

A CRITIC AT LARGE

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## PULP'S BIG MOMENT

*How Emily Brontë met Mickey Spillane.*

BY LOUIS MENAND

**B**ack when people had to leave the house if they wanted to buy something, the biggest problem in the book business was bookstores. There were not enough of them. Bookstores were clustered in big cities, and many were really gift shops with a few select volumes for sale. Publishers sold a lot of their product by mail order and through book clubs, distribution systems that provide pretty much the opposite of what most people consider a fun shopping experience—browsing and impulse buying.

Book publishers back then didn't always have much interest in books as such. They were experts at merchandising. They manufactured a certain number of titles every year, advertised them, sold as many copies as possible, and then did it all over the next year. Sometimes a book would be reprinted and sold again. Print runs were modest and so, generally, were profits.

Then, one day, there was a revolution. On June 19, 1939, a man named Robert de Graff launched Pocket Books. It was the first American mass-market-paperback line, and it transformed the industry. Whether it also transformed the country is the tantalizing question that Paula Rabinowitz asks in her lively book "American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street" (Princeton). She builds on a lot of recent scholarship on the way that twentieth-century literature has been shaped by the businesses that make and sell books—work by pioneers in the field, like Janice Radway and Lawrence Rainey, and, more recently, scholars like Evan Brier, Gregory Barnhisel, and Loren Glass. Paperbacks, even paperbacks that were just reprints of classic texts, turn out to have a key part in the story of modern writing.

Neither the theory nor the practice of mass-market-paperback publishing was original with de Graff. Credit is usually given to an Englishman, Allen Lane, who was the founder of Penguin Books. According to company legend, as Kenneth Davis explains in his indispensable history of the paperback book, "Two-Bit Culture," Lane had his eureka



moment while standing in a railway station in Devon, where he had been spending the weekend with the mystery writer Agatha Christie and her husband. He couldn't find anything worthwhile to buy to read on the train back to London. And so, in the summer of 1935, he launched Penguin Books, with ten titles, including "The Murder on the Links," by Agatha Christie. The books sold well right from the start. It helped that Penguin had the whole British Commonwealth, a big chunk of the globe in 1935, as its market.

Paper book covers are almost as old as print. They date back to the sixteenth century, and paperbacking has been the ordinary mode of book production in France, for instance, for centuries. The first edition of James Joyce's "Ulysses," published in Paris in 1922, is a paperback. In the United States, paperback publishing was tried on a major scale at least twice during the nineteenth century: first, in the eighteen-forties, with an enterprise called the American Library of Useful Knowledge, and after the Civil War, when, unfettered by international copyright agreements, American publishers brought out cheap editions of popular European novels.

The key to Lane's and de Graff's innovation was not the format. It was the method of distribution. More than a hundred and eighty million books were printed in the United States in 1939, the year de Graff introduced Pocket Books, but there were only twenty-eight hundred bookstores to sell them in. There were, however, more than seven thousand newsstands, eighteen thousand cigar stores, fifty-eight thousand drugstores, and sixty-two thousand lunch counters—not to mention train and bus stations. De Graff saw that there was no reason you couldn't sell books in those places as easily as in a bookstore.

The mass-market paperback was therefore designed to be displayed in wire racks that could be conveniently placed in virtually any retail space. People who didn't have a local bookstore, and even people who would never have ventured into a bookstore, could now browse the racks while filling a prescription or waiting for a train and buy a book on impulse.

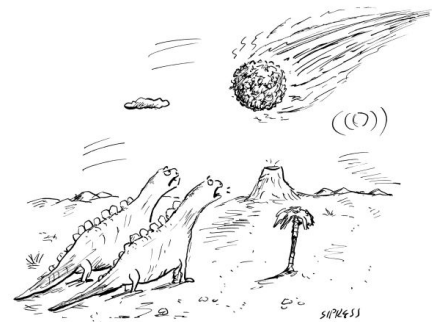
Getting the books into those venues did not require reinventing the wheel. Instead of relying on book wholesalers—"jobbers"—who distributed to bookstores, de Graff worked through magazine distributors. They handled paperbacks the same way they handled magazines: every so often, they emptied the racks and installed a fresh supply.

