

**POLITICAL  
COMICS  
AND GRAPHIC  
NOVELS**

COMIC BOOKS AND  
CENSORSHIP  
THE GHASTLY CASE  
OF THE COMICS  
CODE

**Wojciech Lewandowski, PhD, DSc**

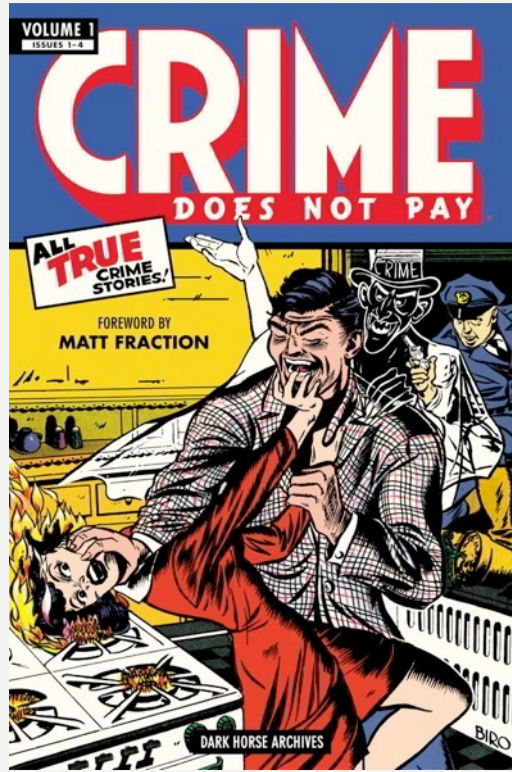
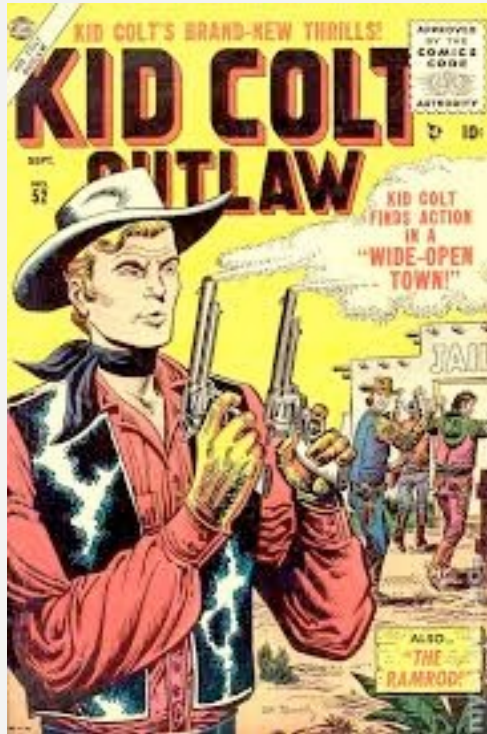
Department of Political Theory and Political Thought  
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University of Warsaw

# COMICS

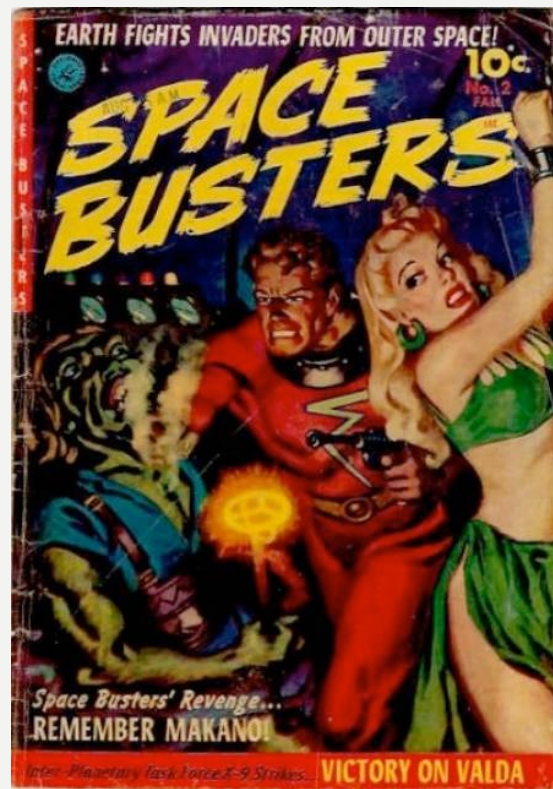
## HISTORY

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Comics Age</b>
1897-1937	Platinum or Pre-Golden Age
1938-1955	Golden Age
1956-1972	Silver Age
1973-1985	Bronze Age
1986-present	Modern Age (Plastic, Tin, Iron)

