



# *Naked Came the Stranger*

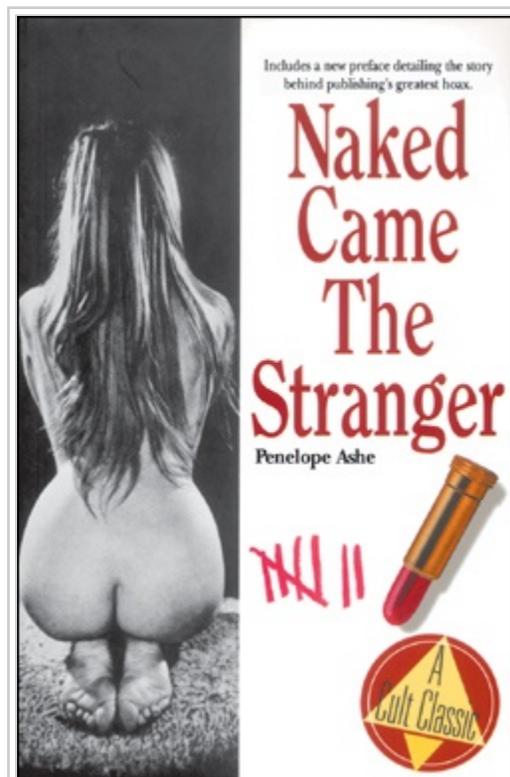
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

*Naked Came the Stranger* is a 1969 novel written as a literary hoax poking fun at the American literary culture of its time. Though credited to "Penelope Ashe", it was in fact written by a group of twenty-four journalists led by *Newsday* columnist Mike McGrady.

McGrady's intention was to write a book that was both deliberately terrible and contained a lot of descriptions of sex, to illustrate the point that popular American literary culture had become mindlessly vulgar. The book fulfilled the authors' expectations and became a bestseller in 1969; they revealed the hoax later that year, further spurring the book's popularity.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Contents

- 1 Hoax
- 2 Synopsis
- 3 Reception
- 4 Further reading
- 5 See also
- 6 References
- 7 External links



Cover of reissue of *Naked Came the Stranger*

## Hoax

Mike McGrady was convinced that popular American literary culture had become so base—with the best-seller lists dominated by the likes of Harold Robbins and Jacqueline Susann—that any book could succeed if enough sex was thrown in. To test his theory, in 1966 McGrady recruited a team of *Newsday* colleagues (according to Andreas Schroder,<sup>[2]</sup> nineteen men and five women) to collaborate on a sexually explicit novel with no literary or social value whatsoever. McGrady co-edited the project with his *Newsday* colleague Harvey Aronson, and among the other collaborators were well-known writers including 1965 Pulitzer Prize winner Gene Goltz, 1970 Pulitzer Prize winner Robert W. Greene, and journalist Marilyn Berger.<sup>[3]</sup>

The group wrote the book as a deliberately inconsistent hodge-podge, with each chapter written

by a different author. Some of the chapters had to be heavily edited, because they were originally too well written. The book was submitted for publication under the pseudonym "Penelope Ashe" (portrayed by McGrady's sister-in-law for photographs and meetings with publishers).

The publisher, Lyle Stuart, was an independent publisher then known for controversial books, many with sexual content. According to Stuart, he appropriated the cover photo (a kneeling nude woman with very long hair down her back, photographed from behind) from a Hungarian nudist magazine; the model and photographer later demanded and received payment.<sup>[4][5]</sup>

## Synopsis

Gillian and William Blake are the hosts of a popular New York City breakfast radio chat show, *The Billy & Gilly Show*, where they play the perfect couple. When Gillian finds out that her husband is having an affair, she decides to cheat on him with a variety of men from their Long Island neighborhood. Most of the book is taken up by vignettes describing Gilly's adventures with a variety of men, from a progressive rabbi to a mobster crooner.

## Reception

The book fulfilled McGrady's cynical expectations, and sales soon reached 20,000 copies,<sup>[6]</sup> whereupon the co-authors decided to go public, in August 1969. The male authors gave their "confession" on *The David Frost Show*, after being introduced as "Penelope Ashe" and walking out on stage, single file, as the orchestra played the song "A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody". The revelation of the true origins of the book prompted more sales with the book selling approximately 90,000 copies by 13 October 1969.<sup>[7]</sup> By the end of the year, the book had spent 13 weeks on the *New York Times* Best-Seller List,<sup>[1]</sup> although by that time its authorship was common knowledge. It is unclear how much of the book's success was due to its content and how much to publicity about its unusual origin. As of May 2012, the book's publisher reported the book had sold 400,000 copies.<sup>[1]</sup>

In 1970, McGrady published *Stranger Than Naked, or How to Write Dirty Books for Fun and Profit*, which told the story of the hoax. *Naked Came the Stranger* later became the basis for an adult film in 1975 directed by Radley Metzger and starring Darby Lloyd Rains. As reported by *The Washington Post*, "Mr. McGrady and the other writers had nothing to do with a hardcore 1975 film with the same title. They did, however, see the movie at a Times Square theater. During one vivid scene, Aronson told *The Charlotte Observer*, someone shouted 'Author, Author!' 'Seventeen of us stood up.'"<sup>[3]</sup>

## Further reading

- Ashe, Penelope (pseudonym) (1969) *Naked Came the Stranger* ISBN 978-1-56980-262-5
- McGrady, Mike (1970) *Stranger Than Naked or How to Write Dirty Books for Fun*

## See also

- *I, Libertine*, an earlier literary hoax
- *Atlanta Nights*, a later literary hoax
- *Naked Came the Manatee*, a 1996 serialized South Florida mystery thriller parody
- *The Tale of Scrotie McBoogerballs*, a *South Park* episode about a literary hoax

## References

1. Fox, Margalit (May 15, 2012). "Mike McGrady, Known for a Literary Hoax, Dies at 78". *New York Times*. p. B12. Retrieved 18 September 2012.
2. Schroder, Andreas. *Cheats, Charlatans, and Chicanery* McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1997.
3. Matt Schudel, "Journalist was ringleader of popular literary spoof" (<http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-31373689.html>), *The Washington Post*, May 16, 2012 – via HighBeam Research (subscription required).
4. Anthony Ramirez, "Lyle Stuart, Publisher of Renegade Titles, Dies at 83" (<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/26/arts/26stuart.html>), *The New York Times*, June 26, 2006.
5. Christopher Reed, "Lyle Stuart: US publisher who challenged the constitution and the boundaries of taste" (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2006/jun/29/guardianobituaries.media>), *The Guardian*, June 28, 2006.
6. "Mike McGrady, Known for a Literary Hoax, Dies at 78". *The New York Times*. 15 May 2012. Retrieved 28 January 2016.
7. This figure, with according date, is quoted on the 20th-Century American Bestsellers' *Naked Came the Stranger* (<http://www3.isrl.illinois.edu/~unsworth/courses/bestsellers/search.cgi?title=Naked+Came+the+Stranger>) page.

## External links

- Twentieth Century Bestsellers—*Naked Came the Stranger* (<http://www3.isrl.uiuc.edu/~unsworth/courses/bestsellers/search.cgi?title=Naked+Came+the+Stranger>)
- *Naked Came the Stranger* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0073437/>) at the Internet Movie Database

Retrieved from "https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Naked\_Came\_the\_Stranger&oldid=743077494"

Categories: 1969 novels | Literary forgeries | Literary collaborations | Collaborative fiction | Works published under a pseudonym | Novels set in New York City

- 
- This page was last modified on 7 October 2016, at 17:26.

- Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.