, obscenity and indecency might be "pinko"-inspired. Both terms were vague. There were legal precedents, even before 1959, thanks to the advocates of the First Amendment, indicating that neither term could apply to literature or images of obvious artistic, literary, scientific, or political value. That was why organizations such as the National Organization for Decent Literature (NODL) insisted on using the average adult's

taste and judgment as a criteria. He or she “knew” newsstand trash with lurid covers were a cause not an effect of disobedience and disrespect for parents and property. “The sociologist expresses professional doubt about the causal line between bad reading and immorality; he finds insufficient evidence for it. The common-sense view asserts that the causal line is sufficiently established by the nature, content, tendency, etc., of the literature itself. At least a strong presumption is thus created; and it furnishes reason for action, until—and maybe after—all the Ph.D. theses, pro and con, have been written.” Common sense beats research every time; that, and the moral entrepreneurs’ statements similar to the one above, established the causal relationship between novels with salacious covers and youth crime.



An easy scapegoat was the urban newsstand, drug store, cigar store, or “5 and 10,” and the magazines and books displayed there. People who, because young, working class, under-educated, under-employed, “under-privileged,” or sexually “deviant,” were thought more likely to be negatively influenced by sensational reading material than “well-adjusted,” white collar, married, home owning Americans. Here’s an image of a Times Square newsstand in 1954, situated where the heaviest foot traffic would be, at the grinder movie house showing the strippers, on 42nd Street at 8th Avenue. The perfect place to pick up a Goodis, John D Macdonald, Wade Miller, Benjamin Appel, or Willeford paperback. In addition to the strip show, there were cheap hotels, hash houses, and pizza joints, back-date magazine and book

shops, novelty shops, and of course grinder movie houses on this street. Willeford liked these kinds of places. Perhaps he recognized the connection between creativity and criminality there, and the rough democratic mixture of various ethnic groups and classes? Writing his first novel on weekends in San Francisco, he strolled the city, particularly interested in cheap restaurants, used car lots, and bars, places that formed the milieu of his characters. He planned a novel about a day in the life of a short order cook. “8 hours. 8 hours and death.”

Newsstands were the inevitable site of the “paperback revolution. Publishers, following the lead of Robert DeGraff of Pocket Books, had long treated books as magazines. The first purchase was by impulse. After that, readers chose what was similar to whatever had turned them on in the first purchase. The packaging (blurbs, cover, advertisements) of Beacon, Newsstand, Chicago Paperback House are all high-pressure advertising that appeals to a lowest common denominator of motives for reading. By 1950, with a saturated market, the publishers found themselves in a vortex of competition that meant increasingly graphic covers, and many new titles monthly: thus many returns, necessitating a cheaper product and even more lurid covers. Eventually good books to reprint became scarce, and originals were hard to get, since the tawdry image with which even firms such as Pocket, New American Library, and Bantam were increasingly being tarred made writers wonder if their books would even be accepted for review by





receptive to making love with him. He has solved her problems with murderous resourcefulness. She has an authentic, long-repressed need for someone who cares about her. Haxby has her so overpowered by his authority that she convinces herself she loves him. Then they have one night of passion. Only after he has loosed her bonds of inhibition can he be satisfied. He has discovered her real desire—for mutuality. The next morning he dumps her. She also he describes as "simple minded": an object, like any other customer, to exploit. The book ends with this exemplar of the "cruel" and "rotten" spin artist getting himself a shave.

Willeford said this was one of his three best books, because of its pure focus on a specific type of person and what he does. Could Willeford's real purpose be to make Haxby so repulsive that readers can see his story as cautionary; a way of shocking readers into not being like him? No way. This is the ultimate Willeford-style put on, or "gotcha." The end is the opposite of the "crime doesn't pay" formulae, and anyone criticizing the novel would be more likely to accept the complaints of used car salesmen that it gave their business a bad name than to praise it for having a healthy moral. The picture Willeford presents goes much deeper as a criticism, and is aimed at the young male reader, and the publishers, movie distributors, and other pop media who protect the kind of person Haxby is. He's an American idol: affluent, loves good whiskey, cars, good music, and books, can talk his way to the top of his field, appreciates the female form, and gets things done. He's the perfect *Playboy* dude, with his next playmate all lined up. He's good for the economy. He is also a fine observer, sensing people's authentic needs and how to spin his web so that these people trust him. A high priest. His customers, his lovers, and his friends: while under his spell, they'd vote for him for president.



