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- [News](#)
- [Election 2008](#)
- [Your Town](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Region](#)
- [Nevada](#)
- [Environment](#)
- [Outdoors](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Elections](#)
- [Special Sections](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [Events Calendar](#)
- [Write the Editor](#)

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- [Lake Tahoe Hotels](#)
- [e-Edition](#)
- [Today's Ads](#)
- [Photo Gallery](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Subscriber Services](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)
- [Email Headlines](#)
- [Legal Notices](#)
- [Autos](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Yellow Pages](#)

SPOTLIGHT



SPECIAL SECTIONS

- [Medical Directory](#)
- [Homestyle Magazine](#)
- [North Lake Tahoe Guide](#)
- [North Shore Almanac](#)
- [Sierra Nevada Boomers](#)
- [Sierra Nevada Weddings](#)
- [Tahoe Winter](#)
- [The Recruiter](#)

NEWSPAPERS

- [Lahontan Valley](#)

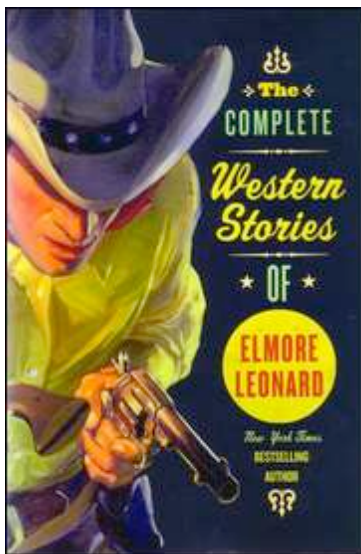
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May 13, 2008

'The Complete Western Stories of Elmore Leonard'



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By Barbara Perlman-Whyman
Good Reads Columnist
May 2, 2008

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Author of more than forty books, many of them best sellers ("Mr. Paradise," "Tishimingo Blues," "The Hot Kid," "When the Women Come Out to Dance") many of them made into films which have become

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classics (“Be Cool,” “Get Shorty,” “Out of Sight”) and recipient of the Grand Master Award of the Mystery Writers of America, Elmore Leonard is well-respected as a “spinner of memorable yarns.”

Not all writers of Western writing originated in the West. Growing up in Detroit, a product of Catholic schools in the 1950s, Leonard began writing in fifth grade.

Majoring in English at the University of Detroit, he spent most of his free time reading and going to the movies. Eventually he discovered that he was reading “not for the story, but for the style.” But it was not until after college that he realized he wanted to be a writer but he needed both to find “a genre in which to learn to write as well as be selling at the same time.”

Choosing Westerns because he had liked western movies throughout his entire childhood beginning in the 1930s, he entered the Western market as it hit its peak in the 1950s. Dozens of pulp magazines were looking for western stories. Initially his stories were not a huge success and he realized he needed a much more comprehensive understanding and authenticity of detail, western life, gear, guns and mentality to market his writing and meet his own expectations. He began to chronicle his research of little known facts into a ledger which he continued to use all through the next decade or so.

With a growing family, he was working as a full-time copywriter for the Chevrolet account at Campbell-Ewald Advertising in Detroit when his first story “Trail of the Apache” was accepted for publication in Argosy magazine. Not willing nor financially able to abandon his day job and realizing that he really wanted write fiction but he had very little time to write, he began getting up at 5 a.m. to write for two hours before work. Because he liked Arizona and New Mexico, and was drawn to the Apache Indians — their “raider” quality, their involvement with Mexican custom and language, and their dress, he focused his attention and sited his stories in this region between 1870-1890.

His stories became more frequently published in the pulp magazines but acceptability still eluded him from the more popular and prestigious ones, such as The Saturday Evening Post and Colliers. It was clear to him that he next needed to work on his style and what better direction to go but to write a novel. In 1953, “The Bounty Hunters” was published and served as a prototype for Leonard’s Western style: put the most dangerous Apache, the wisest scout, the greediest outlaw all set under the desert sun and see who wins.

Within four years, Hollywood approached him and several of his stories became minor classic films (i.e. “Three-Ten to Yuma,” “The Tall T” from his story “The Captive”). But the Western was waning in popularity. In 1960, Leonard took his profit sharing from Campbell-Ewald, bought a home in Detroit and took a hiatus from writing for five years, working exclusively in freelance copywriting to pay the bills.

It was not until 1966, when the movie version of his novel “Hombre” was bought by a movie company that he finally had the money to write his first nonfiction novel, “The Big Bounce.” Then, in 1970, he expanded an earlier story “Only Good Ones” and it was bought up and released in 1973 under the new name “Valdez is Coming,” starring Burt Lancaster. He went on to write a total of eight Western novels.

Although no longer “politically correct,” anyone who loves the old western lore and films will enjoy these tales. The compilation of “The Complete Western Stories of Elmore Leonard” consists of thirty stories, twenty-seven which were written between 1951 to 1956 and gives evidence of his writing style and development beginning with his earliest writings. Although Leonard has since become well-known for his crime stories on the mean streets of Detroit and South Florida, he will be the first to tell you that “they are all derived from what he learned from writing these stories: he just changes the setting and century.”

Announcing Squaw Valley Institute 2008 Summer Workshops:

Every summer for 39 years, the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley has brought together poets and writers for separate weeks of workshops, individual conferences, lectures, panels, readings, and discussions of the craft and the business of writing. Financial aid is available.

Poetry Workshop: July 19 to 26

Lucille Clifton, Robert Hass, Sharon Olds, C.D. Wright and Dean Young
(Deadline to Apply: May 10)

The Poetry Program is founded on the belief that when poets gather in a community to write new poems, each poet may well break through old habits and write something stronger and truer than before. To help this happen we work together to create an atmosphere in which everyone might feel free to try anything. In the mornings we meet in workshops to read to each other the work of the previous 24 hours; each participant also has an opportunity to work with each staff poet. In the late afternoons we gather for a conversation about some aspect of the craft. On several late afternoons staff poets hold brief individual conferences.

Writer's Workshops: Aug. 2 to 9

Greg Bills, Max Byrd, Michael Carlisle, Mark Childress, John Daniel, Gill Dennis, Cai Emmons, Janet Fitch, Lynn Freed, Molly Giles, Sands Hall, Louis B. Jones, Michelle Latiolais, Janis Cooke Newman, Cecile Pineda, Jason Roberts, Elissa Schappell, Martin J. Smith and Al Young.

Literary agents and editors with published alumni: David Bajo, Joshua Ferris, Christina Meldrum and Nora Pierce.

Plus special guests: Selden Edwards, Oakley Hall, Rhoda Huffey, Diane Johnson, Anne Lamott, David Lukas and Amy Tan.

(Deadline to Apply: May 10)

These workshops assist serious writers by exploring the art and craft as well as the business of writing. The week offers daily morning workshops, craft lectures, panel discussions on editing and publishing, staff readings, as well as brief individual conferences. The morning workshops are led by staff writer-teachers, editors, or agents. There are separate morning workshops for fiction and narrative nonfiction/memoir. In addition to their workshop manuscript, participants may have a second manuscript read by a staff member who meets with them in an individual conference. For information, go to the Web site www.squawvalley@pmailus.com.

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North Lake Tahoe Bonanza - 925 Tahoe Blvd., Suite 206 - Incline Village, NV 89452