

Notes on Charles Thomas' Novels by Fielding M. McGehee

Charles Thomas' novels tend to fall outside any recognized genre. They are politically radical, leaning far into anarchism – either from the right or the left – and conspiracies. They are violent, graphic, and somewhat sado-masochistic. They are dark, offering little redemption. They are apocalyptic. Yet the dialogue – and the research which went into his fiction-writing – is deeply-layered, placing it outside most accessible fiction, and certainly outside the interest of most consumers of the action thriller. Charlie assumes a great foundation of detailed knowledge of American history – especially military history – on the part of his readers, then proceeds to additional insights and educational refinements of the points he wanted to make, often through arcane references.

One example should suffice: In one novel, a character makes an offhand comment about the carnage at Hamburger Hill, and a second character replies in kind. There is no context for the reference, no description of why the site of the battle was called Hamburger Hill, not even to the Vietnam War from which the term arose, nothing. Many of Charlie's contemporaries have forgotten the term – if they ever heard it in the first place – and the majority of the U.S. population was born after Vietnam. Yet for Charlie, the images of Hamburger Hill, and the perceived idiocy of U.S. military policy that led inevitably to it, remained at his core. For him, it was unfathomable that his wide knowledge of his chosen field of military history wasn't similarly hard-wired into the brains of every American.

The characters tend to be either cynical, foolish, or completely malevolent. This applies to the women as much as the men. The lead character – most often Charlie himself – is a man who wants the best for the human race, who should know better than to expect it, and who acquiesces in its destruction (along with his own). The lead female antagonist – whose name often begins with a "C" – is based upon his *bete noire* at the National Archives, a woman named Claudine. Even if Charlie dies in most of his books, Claudine dies first, and usually by more grisly means, often through a disembowelment.

Little of the research or the notes or the first scribbled drafts of Charlie Thomas's works remains. He wrote the first drafts in longhand on yellow legal tablets, then typed them with a typewriter. When he made modifications on a book, even minor ones, he often retyped the book in its entirety, and often – apparently – destroyed earlier drafts. His novel *Mission*, for example, went through at least eight drafts, yet only five remain, and three of those because he had sent them to me. One novel from the early 1980s, *Still At Large*, which was a fictionalization of his difficulties with the federal government (described in his non-fiction accounts *Still At Large* and *J' Ai Vecu*), is completely gone. A short autobiographical statement he wrote a few months before his death includes five plays, one novel, and one serialized novel that he wrote in high school, with a note that "None of the above properties have survived to the best of my knowledge." He finally embraced the computer and its word processing capabilities, but not until the end of his life.

There is little of Charlie's correspondence with agents, although he sent out manuscripts to be considered for publication. The extant correspondence is written in his own style, practically daring the agent to read the work under submission. Most drafts were returned unread. Eventually, Charlie asked Rebecca Moore and me to act as his agents, and the exchanges of correspondence between "Mr. Thomas" in Milwaukee and various publishers reflect that relationship. We were similarly unsuccessful.

Because Charlie rewrote and rewrote his novels and other nonfiction works not directly related too KSU – and because some books are completely undated – it is difficult to place them in chronological order. I therefore place them in alphabetical order, with dates supplied as I found them. A chronological listing of his complete oeuvre, including his Kent State nonfiction work, as best as I can reconstruct it, appears at the end of the alphabetical listing. The Kent State nonfiction work appears as bold face in this listing.

The Barbara Steele Paradigm. Third draft intact, 1988, 438 pages. Also attached is undated folder of “Futuristic segments only”, and folder of various pictures of Barbara Steele, an actress upon whom Thomas had a long and abiding infatuation. Undated (2000?) partial manuscript on computer printout. Autobiographical novel, weaving in the inevitability of thermonuclear war. Protagonist is Charlie McGehee (Charlie Thomas) in 1998 draft, Charlie Thorne in undated segment. Recurring themes: Barbara Steele, military history, Vietnam.