Of course, he has no conscience, no compassion for anyone, and power is his only aphrodisiac. He's a product of much deeper forces in post-war America than are newsstand novels with salacious covers and blurbs, the texts of which describe promiscuous sex, theft, or gang fights. Those, especially Willeford's, are only the messenger. That message could not be as strong as it is without the conventions and vulgar energy of the paperback crime genre: protagonist psychos or "feeb," the slutty or vulnerable women (more Madonnas than femme fatales), ugly fights, casual cheating, teasing sex, coldness, and cruelty. What's it all mean—Willeford knows as well as Thompson, Goodis, Block, or Highsmith.

As for *Wild Wives*, it would have fit both the "obscene" and "indecent" labels of the censors. The chief femme fatale turns out to be a bobby-soxer who causes the murder conviction of Jake Blake, the PI protagonist. The other female is simply a vicious, sex-crazed wild wife who smothers her husband. Sex is purely a slam-bam experience, and there is plenty of it, no doubt approved of and possibly augmented by the Royal Books editor. The author tosses into the iconoclastic bargain a cowardly policeman who hides behind a billboard while the PI kills his lover. A gay couple provide the final plot twist.

There are echoes of *Double Indemnity* in the depravity of the wife, and of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* in the feral lust of the illicit lovers. All this is enough indecency to make an NODL censor's head explode. Willeford administers reality checks regarding the ideals of teenage female innocence, police courage, wifely fidelity, and the righteous triumph of American justice (Blake will hang not because of the murder of which he is guilty but for one of which he is innocent, or which the testimony of the 16-year-old bobby-soxer convicted him). It's another boatload of proletarian arsenic.

### **Masscult murder and High Modernist snobs**

There is one aspect that the advocates of all three stigma had in common. That is disdain for new media of communication that reach a general population. Inventions such as movies, TV, and the Internet generate concern among authorities that they will be misused by people without the sophistication to use them "constructively." The mass market paperback, its appearance on newsstands and specialty outlets where the masses can be enticed by its cheapness, its garish covers, its blurbs, and its portability, all make guardians of decency and gatekeepers of culture nervous. They fear having their authority undermined. They fear losing control to entrepreneurs they do not trust.

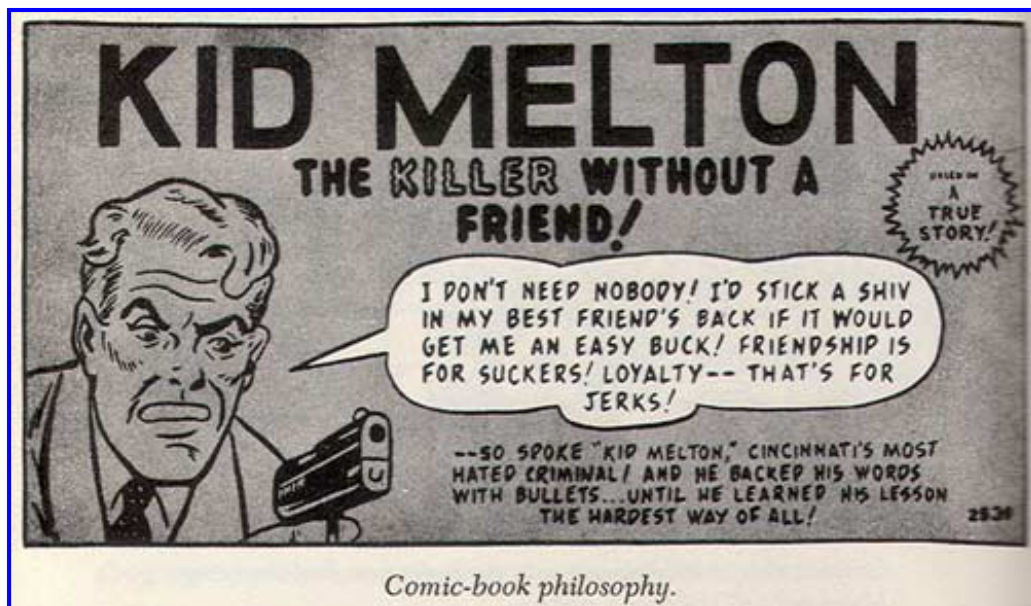
Moral crusaders are motivated by fear of the masses. So were the other masters of censure, but not censorship, in post-war USA. They were the intellectuals, writers, or researchers, not necessarily conservative. They stigmatized pulp fiction, thriller movies, and crime comics as opiates for the masses. Chief among them were Dwight MacDonald, one-time Trotskyist, pacifist, anarchist, friend of Lionel Trilling, Bruno Bettelheim, and C. Wright Mills; Frederick Wertheim and Pitrim Sorokin, both Holocaust survivors and sociologists; Gershon Legman, scholar of erotic folklore who deplored American repression of sex but glorification of violence; Theodore Adorno, philosopher and psychologist of mass behavior; and Ernst Van Den Haag, contributor on sociology to William Buckley's *National Review*. These intellectuals, equally subjective as the moralists about degeneracy and indecency, agreed with them as much as did judges and district attorneys on the sickness of a society whose reading was empty of what they defined as educational, artistic, literary, or social value.