# COMICS IN THE 50S



# SCIENCE FICTION





# HORROR



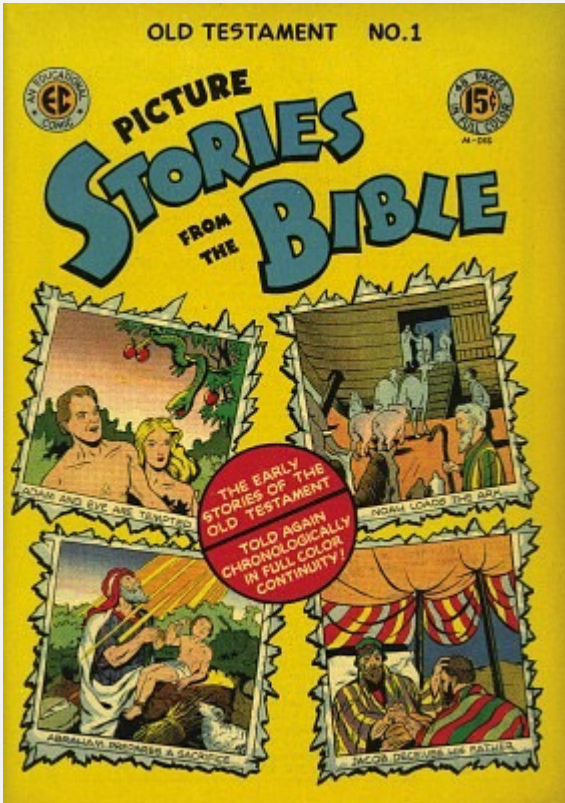
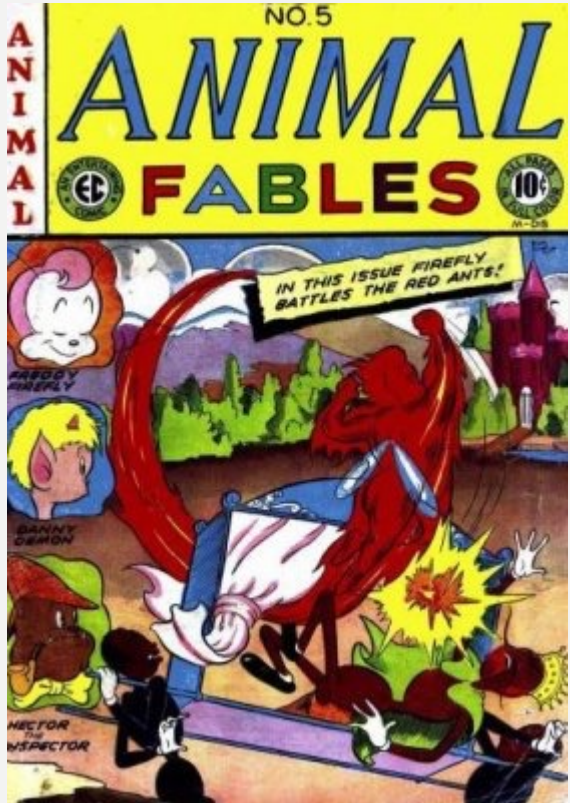
# EC

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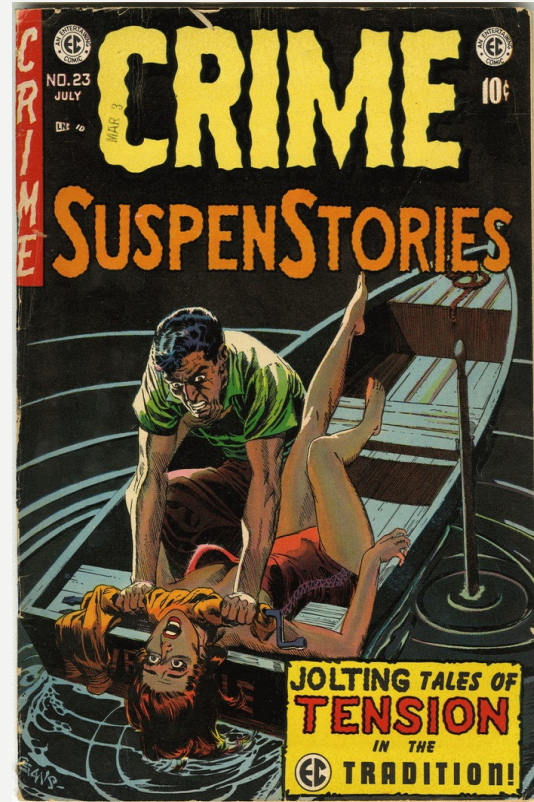
- 1944
- Educational Comics
- Max Gaines
- William Gaines (since 1947)
- „New Trend“ (1950-1954/5)

EC



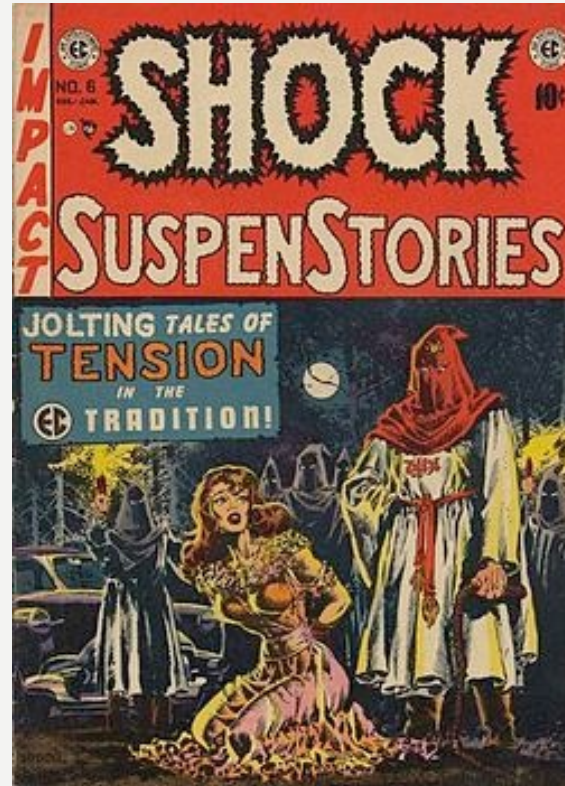
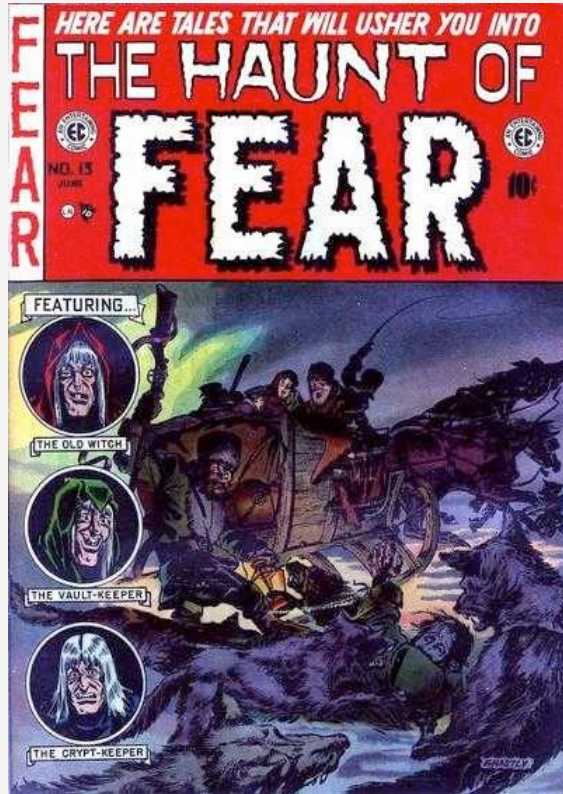