Pocket books were priced to sell for twenty-five cents. De Graff is supposed to have come up with that figure after paying a quarter at a toll booth. No one, he concluded, misses a quarter. Penguins sold for sixpence: Lane believed that his books should not cost more than a pack of cigarettes. This meant that people could spot a book they had always meant to read, or a book with an enticing cover, and pay for it with spare change.

De Graff road-tested his idea in New York City, selling Pocket books in subway newsstands and similar outlets. He knew he had a winner when a hundred and ten books were sold in a day and a half at a single cigar stand. By mid-August, after eight weeks and with distribution expanded to the Northeast corridor, de Graff had sold three hundred and twenty-five thousand books. He had discovered a market. The same month, Penguin opened an American office. Others rushed to compete: Avon started up in 1941, Popular Library in 1942, Dell in 1943, Bantam in 1945, and, after the war ended, half a dozen more, including, in 1948, New American Library (N.A.L.), which published the Signet (fiction) and Mentor (nonfiction) imprints. The paperback era had begun.

**P**aperbacks vastly expanded the book universe. The industry had got a taste of the possibilities during the war. Encouraged by the success of Pocket and Penguin, publishers collaborated to produce Armed Services Editions of popular titles—double-columned paperbound books, trimmed to a size that slipped easily into the pocket of a uniform, and made to be thrown away after use. The books were distributed free of charge to the sixteen million men and women who served during the war. (Publishers also offered their own books for sale to the troops.) According to Rabinowitz, eleven hundred and eighty titles were published in Armed Services Editions, and an astonishing 123,535,305 books were distributed, at a cost to the government of just over six cents a copy.

*“Uh-oh—climate change.”*



Servicemen and women stationed overseas were a captive audience, but many came home having acquired a habit of reading for pleasure and a comfort with disposable paperbacks. In 1947, two years after the war ended, some ninety-five million paperback books were sold in the United States. Paperbacks changed the book business in the same way that 45-r.p.m. vinyl records (“singles”), introduced in 1949, and transistor radios, which went on sale in 1954, changed the music industry, the same way television changed vaudeville, and the same way the Internet changed the news business. They got the product cheaply to millions.

Paperbacks also transformed the culture of reading. De Graff was a high-school dropout (as was Lane, who left school when he was sixteen), and he seems not to have been much of a reader. He had no apparent investment in the notion of books as uplifting. “These

new Pocket Books are designed to fit both the tempo of our times and the needs of New Yorkers,” he announced in a full-page ad in the *Times* the day his new line went on sale. (The copy was written for him by someone from an advertising agency.) “They’re as handy as a pencil, as modern and convenient as a portable radio—and as good looking.” Books were not like, say, classical music, a sophisticated pleasure for a coterie audience. Books were like ice cream; they were for everyone. Human beings like stories. In the years before television, mass-market paperbacks met this basic need.

Rabinowitz’s thesis is that mass-market paperbacks were revolutionary in another way as well. She thinks that they were a vehicle for social and cultural enlightenment—that they de-provincialized the American public. That is not how most people thought of them at the time. Editors at the old hardcover houses looked on paperbacks as a bottom-feeding commercial phenomenon, like the pulp magazines and comic books they were distributed with. Critics ignored them, or attacked them as a lowbrow and politically retrograde diversion. Religious and civic groups campaigned to get them regulated or banned.

For it was one thing to reprint literary classics, like “*Wuthering Heights*” (a big seller for Pocket Books) or the tragedies of William Shakespeare (which de Graff regarded as a loss leader). Selling classics and critically acclaimed best-sellers for a quarter was a way of democratizing culture, which has been an impulse in American life since the days of the Library of Useful Knowledge and before.

But, alongside the classics and the reprints of hardcover best-sellers, there quickly sprouted up on the racks an apparently inexhaustible profusion of books with racy titles and lurid covers: “*Hitch-Hike Hussy*,” by John B. Thompson and Jack Woodford (Beacon), “*I Wake Up Screaming*,” by Steve Fisher (Popular Library), “*Scandals at a Nudist Colony*,” by William Vaneer (Croydon Books), “*The Daughter of Fu Manchu*,” by Sax Rohmer (Avon), which carried the semantically original cover line “She flaunted an evil conspiracy for power and love.”

