

## *A New Look at Some "Bad Boys"*

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Until the Civil War, the American boy in both country and city was a miniature of his father. He dressed as did his elders, he attended school, and he frequently learned that he resulted from original sin, and, like his parents, would walk a rough and stony road if he hoped to achieve redemption and eternal salvation. The route was bordered by brambles and thistles, not to mention the razor strop. Frequently the boy was governed by two old-fashioned bromides, "Children should be seen and not heard" and "Spare the rod and spoil the child."<sup>1</sup>

Books for children pointed out their innate depravity and were heavily laced with moral and pietistic poems and stories. William H. McGuffey's *New Second Eclectic Reader* admonished the young

In your play be very careful  
Not to give an-oth-er pain;  
And if others hurt or tease you,  
Never do the like to them.  
  
God will love the child that's gentle,  
And who tries to do no wrong;  
You must learn then to be careful,  
Now while you are very young.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> References to the bad boy in American humorous literature are so abundant that it is impossible to cite all in a short survey. Readers, however, will find two titles, each with extensive bibliographies, helpful: Robert E. Spiller, et al., eds., *Literary History of the United States*, 3v. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948) and Walter Blair, *Native American Humor, 1800-1900* (New York: American Book Company, 1937). See also Evelyn Geller, "Tom Sawyer, Tom Bailey, and the Bad-Boy Genre," *Wilson Library Bulletin* (November 1976), 245-50; Philip D. Jordan, "The American Bad Boy," *The Amateur Book Collector*, vol. 1, no. 9 (May 1951), pp. 2-3. In this article the author has leaned heavily upon his previous essay, but interpretations have been altered. The best sources, of course, are the books written by those who created the bad boy and set down his adventures. The author acknowledges the generous assistance given by Robert A. McCown, Manuscripts Librarian, University Libraries, The University of Iowa.

<sup>2</sup> New-York: American Book Company, 1885, p. 57.

This quotation epitomizes the moral philosophy of most nineteenth-century authors of school texts. It was neatly summed up during the early 1830s when a historian stated that the cardinal principle to be presented to children should be “striking instances of virtue, enterprise, courage, generosity, patriotism.”<sup>3</sup>

Sabbath School teachers, like schoolmasters, strove mightily to mould bad boys in the shape of a small Jesus. Approved conduct was blessed by God. Bad behavior was cursed by God. Such sentiments were thundered from pulpits and were a part of the regular format of funeral services: “And while the wicked with trembling hands and throbbing hearts, with horror in their aspect and damnation in their view, would be glad to be crushed to atoms by falling rocks, or buried in eternal oblivion at the bottom of the mountains, the righteous will rejoice and triumph, for the day of their redemption is come.”<sup>4</sup>

Gradually, as authors, textbook writers, educators, and clergymen wove their secular and religious prose about the American boy, a stereotype stifled and concealed the nature and character and even the activities of a *real* boy. He needed to be emancipated from literary masters who had enslaved him for generations, described him as a pious prig, and robbed him of his flesh-and-blood reality. A reading public had to learn that the American boy, whether “bad” or not, was not his father’s “little man,” but was a man in his own right. He was no scaled-down replica of his Pa.

The literary image of the bad boy emerged when the nation began to free itself from the tyranny of colonial thought and manners; when the frontier uprooted thousands of families and drew them to lands of the setting sun, when the slavery issue forced men of various views to come to grips with both human and political values; when the Civil War snatched multitudes of boys from both the North and the South and turned them into mature, hardened veterans; and when the new industrialism and the rise of the city brought new, surprising, and unexpected social and economic problems. These forces and others altered, even though gradually, older family patterns. Dreams became nightmares, and sentimental bathos turned into harsh reality.

One of the results was the growth of the so-called bad-boy genre as represented by the writings of Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Mark

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<sup>3</sup> Charles A. Goodrich, *A History of the United States of America* (Hartford, Conn.: H. F. Sumner and Co., 1833), p. xi.

<sup>4</sup> Archibald Maclay, *Consolation to Believers under the Loss of Their Christian Friends and Relations. A Sermon . . . Occasioned by the Death of Mrs. Mary Delezenne* (New-York: Whiting & Watson, 1812), p. 20. From the author’s collection of nineteenth-century funeral sermons.