Dwight MacDonald defined "masscult" in 1962, by codifying what had been the highbrow opinion of lowbrow entertainment for years. MacDonald tells the readers of his *Against the American Grain* that he believes in the "potentialities of ordinary people," but sees movies, TV, and pop fiction as producing a "mass" who cannot develop a sense of individuality, or any "aversions" or "aspirations" that are not mere clichés. Entrepreneurs of popular diversions are MacDonald's degenerate architects of Masscult.

He says about them exactly what congressmen on the congressional committees investigating obscene materials say: "Never underestimate the vulgarity and ignorance of publishers, movie producers, and network executives." As Theodore Adorno puts it, only people whose lives are not bound by the need to work have the time to appreciate products of the imagination. He, and Ernst Van den Haag, add that the production of labor had been mechanized: "distraction" from individual thought **is** built into the

entertainment that provided the masses with relief from the pressures of work. The hallmark of masscult art is escape into generic romance and adventure tales: “total subjection to the spectator.” Its effect is numbing, producing only “barren thrills.” Further, it tends to cheapen tastes of all people: masscult is the great leveler: it mixes classes and cultures together, and breaks down tradition and taste. Real modern artists (Joyce, Eliot, Stravinsky) prefer to create for a sophisticated few who understand their art.

Frederick Wertheim was the most popular expert to testify at congressional hearings on juvenile delinquency. His *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) attained unexpected popularity with the general public. As James Gilbert put it in his study of 1950s way of thinking about the delinquent, Wertheim epitomizes the myth that “pernicious mass culture could cut through the loving bonds of family and ensnare any child. It could cancel the ties of social, cultural, and moral order.” It pandered to adolescent fantasies of tough guys defeating all comers and sneering at laws and authority.



Gershon Legman, in his *Love and Death: A Study in Censorship* (1949), decried with an Old Testament prophet's rage the celebration of violence and the repression of sexual expression. He hated institutional censorship, especially the boycotts of “the virgin sex experts of the Catholic Church.” But, even more than war movies, he hated detective stories about PIs who kill and maim their enemies (“Spillane pukos”). He called comic strips, salacious magazine and paperback covers, and crime novels in which dames got slugged, shived, or plugged “a war against women.” Legman noted that the “perversions” [his word] to which the sado-masochistic undertones of these entertainments gave rise to included homosexuality, lesbianism, flagellation, and bondage. At least according to book trade legend, Legman had a special humiliation in store for anyone who got excited by reading his descriptions of the violence inflicted upon characters in comics, crime novels, and movies. The red wrappers of the first edition of *Love and Death* were supposedly treated with a special dye that left a sweating reader's

hands blood red. Wertheim, whom he championed, might have approved.

Pitrim Sorokin invoked the pollution theory of obscenity: “lewd poison,” “obscene garbage,” “destructive viruses...infecting their numerous consumers with bodily, moral and mental diseases.” However, Sorokin’s point was that the viruses of paranoia, loneliness, and frustration were endemic to contemporary American culture, not the work of pornographers or mystery writers. By “[the] numerous customers” for banalities Sorokin meant the audience for “our press, radio, television, theater, movies, music, advertising, and other channels of communication.” This of course was not the kind of expert testimony that congressional committees solicited.