There were also lots of whodunits, like the Perry Mason series, by Erle Stanley Gardner (a huge seller for Pocket Books), and endless iterations of the hardboiled-detective story. Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett were paperbacked, of course, but there were dozens of titles like “*Exit for a Dame*,” by Richard Ellington (Pocket), “*Benny Muscles In*,” by Peter Rabe (Gold Medal Books), “*Report for a Corpse*,” by Henry Kane (Dell), and “*Leave Her to Hell*,” by Fletcher Flora (Avon). (“You meet a lot of gals on the make in my business, but this case had too many dames.”) And, starting with “*I, the Jury*,” in 1948, there were the multimillion-selling Mike Hammer detective novels, by Mickey Spillane (Signet).

This stuff was not trying to pass itself off as serious literature. It was a deliberately down-market product, comic books for grownups—pulp fiction. Rabinowitz’s quite valid point is that when we look back on the mass-market-paperback phenomenon it’s hard to keep

the Emily Brontës separate from the Mickey Spillanes. In the same year that Signet published “I, the Jury,” it also published reprints of books by James Joyce, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Arthur Koestler. Paperback publishers made no effort to distinguish classics from kitsch. On the contrary, they commissioned covers for books like “Brave New World” and “The Catcher in the Rye” from the same artists who did the covers for books like “Strangler’s Serenade” and “The Case of the Careless Kitten.”

Avon, one of the most resolutely down-market of the major paperback imprints, used an image of Shakespeare’s head as a colophon. “Millions of readers have found that this trademark represents a high standard of reading entertainment,” explains the blurb on the back cover of Avon’s “The Amboy Dukes,” by Irving Shulman. “The Amboy Dukes,” captioned as “A novel of wayward youth in Brooklyn,” and with a cover featuring two teen-agers passionately entangled on the grass, was one of the most notoriously sensational of the pulps. (Not that Shakespeare would have objected to it.)

Rabinowitz is an English professor, and English professors get excited when they see boundaries being blurred. But the blurriness in the postwar paperback world is one of the reasons it’s difficult to sort out what was actually going on. People could once find “Native Son,” “Invisible Man,” and Ann Petry’s “The Street” on the same rack that held books like “Kiss Me, Deadly.” That fact doesn’t quite support Rabinowitz’s idea that “by linking leftist and black authors to Spillane through standardized formats and similar cover art, N.A.L.’s works anticipate a new postwar civil rights landscape, in some ways helping to make *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and their aftermath legible to a largely white working-class readership through detailed chartings of cross-race intimacy.”

The editors at New American Library certainly had no such intention. They made the books look the same because they were trying to sell Ann Petry and Ralph Ellison to people waiting for a bus or looking for something to read in the beauty parlor. And cross-race intimacy is about the last thing (apart from same-sex intimacy) that Spillane’s books could be said to countenance.

Still, Rabinowitz is on to something. It’s too much to say that the mass-market paperback helped to liberalize American social and political attitudes after 1945. You could as plausibly say that paperbacks were one of the things holding change back. The amount of tough-guy pulp, racial stereotyping, and sexist sleaze far outweighed, and outsold, reprints of books by famous writers and marginal voices. But paperbacks did have a role in changing twentieth-century literature. They were market disrupters. They put pressure on the hardcover houses, and that meant putting pressure, in turn, on the legal regulation of print. What you could publish in the United States and Britain in 1965 was radically different from what you could publish in 1945, and pulp paperbacks were part of the reason. In the process, the pulps lost their clout in the book business. But they died so that Philip Roth and Erica Jong might live.

*“Most opera plots could be averted by some decent therapy.”*



**T**he paperback presented the publishing industry with a dilemma. Many people in the business, whether they actually read books or not, believed that they should be packaged as upmarket commodities, cultural goods for people looking for something superior to mass entertainments like Hollywood movies and, after 1950, television. “Read a good book” is a phrase that has the ring of virtue. It implies that what is, after all, just another form of distraction is more than that. It recommends taking some private time away from the world to immerse yourself in a mode of enjoyment and edification that belongs to an ancient and distinguished tradition.