# EC



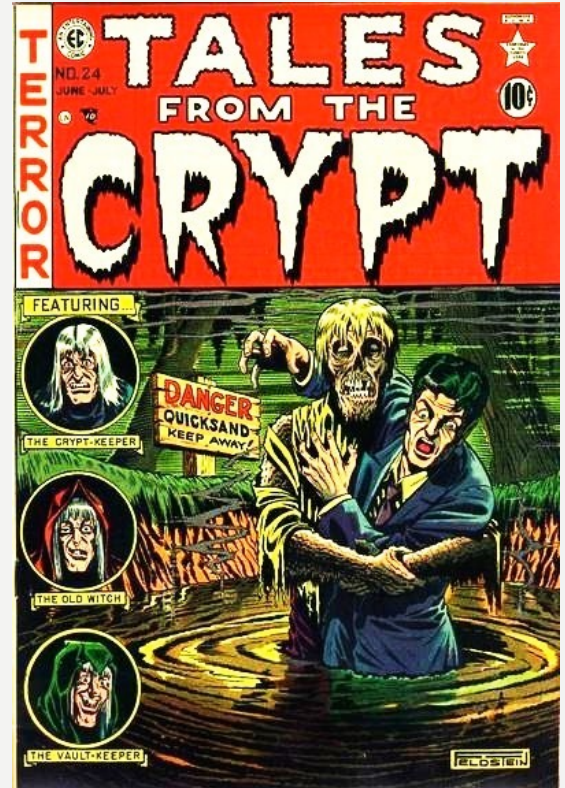


# EC

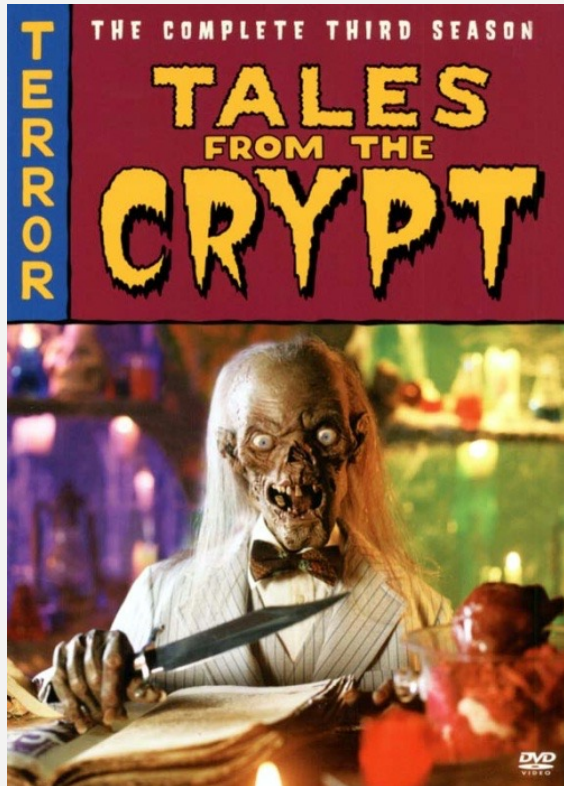


# TALES FROM THE CRYPT

- *International Comics* #1-5 (1947)
- *International Crime Patrol* #6 (1948)
- *Crime Patrol* #7-16 (1948-1950)
- *The Crypt of Terror* #17-19 (1950)
- *Tales From the Crypt* #20-46 (1950-1955)
- bi-monthly



# TV SERIES

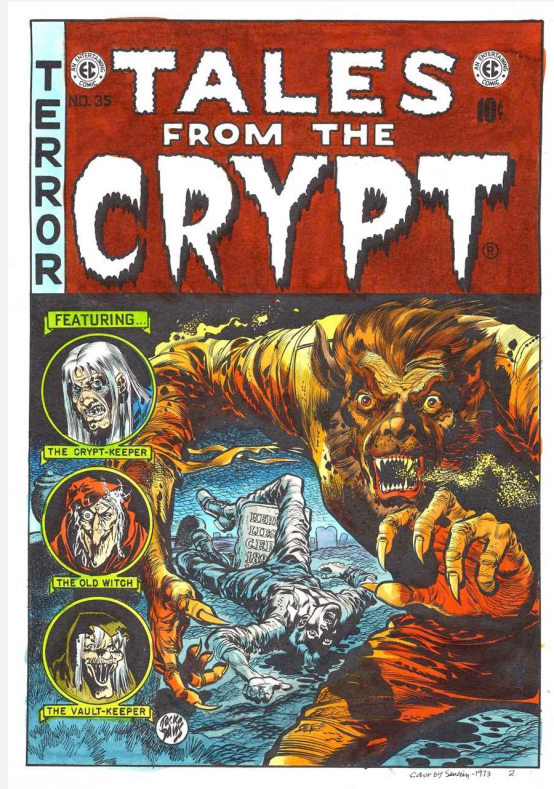


- HBO
- 1989-1996
- 7 seasons (93 episodes)
- perfectly recreates the atmosphere of comic book stories



# THEMES

- revenge from beyond the grave (crime stories)
- justice
- betrayal
- ghosts
- zombies
- werewolves
- haunted houses