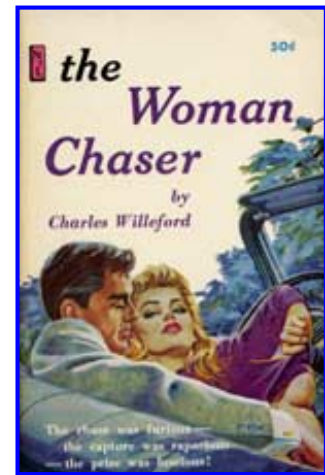
Highbrow critics of popular entertainment did not parrot the us-them propaganda of the investigating senators, candidates for political office (who often conducted tours of the “sleazy” newsstands and “dirty” bookstores of their cities), and outraged preachers. They knew what the distributors of “wholesome” mainstream entertainment and the paperback publishers had in common. They were both running lucrative businesses. Imitating the studios’ generic films and stars packaged with them in mind, magazine companies had various lines for various markets: the romance novel for lending library and bookstore sale, and the crime and sex pulp for the newsstand and specialty shop. MacDonald, a editor for upscale magazines and book publishers, certainly knew that. Intellectuals knew that the distinction between “all American male interest” and pulp trash was a useful and hidden illusion. They also knew “the market always wins.” They stigmatized paperback original writers because, as Sorokin delineated, they assumed that nothing really subversive of romantic, patriotic, and political clichés could exist in a book with a lurid cover and salacious blurbs for “adult” reading. They felt that pulp reading reinforced a moral consensus that justified bigotry, military adventurism, and the union of sex with prurience. The newsstand was the enemy of individual thought.

The third stigma against mass market paperback novels—that they were sub-literary hackwork—is also the work of these social analysts. They believed in the techniques of high modernism, however much the complexity of language, esoteric references, thematic density, and non-linear narratives made these works’ texts and images incomprehensible to people without either literary sophistication or the time to acquire esoteric reading habits. Today, it is easy to call them snobs. That is not nearly as unfair as they were in rejecting newsstand reading materials and their purchasers as a socially programmed underclass doomed to ignorance of themselves and the higher potentialities of human awareness. When they use terms such as “exploiters of the immature minds of salesgirls and construction workers,” “sex-obsessed addicts of sensationalism and the degenerate publishers who serve them,” and “newsstand hack writers,” they can indeed be called Guardians of Culture—the kind whose intolerance for a different kind of creativity than the one they choose to recognize does make them unwitting and parochial snobs. Literary, artistic, political, and/or social value—they assert it must be they themselves who decide. If that role is taken from them, they are out of business.

Willeford’s attitude toward what the critics of masscult said was complex. He shared their contempt for the publishers’ hard sell, the covers and blurbs that had little to do with the

content of the book, the editors' penchant for adding sex scenes; the pressure for more stories in less time, the fudging on subsidiary rights, and the precipitous pulling of books from newsstand circulation. But the elitist vision stimulated his crap detector. He made Richard Hudson (in *Woman Chaser*) and Russ Haxby sociopaths, but also brilliant minds who know beauty in writing, dance, music, and graphic design as well as they know how to spin a used car off the lot and into the hands of a feeb. Richard Hudson suffers as much existential angst as Dostoevski's underground man, Kafka's Gregor, or Joyce's Stephen Dedalus. Is this a gesture toward giving his novel redeeming literary value? More likely, its mischievous ridicule for the concept that only High Art brings with it redeeming value, as First Amendment lawyers would put it.