Descent: A Psychoanalytic Parable on Nazi Germany. Two drafts of novel intact. 1980, 163 pages. 1991, 179 pages. One screenplay intact, 1966, 45 pages, 12 pages of notes and references. 1980 draft includes cover letter to publisher, in which he describes himself – and novel – as “immersed in the factual horror ... of World War II.” In the tradition of H. P. Lovecraft, he sets this gothic/horror story of vampires in the last days of the Third Reich during the destruction of Dresden. Recurring themes: Barbara Steele.

Done By Hand. Two versions intact. 1994, 1353 pages in nine folders. 1996, 905 pages in box. The administration of a chiropractic college turns into a cult, indoctrinates students. Written after experiences as security guard at Life College in Atlanta, Georgia, a chiropractic school which has since gone defunct. See also, *Life University*.

Endgame. See *Mission*. (Filed with *Mission* manuscripts)

The Fourth of May. 1990. 200 pages. Original title for *The Hillside*.

The Fourth Beast. 1992. 20 pages (partial manuscript). Beginning of a novel about air warfare in Europe in early 20th century.

Frightfest: Portrait of the Artist as a Dead Man. Three undated versions (1999 and 2000), one incomplete (first 132 pages). Both other drafts are 557 pages (although one is missing page 69), and have subtle changes throughout each. Aging security guard Charlie Thorne (Thomas) faces hordes of violent visitors to theme park in Georgia on Halloween, 1999. Apocalyptic, millennial horror. Recurring themes: Kent State, Thomas’ history at Duke University, Barbara Steele, National Archives (esp. Claudine). Based upon his work as security guard at Six Flags Over Georgia. See also *Halloween*.

Halloween. 1999. Screenplay based loosely upon *Frightfest*. 146 pages.

The H. G. Wells Society. A Kevin McMurphy novel. Two drafts intact. 1991 draft, 224 pages. 1995 draft, 392 pages, plus three page synopsis and exchange of agent correspondence. A private detective is hired to defend a NASA scientist against an involuntary commitment to a mental institution, because the scientist believes he is about to be kidnapped by aliens outside the solar system. The investigation reveals that the real threat is the space agency itself, who is trying to silence the scientist over what he knows. Also known as *Society*.

The Hillside. A Kevin McMurphy novel. 1991. 236 pages. A private detective is hired to look into the case of a whistleblower, Charles Thorne (Charles Thomas), who police say has turned onto an assassin. McMurphy's investigation leads him to uncover an intricate CIA plot to assassinate the first serious female candidate for President of the U.S., and – further back – how the CIA was involved in the murders at Kent State University in 1970. Title of first draft was *The Fourth of May*.

J'Ai Vecu (Stately Tomb II) (1989). Autobiographical, non-fiction account of problems with National Archives and government from 1976 to date. 206 pages, 2 files. See also *Stately Tomb*.

Jungle Cult. A Kevin McMurphy novel. 1992. 323 pages. Two copies. Loose copy in three folders. Bound copy includes synopsis at end. A private detective is hired to locate a young woman who was presumed to have died in a mass suicide of an American religious commune in South America. In the course of his investigation, McMurphy finds government files showing intelligence agency surveillance of the community before it left the U.S. Inspired in part by the mass deaths in Jonestown, Guyana in 1978.

Life University: A Social History. Undated, probably around 1994. Complete draft of 298 pages in box. Five folders of partial drafts, news articles and tape transcripts used in research. A non-fiction study of Life Chiropractic College and its founder, Dr. Sidney E. Williams. Written after experiences as security guard at Life College in Atlanta, Georgia, a chiropractic school which has since gone defunct. See also *Done By Hand*.

Mission: A Novel of Man's Last War. Five drafts of novel intact, including 1991 version entitled *Endgame*. First draft, completed 22 April 1975, 103 pages (single space). Undated draft, mid 1980s, 199 pages. Eighth draft 7 December 1987, 185 pages. *Endgame* draft, 1991, 204 pages. Undated draft, mid-1990s, 158 pages. One screenplay (sixth draft), 174 pages, 8 August 1983. Science fiction novel about the CIA's final mission after a nuclear holocaust, as agency commandos travel from New York to Washington encountering a world gone mad from thermonuclear war. Charlie Thomas is protagonist. Recurring themes: Claudine, KSU. See also, *Endgame*.