Twain. But one can properly speculate whether Aldrich's Tom Bailey or Twain's Tom Sawyer were actually bad boys, if by "bad" is meant that they engaged in illegal actions which could be classified by village or city codes as misdemeanors. Perhaps, at times, both Aldrich's and Twain's heroes were naughty, prankish, mischievous, or puckish and impish. They, like the bad boy created by George W. Peck, liked the practical joke. But in neither Aldrich's *The Story of a Bad Boy*, published in 1869, nor in *Tom Sawyer*, appearing in 1876, is there evidence of delinquency or criminality. This is equally true of Peck's books: *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa* (1883); *Peck's Boss Book* (1888); *Peck's Uncle Ike and the Red Headed Boy* (1899); and *Peck's Bad Boy in an Airship* (1908). Although *Peck's Boss Book*, published in 1882, was a collection of humorous tales, there was little of the bad-boy theme in it.

But in his *Boss Book*, Peck came about the closest he ever did in anything he wrote in involving a bad boy, not *the* bad boy of future books, with sin and the police. The boy journeyed to the city and was

met on the street by a gorgeous female who asked him to see her home, as she was afraid of the bad men on the street; and he said to her: "Sophia, you need salting; you are too fresh. I am a young man from the country, but you can't play no circus on the son of the old man. Ta-ta!"<sup>5</sup>

However, the bad boy's companion, the good boy, went home with the girl, and she filled him with New Jersey cider at five dollars a bottle, and "her pal stole the good boy's pants through a panel in the door, with forty-four dollars and a testament in his pistol pocket." Then he was kicked downstairs at midnight and "the police picked him up, and the bad boy went to the police court the next morning and paid his fine."

In the above episode Peck was attempting to explain, as he said, how boys turn out. He was moralizing and was expressing the prevalent suspicion held by country people for the city and its temptations. He was deadly serious, despite his light-hearted prose, when he wrote that "Boys that give promise in youth to become the most pious, God-fearing, intelligent business men, often turn out to be the worst whelps

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<sup>5</sup> Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1888, p. 178. All bad-boy books cited in this article, with the exception of the 1969 reprint of *How Private Geo. W. Peck Put Down the Rebellion*, the 1970 reprint of *The Grocery Man and Peck's Bad Boy*, and *Adventures of One Terence McGrant* (New-York: James H. Lambert, 1871) are from the author's collection.

that ever scuttled a schooner of beer” while often “the wild, reckless, devil-may-care critters, whom you would expect to find robbing stage-coaches and punching heads in the prize-ring, tumble to themselves and become deacons in the church.”

It would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the New England-born Aldrich with his taste for the cultivated, to have written, as did Peck, about the way boys turn out. Although Aldrich’s *The Story of a Bad Boy*, with its genteel and pleasant memories of his youth, was, according to critics, his most significant prose work, it was inferior both to Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* and to the volumes relating to Peck’s bad boy. Aldrich had his own background in mind when he wrote. Both Twain and Peck also looked back to their own younger days, but they also knew other juveniles. Each was an experienced newspaperman, and each recognized the difference between the naughty prankster and the juvenile outlaw who, for example, hired on steamboats as cabin boys for the sole purpose of robbing passengers’ carpetbags. Newspapers of the period frequently reported activities of thefts by children, of destructive juvenile gangs, and of knifings and rapes by young rascals.<sup>6</sup>

Peck defined the bad boy in terms which left no misunderstanding. It is curious that his definition is not more frequently quoted in articles which are verbose and full of circumlocution when attempting to explain what a bad boy really was.

Peck’s prose was plain and to the point:

The “Bad Boy” is not a “myth,” though there may be some stretches of imagination in the articles. The counterpart of this boy is located in every city, village and country hamlet throughout the land. He is wide awake, full of vinegar, and is ready to crawl under the canvas of a circus or repeat a hundred verses of the New Testament in Sunday School. He knows where every melon patch in the neighborhood is located and at what hours the dog is chained up. He will tie an oyster can to a dog’s tail to give the dog exercise, or will fight at the drop of the hat to protect the smaller boy or a school girl. . . . But he shuffles through life until the time comes for him to make a mark in the world, and then he buckles on the harness and goes to the front, and becomes successful, and then those who said he would bring up in State Prison, remember that he always *was* a mighty smart lad, and they never tire of telling

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, *St. Louis Daily Reveille*, April 21, September 12, 1846; August 22, 29, 1847; February 4, May 24, June 14, August 30, 1848. *Oquawka* (Illinois) *Spectator*, July 18, 1867, November 7, 1878.