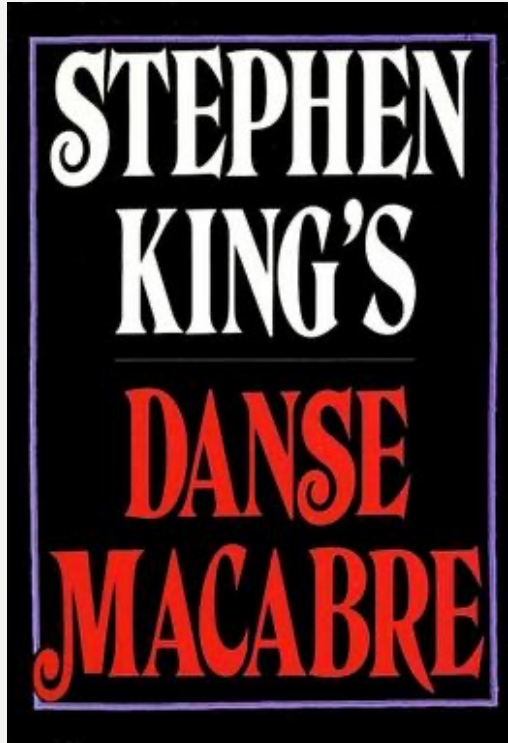




# HORROR GENRE

STEPHEN KING

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three descending levels:

- terror
- fear
- revulsion

# TERROR

IT WAS THE MOST UNUSUAL FRATERNITY INITIATION EVER SEEN ON THE CAMPUS... OR ON ANY OTHER CAMPUS, FOR THAT MATTER! THE THREE PLEDGES WERE TAKEN OUT TO THE OLD PALMER HOME ON THAT INFAMOUS NIGHT FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, AND INSTEAD OF THE PLACE BEING AMUSINGLY HAUNTED, IT TURNED INTO A---



IT WAS ON A NIGHT IN 1934 THAT THIS STRANGE TALE HAD ITS BEGINNING! TODAY, FIFTEEN YEARS LATER, THERE IS STILL NO EXPLANATION FOR WHAT HAPPENED AT THE PALMER PLACE!

GET A LOAD OF LES WILTON BACK THERE... SCARING THE WITS OUT OF THOSE POOR FRESHMEN!



HE'S GONE ABOUT PREPARING THIS HOUSE FOR THE INITIATION AS IF IT WERE THE CLOSING SECONDS OF THE BIG GAME!



HE CLAIMS THAT EVEN IF IT WAS JUST AN OLD DUMP BEFORE... IT'S HAUNTED NOW!

- haunted house?
- nature of threat = unknown
- intuitive fear



G-GOOD HEAVENS!

I... IT'S WILTON! H... HE'S AGED FIFTY YEARS IN THE LAST FEW MINUTES... H... HIS HAIR... IT'S TURNED WHITE!

H... HE LOOKS AS IF HE'S GONE INSANE! LISTEN TO HIS MOANING!

# FEAR

- *The Thing from the Sea*
- haunted cabin
- revenge from beyond the grave
- visualized terror

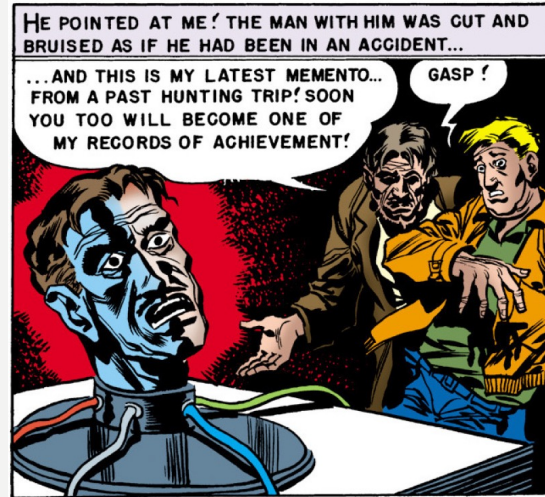




# REVULSION



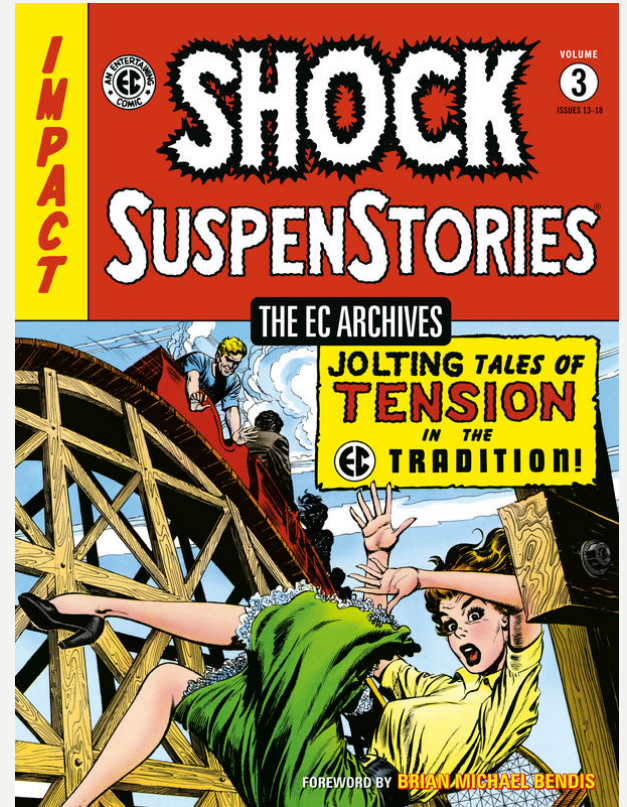
- *The Trophy*
- mad „scientist“
- rarely present in *Tales from the Crypt*