This marketing philosophy may have reflected the fear that, if books competed directly with the movies, the movies would win. Whatever the thinking, Pocket Books and its progeny defied it. De Graff packaged books as just another form of distraction, and one completely compatible with everyday life. He imagined people reading books on the way to work, during the lunch hour, standing in line at the bank—exactly the way that millions of people listen to music through their earbuds today.

You can’t tell a book by its cover, but you can certainly sell one that way. To reach the mass market, paperback publishers put the product in a completely different wrapper. The pulp-paperback cover became a distinctive mid-century art form, eventually the subject of numerous illustrated books, like Richard Lupoff’s “The Great American Paperback” and Lee Server’s “Over My Dead Body,” and Web sites.

The purpose of the art, of course, was to catch the eye and overcome the financial inhibitions of people who were not necessarily shopping for a book. But spicing up the covers put paperback lines in competition with each other, and this quickly turned into a race to the bottom. Scantly clothed women and sexually suggestive scenes, whether the author was Mary Shelley or John D. MacDonald, became almost a requirement of the format. If the book was a hardboiled-detective novel or a mystery, the requirement was a woman wearing a peignoir and holding a gun.

The paperback reprint was therefore in certain respects a different product from its hardcover parent. It was different physically, and it had a different aura as well. George Orwell's "Nineteen Eighty-Four" was one of the best-selling novels of the early nineteen-fifties. The dust jacket for the American hardcover edition, published by Harcourt, Brace in 1949, has an all-text design on a dark-blue monochrome background. Orwell's name and the words "A Novel" are printed in script. Very tasteful, in keeping with the gravity of the subject.

The cover of the 1950 Signet reprint (the artist was Alan Harmon) features a surprisingly toned Winston Smith, in a sleeveless top that shows off his triceps nicely, sneaking a glance at a slinky Julia, in lipstick and mascara, who wears an Anti-Sex League button pinned to a blouse with a neckline that plunges to her tightly sashed midriff. The artist has rendered O'Brien, Winston's nemesis, as a sort of sadistic swimming instructor—a menacing dude clad in a black skullcap and halter-top outfit cut daringly across the pecs, and clutching what it is hard not to assume is a whip. "Forbidden Love. . . . Fear. . . . Betrayal," the blurb says. "Complete and unabridged."

Hardcover dust jackets rarely said "complete and unabridged." The practice of putting that phrase on paperback covers began because de Graff worried that readers associated paperbacks with abridgments, but it became virtually universal among publishers of paperback reprints, since it suggested that you were finally getting the original, uncensored text.

As David Earle puts it in his enlightening study of pulp, "Re-Covering Modernism," mass-market cover art thus managed to recapture the risqué and subversive aura of modernist writing. It put the frisson of scandal back into books, even books that had been around for decades. It might have been ridiculous to imagine that the paperback you bought off the rack in a Sears was underground or samizdat literature, but that's what mass-market packaging was designed to make you feel.

Cover art was a divisive issue. Allen Lane hated it. Penguin covers were known for their standardized design, and Lane wanted nothing to do with pulp. He is supposed to have raided one of his own warehouses in order to destroy, in a bonfire, books he deemed tasteless. His dislike of cover art was one of the things that led him to break with his American office, in 1948. That's the year that American Penguin became New American Library, the publisher of Mickey Spillane.

The covers also alienated some writers. When "The Catcher in the Rye" was published in hardcover by Little, Brown, in 1951, sales were strong, but it was not one of the best-selling novels of the year. In 1953, the Signet edition came out, and the book sold one and a quarter million copies the first year. The Signet cover was illustrated by James Avati, known as "the Rembrandt of Pulp." It shows Holden Caulfield standing outside what appears to be a Times Square strip-tease joint, with, in the background, what might

be a man soliciting a prostitute. “This unusual book may shock you, will make you laugh, and may break your heart—but you will never forget it!” the blurb warns. Salinger was furious, and when the paperback rights to “Catcher” became available again and Bantam got them, he designed the all-text maroon cover himself.