THE DEACON LAYED OUT

PECK'S BAD BOY, No. 2.

THE GROCERY MAN  
AND  
PECK'S BAD BOY.

BEING A CONTINUATION OF

PECK'S BAD BOY AND HIS PA.

BY

GEO. W. PECK,

Editor "PECK'S SUN," Milwaukee.

ILLUSTRATED.

CHICAGO AND NEW YORK:

BELFORD, CLARKE & CO.

1882.



Fig. 26. THE CAPTAIN UP A TREE

HOW PRIVATE GEO. W. PECK  
PUT DOWN  
THE REBELLION,

OR THE

Funny Experiences of a Raw Recruit.

[The "War Papers" in *A Century Magazine*, from the standpoint of a private soldier, who was afraid of his shadow, and who didn't want to fight unless he had to.]

BY THE AUTHOR OF

PECK'S PEN, PECK'S SUNSHINE, PECK'S BAD BOY AND HIS PA,  
PECK'S BOSS BOOK, AND LOTS OF SUCH STUFF.

ILLUSTRATED BY TRUE WILLIAMS.

CHICAGO AND NEW YORK:  
BELFORD, CLARKE & CO.  
1887.

Frontispiece and title page for two books by George W. Peck. Both volumes are from editions reprinted, in 1970 and 1969 respectively, by the Gregg Press.

of some of his devilry when he was a boy, though they thought he was pretty tough at the time.<sup>7</sup>

That was the stereotype, the pattern, and the mould followed strictly by all who wrote about him. Yet each author created a somewhat different boy. Aldrich's boy was a rather mild-mannered individual, Peck's young hero was much more forceful, and Twain's Tom Sawyer sometimes has been characterized as the natural boy. However, there was still another youthful prankster who was not quite like his colleagues in devilry. His name was Master Bilderback and he relished the company of Rollo, his friend.

Rollo and Master Bilderback were created by Robert J. Burdette, an editor of the *Burlington* (Iowa) *Hawk-Eye* in 1877, when his *Rise and Fall of the Mustache* was published. Although the book sold well, it never matched Peck's *Bad Boy and His Pa*, which ranked fourth in the list of national best sellers and whose readers purchased more than 500,000 copies in 1883. The three volumes that topped Peck in sales were James Whitcomb Riley's *The Old Swimmin' Hole and 'Leven More Poems*, Hannah Whitall Smith's *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, and Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*. Nevertheless, Burdette's volume was known to thousands of both adults and adolescent rogues.

Burdette was sensitive to the innate savagery inherent in childhood. Both Master Bilderback and Rollo were not quite civilized and each was capable of that curious cruelty that is so much a part of the normal child's personality. Master Bilderback is tintured with bitterness, and Rollo, like many another boy, whether bad or good, who is making the transition from disconcerting puberty to manhood, is a cynic. Both are miniature Ishmaelites, raising their hands against both men and conventions and relishing the iron in their boyish souls.

Burdette understood, as did Peck and Twain, that only catharsis could help their characters along the troubled highway stretching from boytown to mantown. Inhibitions were released and the growing process accelerated when Bilderback, for example, put a wasp in his father's slipper and when Rollo exploded a torpedo under the fox terrier. Both misdeeds are psychologically true to boyhood and represent the imperative and not-to-be-thwarted demand for emotional purification.

Yet few interpreters of the bad-boy genre seem to have given much thought or emphasis to the role that Peck's Pa and other fathers played

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<sup>7</sup> George W. Peck, *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1883), "A Card from the Author," opposite copyright page.

in the narratives. A question helps make this clear: Why was the father the butt of pranks? Why, for example, when Pa took his son to the city to see the sights and gain a taste of urban life did the bad boy feel compelled to alter hotel room numbers, so that when Pa, somewhat full of strong drink, came stumbling home he entered not his room but that of an old maid?