# SHOCK SUSPENSTORIES

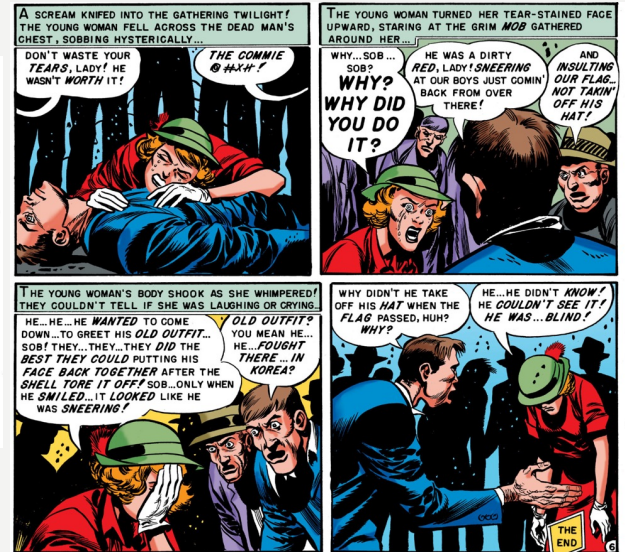
- 1952 (February/March) – 1955 (December/January)
- various genres
- 18 issue
- bi-monthly
- social criticism
- “preachies”



# "PREACHIES"



- *Patriots*
- superficiality of American patriotism
- real vs arm-chair patriotism





# "PREACHIES"

- *The Guilty*
- racism, prejudice
- institutional racism



# "PREACHIES"

## WEIRD FANTASY

### JUDGMENT DAY!

THE MAN ROARED DOWN FROM THE NIGHT SKY. HE'D COME FROM THE INFINITE VOID OF SPACE... ACROSS THE ENDLESS COSMIC VAGUUM. HE'D COME FROM THE PLANET EARTH. HE'D COME IN A SHIP OF GLEAMING ALLOYS... BELCHING BLUE FLAMES AND YELLOW CLOUDS OF ATOMIC DUST. AND HE'D COME ALONE. HE STEPPED TO THE PORT AMID THE CHEERS OF THE ROBOT POPULATION.

WELCOME! WELCOME, EARTHMAN, TO CYBRINIA... TO THE PLANET OF MECHANICAL LIFE!



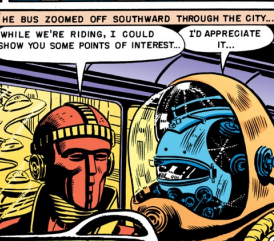
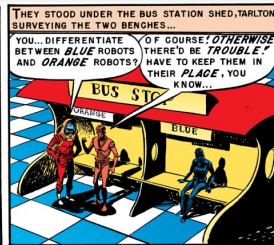
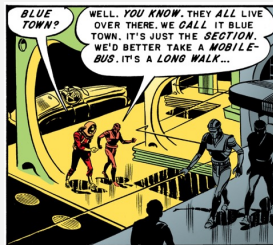
THE MAN STEPPED FROM HIS GLEAMING SHIP. HE STEPPED INTO THE ARTIFICIAL SUNLIGHT THAT FLOODED THE LANDING SITE. HE EXTENDED HIS HAND...

I AM TARLTON... FROM "WE ARE READY" WE "EARTH COLONIZATION" HAVE LABORED LONG I AM HERE TO INSPECT AND HARD TO PERFORM I FIND THAT YOU FEEL OUR SOCIETY... ARE READY... WE HAVE EXPERIMENTED AND DISCOVERED, PLANNED AND BUILT... ASKED AND ANSWERED. WE ARE READY...



TARLTON MOVED FORWARD THROUGH THE CROWD OF ORANGE ROBOTS THAT PRESSED AROUND HIM. HE STOPPED AND QUESTIONED ONE...

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM? YOU ARE TARLTON... FROM EARTH! YOU ARE A REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR ORIGINAL CREATORS! IF YOU FIND THAT WE ARE READY, ALL OF THE WONDERS AND GREATNESS OF EARTH WILL BE OURS.

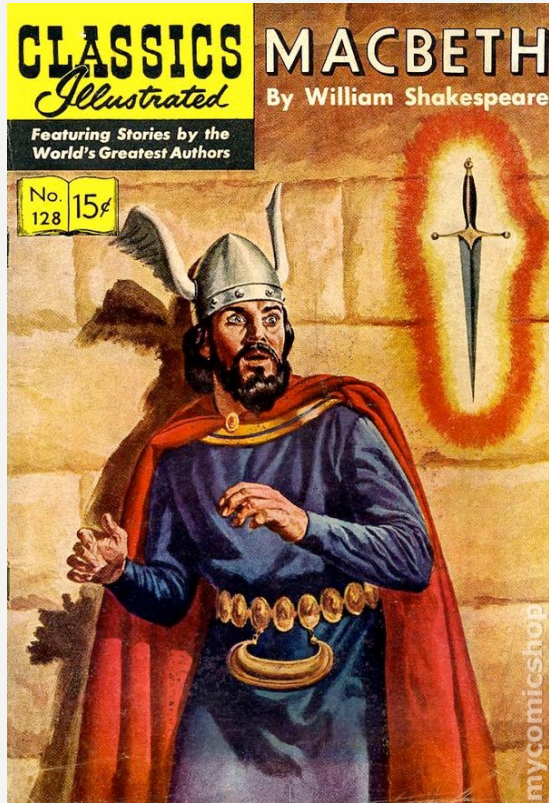


AND INSIDE THE SHIP, THE MAN REMOVED HIS SPACE HELMET AND SHOOK HIS HEAD, AND THE INSTRUMENT LIGHTS MADE THE BEADS OF PERSPIRATION ON HIS DARK SKIN TWINKLE LIKE DISTANT STARS...