The Seventh Seal. Screenplay, adapted from Ingmar Bergman's original. 1983. 52 pages. Using some of the same characters as in Ingmar Bergman's classic 1956 film, this screenplay portrays a post-apocalyptic America. The country has been ravaged by biological warfare, and the survivors – mainly denizens of the lower classes and sinister military figures – vie with one another in religious fervor for dominance.

Society, see *The H.G. Wells Society*.

Stately Tomb: The National Archives, Kent State, and the Advent of American Fascism, 1968-1980. Undated, early 80's. 393 pages, 4 files. Personal history on the decline of the National Archives. See also *J'Ai Vecu*.

Stepan Razin. Three drafts intact. 1979, 860 pages. 1989, 628 pages. 1990, 685 pages. A historical novel of the Cossack revolt in Russia, 1660-1670.

Three Minutes to Twelve. Early 1970s. Two versions intact. Undated, single space, 74 pages. Undated, double space, 165 pages. Private eye investigates murder by a graduate student (Charles Thomas) of several university professors who destroyed his academic career. The investigation quickly turns to the death of a coed at university during anti-war demonstration during presidency of Richard Nixon. Recurring themes: Barbara Steele, KSU, military history.

Trial: A Novel on the Occupation of Japan. Two drafts intact. 1982 version, 524 pages, 4 folders. 1992 version, 468 pages (with one page opening note, and three-page epilogue), 3 folders. A historical novel of the Tokyo Trials and Rape of Nanking.

Verdun (1983): Screenplay of Christian missionaries attempt to eradicate evil in Amazon rain forest in 1915. Charlie Parker (Thomas) is captain of river launch. 89 pages

Chronology

- 1960: *Stepan Razin* (manuscript gone)
- 1961: *Verdun* (screenplay – manuscript gone)
- 1965: *The Barbara Steele Paradigm* (first draft – manuscript gone)
- 1966: *Descent* (screenplay)
- 1968: *Trial* (manuscript gone)
- 1970: *Trial* (second manuscript gone)
- 1972: *Three Minutes to Twelve* (two drafts)
- 1973: *Mission* (manuscript gone)
- 1975: *Mission* (earliest draft intact)
- 1977: *Mission* (manuscript gone)
Four Days In May (manuscript gone)
- 1979: *Stepan Razin* (earliest draft intact)
Four Days In May (earliest draft of Kent State book intact, at least third draft)
- 1980: *Descent* (earliest draft intact)
- early 80's *Stately Tomb* (earliest draft intact)
- 1982: *Trial* (earliest draft intact)
Still At Large (no drafts extant)
- 1983: *Verdun* (screenplay)
The Seventh Seal (screenplay)

Mission (screenplay, described as sixth draft)

mid-80's *Mission* (second draft of novel intact)

1985: *J'Ai Vecu* (manuscript gone)

1987: *Mission* (third draft of novel intact, described as eighth draft)

1988: *The Barbara Steele Paradigm* (third draft)

1989: *J'Ai Vecu* (only draft)

Stepan Razin (second draft intact)

Four Days In May (second intact draft)

1990: *The Fourth of May* (first draft of *The Hillside*)

Stepan Razin (last draft intact)

1991: *Descent* (latest draft)

The H. G. Wells Society (earliest draft intact)

The Hillside (second draft of *The Fourth of May*)

Endgame (revised version of *Mission*, at least the ninth draft of novel)

1992: *Jungle Cult* (only draft)

Trial (second draft intact)

The Fourth Beast (partial manuscript)

1994: *Done By Hand* (first draft)

Life University (assumed date on draft)

mid-90's *Mission* (final of what was likely ten drafts)

1995: *The H. G. Wells Society* (latest draft)

1996: *Done By Hand* (second draft)

1998: ***Ten Days That Destroyed A Nation***
(Second, untitled Kent State draft)

1999: *Frightfest* (earliest draft)

Halloween (screenplay)

The Blood Of Isaac (earliest draft)

2000: *Frightfest* (final draft)

The Blood Of Isaac (second draft)

2001: ***Kenfour: Notes on an Investigation*** (best guess at date)

2002: ***Mission Betrayed*** (best guess at date)