Pa looked at the numbers on the doors all along the hall till he found 210, and walked right in and pulled off his coat and threw it on the lounge where the dog was. The old maid was asleep, but the dog barked, and Pa said, "That cussed boy has bought a dog," and he kicked the dog, and then the old maid said, "What's the matter pet?" Pa laughed and said, "nothin the mazzer with *me*, pet," and then you ought to have heard the yelling. The old maid covered her head and kicked and yelled, and the dog barked and bit Pa on the pants, and Pa had his vest off and his supenders unbuttoned, and he got scared and took his coat and vest and went out in the hall, and I opened our door and told Pa he was in the wrong room. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Why did Peck, in *Peck's Bad Boy in an Airship*, feel it imperative for Hennerly to make an ass of his Pa when the two visited France? Pa, all dressed up in stylish French clothes, was sitting in a sidewalk cafe with a beautiful woman, filling her with tales of his wealth and influence. Indeed, she was about to, as Peck wrote, "say the word."

She had his fat, pudgy hand in both of hers, and was looking into his eyes with her own liquid eyes, and seemed ready to fall into his arms, when I got up behind him and lighted a giant fire cracker and put it under his chair and just as the fuse was sputtering, I said, "Pa, ma wants you at the hotel," and the fireworks went off, the woman threw a fit and Pa raised up out of the smoke and looked at me and said, "Now, where in hell did you come from just at this time?"<sup>9</sup>

Were Peck, Burdette, and others reflecting a generally held hatred by boys for their fathers during the final three decades of the nineteenth century? Certainly, there is evidence that, in many instances, the father figure dominated the household. He was absolute in authority, the master of the house. That was especially true of some immigrant groups. The wife was her lord's serf. Punishment, for the most

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> Hon. George W. Peck, *Peck's Bad Boy in an Airship* (Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, 1908), p. 136.

part, was left to the dominant male. Burdette, although perhaps obliquely, hinted at this pecking order when he published a short paragraph characterizing a merciful husband and father. "A merciful man," he wrote, "is merciful to his dog." He called the dog in out of the snow on a bitter cold January morning, "gave him his breakfast in a soup plate, and laid a piece of carpet down behind the stove to snooze on. Then the man went down town, and the neighbors watched his wife shovel snow-paths to the woodshed, cistern, stable, and front gate, and then do an hour's work cleaning off the sidewalk."<sup>10</sup>

No one can successfully deny that Peck and Burdette were humorists, but few interpreters of their writings even hint that they, in their way, also were social critics. The Boston-plated Aldrich, the "realistic" Twain, the newspaper men, Peck and Burdette, may have created a new hero in American fiction, enjoyed equally by children and adults, but there is substantial reason to add a new dimension to their contributions—that of rather penetrating insight into at least one aspect of the American family. Another way of viewing the manner in which these authors wrote may be considered. Was Peck in particular reacting to the way his father treated him when he was a youngster, even though subconsciously? Why did Peck, to a greater degree than other writers about bad boys, make sport of the father, depict him as a simple-minded numbskull who was sometimes a sot, and ridicule him as a person with neither common sense nor dignity? In the final analysis, Peck's Pa was a noodlehead.

Burdette and Aldrich, in contrast to Peck, were rather gentle social critics. They centered attention more upon family foibles—their boys run away from school, tie cans to tails of cats, pester dogs, and put Limburger cheese in the lining of the schoolmaster's cap. But Peck was different. He, in many instances, was the social critic, a writer irritated both by individuals and institutions. Peck kept the bad boy as his hero and Pa as the protagonist or foil in his first books, *Peck's Bad Boy and His Pa* and *Peck's Bad Boy No. 2, or The Groceryman and Peck's Bad Boy*, both published in 1883. But he eliminated the character of Pa in *Peck's Uncle Ike and the Red Headed Boy* (1899), *Peck's Bad Boy Abroad* (1905), *Peck's Bad Boy with the Circus* (1906), and *Peck's Bad Boy with the Cowboys* (1907). In the meantime he published *How Private Geo. W. Peck Put Down the Rebellion* (1887) and *Peck's Boss Book* (1888).

This is all interesting enough, but perhaps the key which unlocks—or explains—the prevailing thread of criticism running through all of

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<sup>10</sup> Robert J. Burdette, *The Rise and Fall of The Mustache and Other "Hawk-Eyetems"* (Burlington [Iowa]: Burlington Publishing Company, 1877), p. 301.