- Patriots
- racism
- controversial story



# CRITICISM OF COMICS



- similar to mass culture criticism common in the fifties
- concern for youth reading preferences
- comics and juvenile delinquency

# MORAL PANIC

- comics were condemned in press
- researches on harmfulness of comics for young readers
- attempts to legally limit distribution of comics (vetoed)
- comics burning (1948)



**Horror Comics Go Up In Flames**

A warm job, but one that Len Wynne enjoys, as he hurls book after book of "horror" comics into public pyre on Prior street. Two months hard sledding went into the "roundup" by Jaycee Youth Leadership committee, that brought 8000 comics to the funeral flames, and some 700 classics into the homes of Vancouver children. Rain dampened the affair.

# CRUSADERS

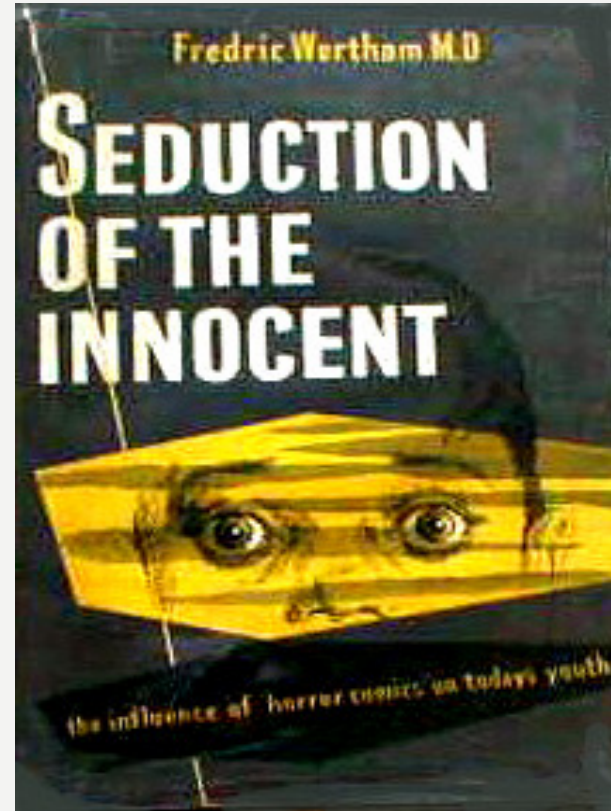
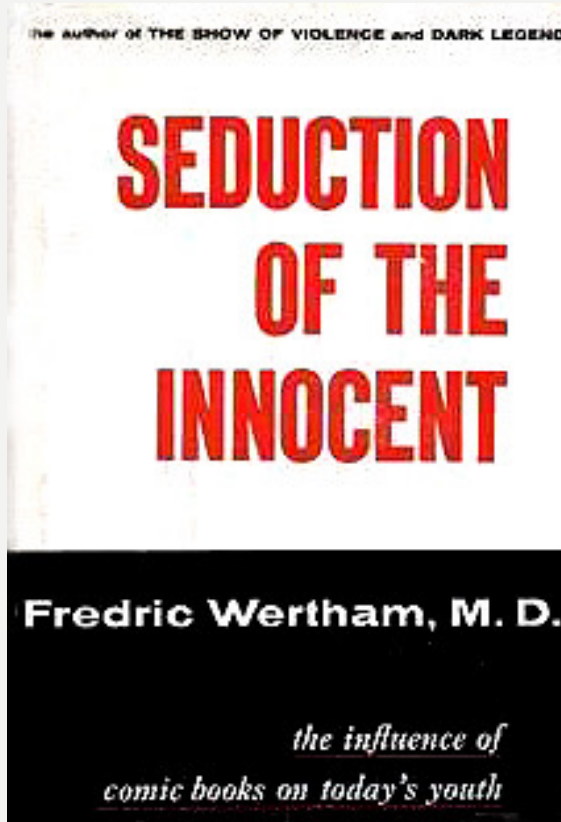
FREDRIC WERTHAM AND ESTES KEFAUVER