In *The Woman Chaser* (1960), Willeford seems to have written a novel based on MacDonald's premise that "the market always wins." It was written for a largely male readership for whom the book's original title, *The Director*, was changed by Beacon Book's editor to one likely to get it selected from the paperback racks at various points of sale. The cover shows a guy and a blonde in a convertible; she is hoisting her purple dress above her knees. "The chase was furious/the capture was rapacious/The prize was luscious." Readers would find that Richard Hudson is not much interested in girls, and his seduction of Laura, an aspiring filmmaker who works for a studio typing pool, is consummated with both partners in tears. Near the end of the novel he is successful in bribing an aging, widowed Salvation Army woman (he picked her up at a gay bar) to go to a hotel with him, but does not consummate the seduction. He wanted to see if he could convince her. But Hudson is enough of a weirdo to keep readers who liked the book's packaging in high delectation. Hudson likes his ballet-star mother more than any other woman (maybe that explains the Salvation Army gal), and his dance with her is a half-hour simulated orgy that ends when he "hold[s] her lush body in my arms. She kissed me then, a sloppy tongue-tangling kiss, and yet so sweet and innocent that my throat tightened with pain." And so would the gullet of any NODL compiler of a list of objectionable books.



Hudson is a used car salesman who has mastered his art; these techniques should be useful for guys who might buy one. For those who already have, his insistence that his employees wear Santa Claus suits throughout an L.A. August is sure to provide a few grins. He's a sadist. He dumps Laura the aspiring film student immediately after bedding her, and recommends to her employer at her movie studio that she is not good enough to be an administrative assistant and should be sent back to the typing pool. When she tells him she is pregnant, he solves the problem by clouting her in the stomach. When his teenage cousin comes on to him, he takes advantage. Willeford or maybe his editor trots out clichés like Becky's "creamy, nubile body" stirring Richard's "dormant juices." He is brutal to her: "I saved the girl from an emotional and physical involvement with another male of any age for a long long time." When the conscientious peacetime army retiree whom he has hired to run the used car office tells him the Santa Claus-clad salesmen have

all quit, Hudson summarily fires him despite all his hard work. He thinks he has taught the guy a good lesson: in civilian life, a worker cannot afford loyalty. Oh, and Hudson is a thief too, stealing his step-father's favorite painting. You don't want to get on his bad side. This was Willeford's first novel for – you might have guessed it – Newsstand Library. You can see why that outfit took it. There's a "just deserts" ending to allow the publisher to hide behind the "crime doesn't pay" ploy: Hudson ends up on the way to the police station to be arraigned for embezzlement, theft, and assault. He's wearing the Santa suit no employee could stand.

It's an exemplary pulp that MacDonal, Legman, Adorno, and Wertheim—let alone the NODL—would cite as egregious. The required sensationalism and vulgarity, made to order by the publisher, provide a rough backbeat for something that gives the readership a chance to think deeply about themselves and their world. Partly this is due to the fact that fights, rough sex, slang, swearwords, and sleazy urban settings function as an indication of danger and disorientation. Willeford builds on this by giving the reader a full dose of Richard Hudson in the appalling flesh. Doing so reveals two impressive abilities in his protagonist. First, this all-American bastard is a successful manipulator of people for love and money. He's even bored of it all. He's psycho, but the kinds of effort it takes to succeed in America do tend to drive one round the bend. Willeford's pulp heroes exemplify the traits of toughness, cleverness, manipulation, and pragmatic capitalism that are part of American dream. Their stories reveal what can happen to humanity and real decency when a RH (Russ Haxby, Richard Hudson) goes into action.



Scene from the film of  
*The Woman Chaser*

Second, Hudson is an artist with the same tastes in the classics Richard Haxby (and presumably Dwight McDonald) would have: Joyce, Dostoevski, Fitzgerald, Kafka, Eliot. The closeness of his tastes in literature to the critics of paperback writing is a suggestion that these critics may be just as contemptuous of the common man as the cold-hearted, emotionally detached Hudson is to the feeps he exploits. The difference is that Hudson, however cruelly he treats people whose orbits touch his, creates a work of art fueled by a sympathy for the common man so deep that he weeps when contemplating their fate. It's the total lack of authenticity in their lives that saddens him. He has closely observed men working in wage slavery, putting food on the table, and paying the mortgage, and women so repressed by how their society values sexual reticence, and so harried by bringing up kids and feeding the hubby, that their only escape is in TV and film romance, as their husbands' is in secretly bringing home sleazy magazines. This kind of empathy is noticeably lacking in the morally indignant censors of indecent paperbacks or the highbrow critics of masscult.