The attempt to use cover art to pimp out titles produced some amusing anomalies. A classic case is the so-called nipple cover, attributed to a prolific pulp artist named Rudolph Belarski. It appeared on the 1948 mass-market Popular Library reprint of a 1925 novel called “The Private Life of Helen of Troy.” Belarski claimed that he was always told it didn’t matter whether or not the scene depicted on the cover was in the novel. “The editors would say, ‘Don’t worry, we’ll *write* it in. Just make sure to *make ’em round!*’”

He did. His Helen is a blonde in what one takes to be the Mycenaean version of the peignoir, neatly cinched at the waist and under the bust, with a casually elegant aquamarine off-the-shoulder toga and nothing on underneath. (Unless that’s a twelfth-century B.C.E. thong?) And they do pop out. You can see what got Paris’s attention. The cover line says, “Complete and unexpurgated.”

In fact, there had been nothing to expurgate. There are no references in the novel to breasts, or to any other female body parts, except for a single mention of a “bosom.” Most of the book is dialogue. It is a sometimes droll exercise in making characters in Homer’s epics converse in contemporary speech. The author was a Columbia English professor named John Erskine, who happened to be the teacher of Lionel Trilling and the creator of the course that became Literature Humanities—Columbia’s Great Books requirement. He went on to become the president of Juilliard.

*“Use your White Privilege, Luke.”*



The editors at Popular Library must have known that the nipple cover would work, because Pocket Books had used a similar image on a 1941 reprint of Émile Zola’s 1880 novel “Nana,” and it had become one of the best-selling Pocket books sold to troops. It went through thirteen printings during the war, and sold 586,374 copies. Popular Library at least had some textual authority for the cover, since the Nana in Zola’s novel is an actress who takes male Paris by storm after she appears onstage completely naked under a see-through gown.



So mass-market paperbacking was about as raunchy and exploitative as it could be. On the other hand, who could argue with the numbers? Paperbacking could leverage a title with respectable revenue and decent word of mouth into the sales stratosphere, and often with significant industry knock-on effects. Earle offers the example of Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre," a gothic tale of lower-class Southern whites, with plenty of illicit sex and generous overtones of incest. When Viking brought the book out in hardcover, in 1933, it sold slightly more than eight thousand copies. That was good enough for it to be reprinted in the Modern Library, whose edition sold sixty-six thousand copies. A Grosset & Dunlap reprint sold a hundred and fifty thousand. Then, in 1946, the book was brought out by American Penguin. After eighteen months, three and a half million copies had been sold.

Between 1945 and 1951, Caldwell sold twenty-five million copies of his books in paperback. His success inspired a subgenre of Southern-gothic pulp, with titles like "Swamp Hoyden," by Jack Woodford and John B. Thompson, and "The Sin Shouter of Cabin Road," by John Faulkner. John Faulkner was not a nom de plume; John Faulkner was William Faulkner's brother. And it's likely that the popularity of Caldwell's novels helped William Faulkner's books sell as well. Between 1947 and 1951, Signet published six titles by Faulkner, which had sales of close to 3.3 million. (It helped that Faulkner received the Nobel Prize in 1950.)

One of the biggest sellers of the nineteen-fifties and early sixties, Grace Metalious's "Peyton Place," is essentially a Southern gothic transplanted to New Hampshire. "Peyton Place" came out in 1956; it spent fifty-nine weeks at the top of the *Times* best-seller list; it was turned into a movie and a television series; and by 1966 it had sold ten million copies. It did not inspire a wave of New Hampshire gothic fiction.

Volume like this was unprecedented. Pocket Books, after its business got established, rarely went to press for less than a hundred thousand copies; Signet started at two hundred thousand, and Fawcett, the publisher of Gold Medal Books, had initial print runs of three hundred thousand. Earle offers a comparison with two celebrated titles from the hardcover era. "The Sun Also Rises" sold just over five thousand and "The Great Gatsby" a little over twenty thousand copies in their first printings.