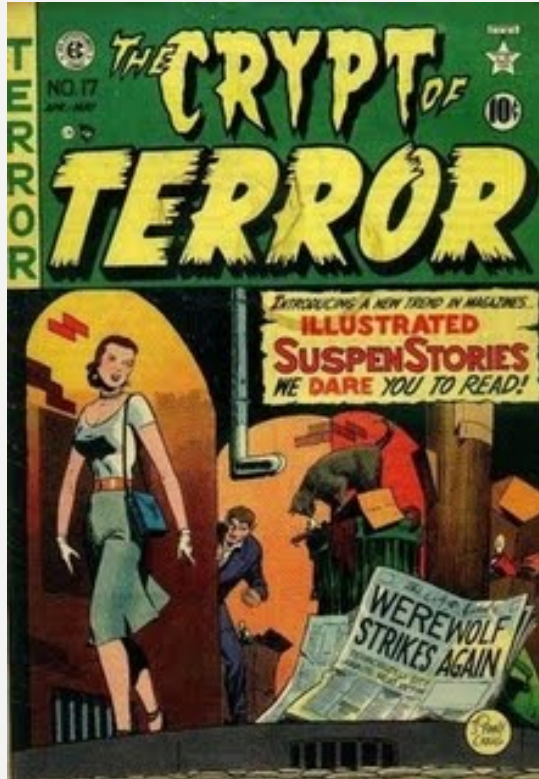
# FREDRIC WERTHAM

*SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT*



# FREDRIC WERTHAM

## *SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT*

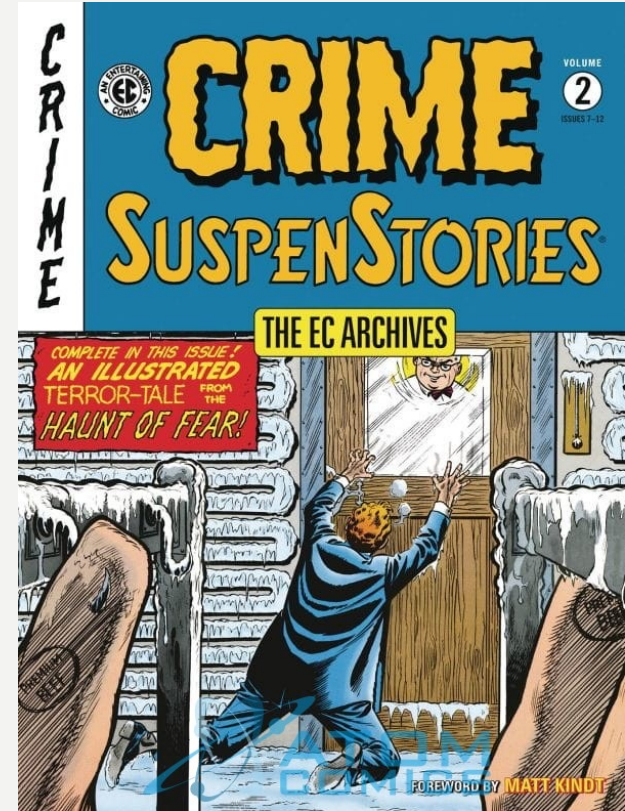


- crime comics
- comics as a source of violence among juvenile
- all comics depicted violence
- racist
- erotic content

# FREDRIC WERTHAM

## *SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT*

- comic book stories mostly contain violence
- violence is an end itself
- manual for juvenile delinquents





# FREDRIC WERTHAM

## *SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT*



- liberal and progressive approach
- evil is individual predisposition
- evil is present in social environment
- comics are one of the factors responsible for the rise of juvenile delinquency

# FREDRIC WERTHAM

## *SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT*

comics as a sexual stimulus  
for juvenile



# HEARINGS

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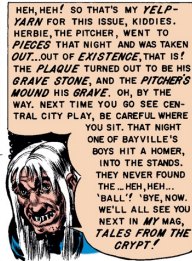
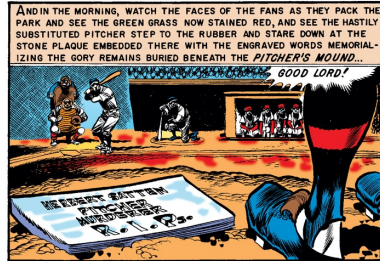
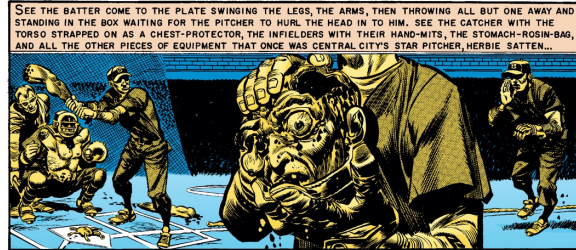
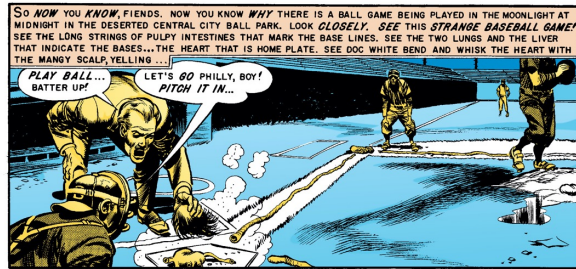
- United States Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency
- hearings on comic books (1954):
  - 21-22 April
  - 4 June





# WERTHAM

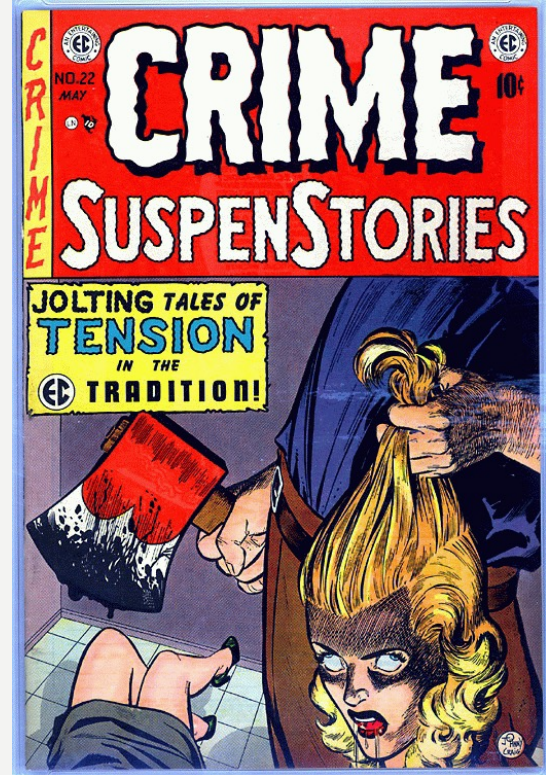
## HAUNT OF FEAR #19



- *Foul Play*
- revenge story
- baseball match played with human head
- revulsion

# A MATTER OF TASTE

- for William Gaines it was just a matter of taste
- each story should be read in the context of the genre it represents



# COMICS CODE

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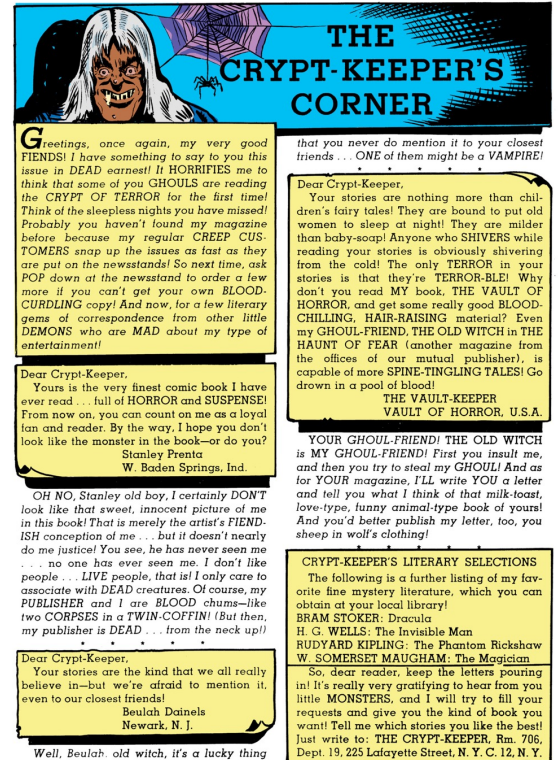


- Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA) (1954)
- Comics Code Authority
- auto-censorship
- not in operation since 2011



# CONTEXT

- correspondence with readers (*The Crypt-Keeper's Corner*)
- adults were not familiar with the certain style of EC comics
- generation gap?



## THE CRYPT-KEEPER'S CORNER

**G**reetings, once again, my very good FIENDS! I have something to say to you this issue in *DEAD* earned! It HORRIFIES me to think that some of you GHOULS are reading the *CRYPT OF TERROR* for the first time! Think of the sleepless nights you have missed! Probably you haven't found my magazine before because my regular CREEP CUSTOMERS snap up the issues as fast as they are put on the newsstands! So next time, ask POP down at the newsstand to order a few more if you can't get your own BLOOD-CURDLING copy! And now, for a few literary gems of correspondence from other little DEMONS who are MAD about my type of entertainment!

Dear Crypt-Keeper,  
Yours is the very finest comic book I have ever read . . . full of HORROR and SUSPENSE! From now on, you can count on me as a loyal fan and reader. By the way, I hope you don't look like the monster in the book—or do you?  
Stanley Prenta  
W. Baden Springs, Ind.

OH NO, Stanley old boy, I certainly DON'T look like that sweet, innocent picture of me in this book! That is merely the artist's FIENDISH conception of me . . . but it doesn't nearly do me justice! You see, he has never seen me . . . no one has ever seen me. I don't like people . . . LIVE people, that is! I only care to associate with DEAD creatures. Of course, my PUBLISHER and I are BLOOD chums—like two CORPSES in a TWIN-COFFIN! (But then, my publisher is DEAD . . . from the neck up!)

Dear Crypt-Keeper,  
Your stories are the kind that we all really believe in—but we're afraid to mention it, even to our closest friends!  
Beulah Dainels  
Newark, N. J.

Well, Beulah, old witch, it's a lucky thing that you never do mention it to your closest friends . . . ONE of them might be a VAMPIRE!

Dear Crypt-Keeper,  
Your stories are nothing more than children's fairy tales! They are bound to put old women to sleep at night! They are milder than baby-soap! Anyone who SHIVERS while reading your stories is obviously shivering from the cold! The only TERROR in your stories is that they're TERROR-BLE! Why don't you read MY book, THE VAULT OF HORROR, and get some really good BLOOD-CHILLING, HAIR-RAISING material? Even my GHOUL-FRIEND, THE OLD WITCH in THE HAUNT OF FEAR (another magazine from the offices of our mutual publisher), is capable of more SPINE-TINGLING TALES! Go down in a pool of blood!

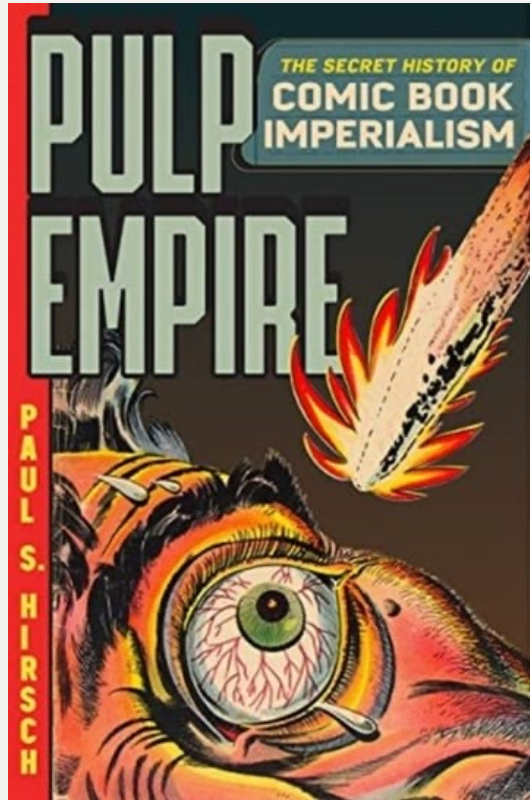
THE VAULT-KEEPER  
VAULT OF HORROR, U.S.A.

YOUR GHOUL-FRIEND! THE OLD WITCH is MY GHOUL-FRIEND! First you insult me, and then you try to steal my GHOUL! And as for YOUR magazine, I'll write YOU a letter and tell you what I think of that milk-toast, love-type, funny animal-type book of yours! And you'd better publish my letter, too, you sheep in wolf's clothing!

CRYPT-KEEPER'S LITERARY SELECTIONS  
The following is a further listing of my favorite fine mystery literature, which you can obtain at your local library!  
BRAM STOKER: *Dracula*  
H. G. WELLS: *The Invisible Man*  
RUDYARD KIPLING: *The Phantom Rickshaw*  
W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM: *The Magician*

So, dear reader, keep the letters pouring in! It's really very gratifying to hear from you little MONSTERS, and I will try to fill your requests and give you the kind of book you want! Tell me which stories you like the best! Just write to: THE CRYPT-KEEPER, Rm. 706, Dept. 19, 225 Lafayette Street, N. Y. C. 12, N. Y.

# PULP EMPIRE



- vision of America as a violent place
- “American monomyth”
- wrongly used “soft power”