It is after one of these crying fits about "the meaningless void of everyday business" that he conceives his noir film *The Man Who Got Away*. There are of course many novels

about artists whose work is a deeply personal response to the suffering and injustices they see by living with their fellow Americans. But none have the pulp, sleazy sensibility of Richard Hudson. And none create a pulp film like his. The protagonist, “Mr. average American,” is played by a loner whose audition speech parodies Shakespeare: “Should I compare thee to a fucking turd?” He’s just ornery enough to be right for the part of a nameless truck driver with a well-paying job and a mechanically functioning household. However, he is terminally (as it turns out) pissed off. The job is dull and the effort to keep the wife and kids comfortable makes him feel like a caged bear. He takes an emergency long haul to get away. At a truck stop, he gets into an argument with other frustrated truckers. Angry, tired, and a bit tipsy, he runs over a little girl. The film shows the tire tracks on her body, a taboo image that would horrify viewers, as would the harsh edginess of the narrative in general. Now he is hunted down by police and described as an inhuman maniac by media newscasters who turn the tragic accident into a race to capture a terrorist. To the media bobbleheads and handwringers, 1960 vintage, the *Man Who Got Away* is simply an Ace in the Hole on a bad news day.

Accepting this pariah identity as an improvement over that of a beaten-down nobody, the trucker takes a joy ride he knows is his death song and goes on the warpath, barreling through roadblocks and killing two cops at one barrier. Police rig up a mountain-high set of vehicles and a massive crowd gathers to watch the windup. The driver, his clothing aflame, staggers out of his wrecked Semi. One man tries to make him comfortable in his last moments and is beaten up by the mob for going so. The camera pans the faces of the spectators, showing a remarkable range of expressions: horror, fascination, excitement, satisfaction, and open-mouthed amazement. Hudson got these effects by hiring a strip tease dancer to perform just outside the range of the camera. Another brainstorm was to have the film’s background music sung by an African American guitar player from Watts with an intimate knowledge of what fear and hatred of outsiders is like.

The studio head to whom the hour-length film is shown recognizes its tight construction and visceral power. As its director, RH (Willeford’s original title for the novel was *The Director*) is no compromiser with what sells to a mass audience. But the studio head is. He wants the film shown as part of a new TV series about social issues. It will be edited to fit, with commercials and talking head commentary, into an hour-long program. The studio head is adamant: *The Man Who Got Away* must have its snowball effect muted by TV, for otherwise its realism “would scare moviegoers to death.” Put another way, what Hudson has to tell viewers about their beaten-down lives of quiet desperation is too authentic. It has to be replaced by experts telling people not to take the story too personally, not to be insulted or upset by it.

RH goes nuts like the trucker at the end: he becomes a heartless Tin Man going over the rainbow straight to Hell. Having access to the studio, he burns every script and print he can find. Then he seduces the Salvation Army matron. Next morning, he’s back at the used car lot, in a Santa suit, working the feeb. But Laura and his father-in-law are waiting while the police make the collar. RH is just as self-destructive as the Man Who [Didn’t] Get Away. It’s worth noting that another Willeford persona, Jake Blake, not the PI in *Wild Wives* but a brilliant film director in the short story “Selected Incidents” cuts his wrists

when he can't get his work past his studio heads. "Selected Incidents" appeared in *The Machine in Ward 11* [Belmont, 1963, first published in *Gent*]). Belmont did its best to sell the book as a novel: "The weirdest tale that has been published in America since Edgar Allen Poe." But CW did not despair, and kept publishing paperback originals throughout the '60s. That doesn't mean he let his talent be eroded. He had proven that the market does not always win. When the president of Uni-Books, Beacon's parent company, told him to spin out a novel every six months, as their star sleaze-hack Orrie Hitt did, he made a half-hearted effort but (finally) changed publishers.

Willeford was certainly mischievously panning his own editors at Beacon, Belmont, and Newsstand Library in describing the fate of Hudson's screenplay and Blake's film. One fan letter Willeford received about *Woman Chaser* stated that the book was a "masterpiece," the mass violence of the trucker's final ride reminiscent of West's *The Day of the Locust*. He asked Willeford why he published with such an "obscure" firm, and was saddened by the silly title. The fan suggested Willeford get a better agent. It would be interesting to know if Willeford responded to this letter, and what he said.