The puzzle for hardcover publishers was how to get a piece of the new market without losing respectability or running afoul of the law. "Ulysses" had been declared not obscene by a federal judge, John Woolsey, in 1933, but by then the novel had been out for eleven years and was already canonical. Joyce was one of the most famous writers in the world. American courts since the Woolsey decision had not been so permissive. In 1946, "Memoirs of Hecate County," a collection of interlinked short stories by the *New Yorker* writer Edmund Wilson, was declared obscene by a New York court, and the Supreme Court refused to overturn the decision.

There was political pressure as well. In 1952, a House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials was formed, with E. C. Gathings, an Arkansas congressman, as chair. The focus of the committee's inquiry was "the kind of filthy sex books sold at the corner store which are affecting the youth of our country," as Gathings described it. Cover art—"lurid and daring illustrations of voluptuous young women on the covers of the books"—was a special target of criticism.

The star exhibit was a novel called "Women's Barracks," by Tereska Torres, a novelized account of the author's experience serving in London in the Free French Army during the war. One of the female characters is a lesbian; two others have a brief affair. The book was a paperback original from Gold Medal Books, and, completely contrary to the author's intention, it became one of the first titles in the genre of lesbian pulp fiction.

The cover shows women undressing in a locker room, with a tough female in uniform looking on. But the steamiest passage in the book is this:

How touching and amusing and exciting! Claude ventured still further in discovering the body of the child. Then, so as not to frighten the little one, her hand waited while she whispered to her, "Ursula, my darling child, my little girl, how pretty you are!" The hand moved again.

"Women's Barracks" had already sold a million copies. Thanks to the publicity surrounding the Gathings hearings, Fawcett sold another million. Total sales are said to be four million copies.

In 1953, the committee published its report. "The so-called pocket-size books, which originally started out as cheap reprints of standard works, have largely degenerated into media for the dissemination of artful appeals to sensuality, immorality, filth, perversion, and degeneracy," it concluded. "The exaltation of passion above principle and the identification of lust with love are so prevalent that the casual reader of such literature might easily conclude that all married persons are adulterous and all teenagers are completely devoid of any sex inhibitions."

But there was little the law could do. Pulp described sexual behavior, but the descriptions were not explicit, and they didn't use obscene language. They were not pornography; they were only packaged that way. The Gathings committee's objection to "Women's Barracks" was simply an objection to homosexuality and other forms of "deviance." Congress sensibly ignored the call for regulatory legislation. But, according to Davis, local efforts to ban pulps persisted around the country, and the whole controversy had a "chilling effect" on the industry.

Which was in trouble for other reasons, too. Mass-market paperbacking turned out not to be a stable business model. The hitch was the pricing. Moving several hundred thousand units of a product sounds impressive, but when the retail price is twenty-five cents the revenue is not so impressive. De Graff paid his writers a four-per-cent royalty. That's a penny a book (which is also what writers were paid for the Armed Services Editions of their books). Once you figured in the retailer's cut (which was up to fifty per cent), paper costs, and distribution, there was very little margin, often something like half a cent a book.



The plan was to recoup sunk costs as quickly as possible, but the break-even point was extremely high. That's why print runs were so enormous. Profitability might start only somewhere north of a hundred thousand copies. The result was that the market became flooded. In 1950, two hundred and fourteen million paperbacks were manufactured in the United States, generating forty-six million dollars in revenue. But millions of books went unsold. When the wholesalers cleaned out the racks, they sent the books that were left back to the publishers, who had to warehouse or dump them. By 1953, it was estimated that there was an industry-wide inventory of a hundred and seventy-five million unsold books.

There were other developments. Magazines began offering discount subscriptions, which reduced the traffic at newsstands, and the main magazine distribution company, the American News Company, lost an antitrust suit and eventually got out of the business. Although publishers continued to produce rack-size editions, they were no longer saturating the market with pulp.