The paperback original allowed writers who wish to infuse a novel with a strong autobiographical element the freedom to do so since editors were mostly concerned about the sensationalism.

If Richard Hudson and Russ Haxby, as voracious readers of modern classics, and as would-be writers, are close to Willeford in motive, Harry Jordan in *Pick-Up* (Beacon, 1955) and Sam "Deuteronomy" Springer in *Honey Gal* (Willeford's title *The Black Mass of Brother Springer*; Beacon 1958), are closer in temperament, being artists but not sociopathic or sadistic personalities. All four protagonists, and Jake Blake, share with their creator his own experience with road kid childhood, army experience, aggression, lusts (girls), and appetites (consuming enormous quantities of greasy fried food, red meat, and sweets). Of course, they have much in common with the typical American male reader of pulps.

Willeford is excellent at enticing readers with precise descriptions of the atmosphere of places as familiar a part of working men's lives as the newsstand, cigar, or book store where they purchased paperbacks like *Honey Gal* and *Pick Up*. The 1950s were the height of the industrial age. That means rooming houses, bars, movie and burlesque houses, taxi dance halls, hotels that rent rooms by the hour, and the downtown neon-lit streets and dark alleys. One establishment that fascinated Willeford was the storefront café, diner, or hash house. It figures prominently in Hollywood noirs such as *Dark Passage*, *The Asphalt Jungle*, and later, *Taxi Driver* and *Goodfellas*. This is where *Pick-Up* starts, with Harry behind the late-night counter slapping a frank on a bun, slathering it with chili and onions for a lonely sailor who washes "the unpalatable mess" down with hot coffee. A beautiful, hung-over woman comes in. This Helen, "my Olympia" (the allusion is to Manet's masterpiece reclining nude), becomes the love of Harry's life. The owner, who sits all day behind the register, leering at the girls while Harry cooks and serves, is a figure the novel's



original readers would have seen almost every day. His whole life is his joint, and its confines are as narrow as his temper is short. Another such place appears later in the novel. Harry becomes a fry cook at a lunch room in downtown San Francisco, dishing out eggs, bacon, burgers, and fries from a menu that makes no distinction between breakfast, lunch, and dinner. One of Willeford's early, unfinished, novels was about a day in the life of the owner of such a place ("a home for dead cats"), the first of his "immobilized" heroes of whom the Hudsons, Blakes, the Jordans and the Springers are near-tragic versions. Willeford used the term in his *New Forms of Ugly* to describe the protagonists in stories by Kafka, Beckett, Himes, Salinger, and West.

Witnessing a bar fight is another common experience of urban men. *Pick Up* features two especially vicious ones in which Harry's pent-up fury makes him a stalking panther. The first happens when a workman insults Helen; Harry kicks him in the nuts, then the gut. Later, when Helen's alcoholism had destroyed her mind, Harry discovers her with a sailor whose hand is fingering her vagina. With relish, he uses a shard of a broken bottle, "moving the sharp, glass dagger back and forth across his white face with a whipping wrist motion. Each slash opened a spurting channel of bright red blood that ran down his face and neck and splashed on the floor between his legs." It is the kind of vindictiveness, with feral sexual overtones, that working class people with immobilized lives would respond to. In Harry's case, he and Helen have a love for each other so great as to have no boundaries, and that of course pits them as profoundly against the world as are Romeo and Juliet—that is, to the death. But there is not one drop of romance. The lovers do not care any more about success or survival. Helen was married. After an abusive honeymoon, Helen went back to her mother, and drank. Harry had a wife and a child, but once he was sure his little family was solvent, he left, partly because of his drinking problem, which he was too beaten down to overcome. He was a promising artist but assessed his chances at discovery as nil. They both admit being "pretty much failures in life." But in this bleakness, they are free from the pettiness and falseness of the world. This especially pertains to how they feel about love. They understand and exemplify mutuality. And they understand the hollow-eyed cluelessness with which most people serve up cheap platitudes about love to their mates with the same falseness with which perfume, whiskey, or political commodities are sold to them.