**M**eanwhile, a new player had entered the arena, Jason Epstein. Epstein was a product of Columbia College. Publishing, he later said, in his memoir "Book Business," was "an extension of my undergraduate years." After graduating from Columbia, in 1949, he went to work reading manuscripts at Doubleday, the house where Robert de Graff had got his start. Doubleday was still being run by merchandisers who depended on revenue from the company's book clubs, notably the Literary Guild.

Epstein was a book person. He lived in the Village and hung out in the legendary Eighth Street Bookshop. He craved the new hardcover books he browsed there, but he couldn't afford them on his forty-five-dollar-a-week salary. He began to envision cheaper editions of the kind of books he had read at Columbia, and he discussed the idea of paperback reprints of classic and highbrow titles with the bookstore's owners, Ted and Eli Wilentz. In 1953, he launched, for Doubleday, a line of paperbacks called Anchor Books.

Epstein's first list included D. H. Lawrence's "Studies in Classic American Literature" and works by Conrad, Gide, and Stendhal. Trilling's "The Liberal Imagination" was an early title. The books were priced to break even at around twenty thousand copies, and sold from sixty-five cents to a dollar twenty-five. They were aimed at college students and at slightly more affluent and educated readers. The covers were arty, not cheesy. Many were by Edward Gorey (and Epstein found that those sold especially well).

The product became known as the "quality paperback." This was, of course, to distinguish it from the other kind. But the books were rack-size—in effect, upmarket pulp. (Even Epstein found them a little tacky. After the Eighth Street Bookshop began stocking quality paperbacks, he considered the sight of them, as he later put it, "an affront to the store's serene dignity.")

By 1954, Anchor was selling six hundred thousand books a year—not Mickey Spillane territory, but a sustainable business model. The same year, Knopf launched its quality-paperback line, Vintage Books, and it was soon followed by Beacon and Meridian.

The model of paperbacking upmarket books was taken up by two publishers who were independently wealthy, and not in it for the money: Barney Rosset, the owner of Grove, and James Laughlin, the founder of New Directions. They also picked up from mass-market publishers the practice of producing anthologies of new writing. Mentor published "New World Writing," with work by writers like W. H. Auden, Jorge Luis Borges, and Heinrich Böll; Grove published *Evergreen Review*, a showcase of some of the most advanced writing in the world.

Rosset and Laughlin published paperback editions of works by Samuel Beckett, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Hermann Hesse, Eugène Ionesco, the Beats, the Black Mountain poets, Tennessee Williams, Nathanael West. They got European and American modernism into the hands of students, professors, and even people waiting for the train.

Grove also published a popular line of pornography that somehow seemed consistent with its commitment to literary modernism. For the association between smut and modernist writing was an old one. Before the paperback era, what the average person knew about Joyce and Lawrence was that they were dirty writers, and it was easy to imagine that what made all advanced literature advanced was that it trafficked in the

unmentionable. I think Rabinowitz is right (she is following, with due acknowledgment, Earle's argument in "Re-Covering Modernism") that pulp made the public comfortable with the idea that a book could contain writing that got some readers titillated or aroused and made other readers squirm or blush. Pulp helped to make the book world safe not only for sex but for the gross, the shocking, and the transgressive. At some point, those things, and not a private immersion in a more edifying realm, became what people expected from the reading experience.

As Loren Glass has explained, in "Counterculture Colophon," Rosset was a major force behind the anti-censorship campaign. He was not involved in the 1957 trial of Allen Ginsberg's "Howl and Other Poems," a paperback from City Lights Books, which was declared not obscene by a San Francisco judge. But he was behind the litigation that lifted the bans on "Lady Chatterley's Lover," in 1959, and Henry Miller's "Tropic of Cancer," in 1964. In both cases, Grove had already published the books, and they had become best-sellers. People who had money to spend liked them. That kind of thing often helps judges make up their minds.

Those cases made it possible for the hardcover houses to publish what they could now claim the reading public always wanted: frank depictions of sexuality by prize-winning and critically acclaimed authors. They began to get books like "An American Dream," "Couples," "Myra Breckinridge," "Portnoy's Complaint," and "Fear of Flying" into bookstores and, from there, into middle-class homes. Mainstream publishing finally caught up with the world. ♦



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