Sex and violence are combined in another scene of powerful vindictive energy. It comes when Harry is incarcerated for apparently killing Helen (he could not stomach seeing her alcoholic humiliation; they had arranged a suicide pact). He is visited in his cell by a masochistic young woman for whom sex with a wife murderer is a turn-on worth bribing a guard to experience. Predictably, for his love for Helen was built on complete togetherness not the thrill of being at the mercy of a monster, Harry beats up his visitor. It is he not she who pleads to be let out of the cell.

This story has enough familiar pulp elements to please any publisher. Yet, its deepest meaning is hidden from the reader, however intimately familiar he is with the everyday yet evocative settings, and/or the sex and violence. That meaning is made clear only with the last sentence, which hits with a force that shocks, humbles, and maybe shames. Harry is exonerated on a stranger-than-fiction circumstance that Willeford took from the

newspaper account of a similar story. He returns to the shabby rooming house with the kindly landlady to get his things. Then he leaves for the bus station. “Just a tall, lonely Negro. Walking in the rain.”

Willeford planted clues to the fact of Harry’s skin color, easier for us to see than 1950s readers. Now the nobility of the lovers, and their refusal to confront their world, takes on new depth. Early in the book, Harry realizes, “Without Helen, I was worse than nothing, a dark faceless shadow, alone in the darkness.” There’s a lot more. Leaving the family is a decision Harry shares with many underclass men who are bared from the channels of advancement. Manet’s “Olympia” (“Helen. My Olympia”) shows the white nude being attended by a striking, devoted Black maid. A psychologist tells Harry he and Helen face nothing but disaster if they remain together. Their rooming house neighbor gives them nothing but hate stares. Helen’s dominating mother is wall-eyed with indignation when she meets Harry. The insults in the bar, and Harry’s response to it—and to the prison cell visitor who yearned for him to take her—take on an added dimension of black on white violence. That in itself forces another uneasy layer to a reader’s final response to the story. A “vulgar,” masscult paperback? Sadistic sex rotten with misogyny? Escapist entertainment that prevents ordinary people from self-awareness? The opposite is true. Willeford got several fan letters from readers, obviously African American, thanking him for stating their own experience. They assumed he too was African American. They specifically mentioned that his book was one that they—as men—could identify with. Those letters either could not, or need not, have been written today, but they express deeply the situation of the “Negro” in the 1950s.

Again, none of the effects Willeford gets could a writer have produced if he wrote in a different genre than pulp. That having been said, the pulp industry destroyed what would have been another level of subtlety. The original title of *Pick Up* was *Until I Am Dead*. Beacon, specializing in sex-oriented stories in the 1950s, changed it. Therefore a reader was not able to see the last sentence in the book, go back to the first words (the title), and see the implications of the protagonist having been released by The Law, walking in the rain.... This is another of Willeford’s “high modernist” devices, I think, the last words returning the reader to the first, a la *Finnegans Wake*. But no dice.

What is important is that CW found in the pulp crime novel a kind of writing with which he was comfortable, a kind in which his creative energies flourished. He’s telling a story that suggests its people, experiences, and settings have meaning that keeps the reader fascinated, and for reasons he or she cannot immediately explain. His tales reach mythic proportions, as do those of other pulp writers who we now call noir masters, writers as diverse as Hammett, Woolrich, McCoy, Dorothy Hughes, Margaret Millar, Highsmith, John D. Macdonald, and Benjamin Appel, to mention only some of those Willeford probably read. The most telling mystery in his crime stories is how deep the roots of a particularly American madness are. It is a madness that results in mistaking personality for character, confusing advertising style for authentic needs, substituting sadistic control or hapless resignation for mutuality even with loved ones, and assuming one has no choice regarding the acceptance of platitudes mouthed by employers, media personalities, and politicians. The madness results in addiction, imprisonment, or suicide. Willeford

had often been told to cut out the poetry; repulsive protagonists and downbeat endings would not sell. Orrie Hitt didn't do it. As Charles Willeford said himself when interviewed by *Contemporary Authors*, he stuck to it.

NOTE: I want to thank Betsy Willeford for allowing me to reproduce the photograph of her husband.

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The two real political parties in America are the Winners and the Losers. The people don't acknowledge this. They claim membership in two imaginary parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, instead.

—Kurt Vonnegut, *Wampeters, Foma and Granfalloons*, "In a Manner that  
Must  
Shame God Himself"

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**Sector General**  
by Ditmar