Peck's writings lies in a relatively unknown and seldom mentioned first book. His first humorous piece appeared in the *Representative*, a newspaper published in Ripon, Wisconsin. Written in Irish dialect in the form of a letter, Peck placed it in his newspaper in 1868. It was a satirical account of the nepotism in President Grant's first administration. When Peck moved to New York City he continued the "Terence McGrant" letters. They appeared in book form in 1871 under the title *Adventures of One Terence McGrant*.

Peck, although he served as private, sergeant, and second lieutenant during the Civil War, was an unreconstructed Democrat. He took a violent dislike to President Grant, lampooned generals of the army, ridiculed the ladies of Washington society, and reserved his greatest scorn for black persons. He took due notice of what he said was the President's fondness for strong drink. He mocked and taunted Mormons. Peck's vituperative prose, although advertised as humor, cannot be really appreciated without a few examples.

Mrs. W. W. Belknap, wife of the Secretary of War, arrived at a reception, "harnessed in a green grass grain velveteen silk, wid black flounders, imported for the occasion from Dubuque. She carried an oroide watch in a haversack, and had her dress pinned together at the top wid a brown stone solitaire that couldn't have cost a cint less than three shillings." When, at a formal affair, gentlemen crowded about a recent bride to offer good wishes, she said, "Yez act like a set of Mormons on the arrival of a new recruit."<sup>11</sup>

The strain of spleen obvious throughout *Adventures of One Terence McGrant*, "brevet Irish cousin of President Ulisses S. Grant," seeped, although to a lesser degree, into Peck's yarns of the bad boy. The epitome of Peck's racial prejudice, found in the "humorous" *How Private Geo. W. Peck Put Down the Rebellion*, lies in an account of the burial of a colored cook. Peck then was the chaplain's assistant. He liked all his duties except conducting "nigger funerals." These the chaplain would not participate in. "I had always been a Democrat, at home, and not very much mashed on our colored brothers," wrote Peck, "and one thing that prevented me from enlisting before I did was the idea of making the colored man free." Although he softened this by adding that he "had nothing against a colored man, and got to think a great deal of them afterwards," his account of the services conducted over the body of the black cook was an outrageous travesty and an insult to thousands of blacks who served in both Union and Confederate forces.

Despite caveats that Peck now and again slipped into his stories, he never liked or respected blacks, and boys and men picked up racial

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<sup>11</sup> *Adventures of Terence McGrant*, p. 223.

prejudices from reading him. Indeed, except for the “native” American, the Englishman, and the Irishman, Peck’s books demonstrated antagonism for all whose skins were not white. When, for example, Pa and Hennery visited Germany they felt as if they “had got among Americans again, because all a German needs to be an American is to be able to talk a little broken English.” When the pair arrived in Africa they viewed natives with disdain. “They do not wear any clothes except a doily, made of bark or grass over their loins, and from the doily, above and below, their skin is bare.” No pious foreign missionary could have painted a better picture of “depraved” savages in need of salvation. Peck thought natives should be arrested for disorderly conduct and exposure. “Their skin is thick and warty like a rhinoceros, and when it freezes it looks like pickled pigs’ feet.”<sup>12</sup>

The defamatory callowness of Peck’s depiction of army chaplains, foreigners, and blacks most certainly does not spring from a sensitive social consciousness, although it must be admitted that many nineteenth-century Americans agreed in whole or in part with him. His prejudices, in too many instances, drowned his humor. Both Pa and Hennery lost their humanness to become pasteboard caricatures. Good humor was replaced by bitterness. Peck no longer was a social critic, but a social cynic.

There were occasions, however, when the author of the bad-boy books quite properly touched sensitive nerves. There is slight humor but a goodly amount of pathos in an episode relating Hennery’s experiences in an orphanage where his Pa placed him. Hennery always had believed that an orphan asylum would be a wonderful place to live, for “there would be no parents to butt in and interfere with your enjoyment.” How wrong he was!

Gee, but my ideas of an orphans’ home got a shock when I arrived at the station where the orphan’s home was located. I thought there would be a carriage at the train to meet me, and a nice lady dressed in white with a cap on her head to take me in her arms, and say, “Poor little boy, I will be a sister to you,” but there was no reception committee, and I had to walk a mile with my telescope valise, and when I found the place and went in the door, to present my letter to the matron, a man with a scar on his face, and one eye gone, met me. . . <sup>13</sup>

Hennery, much to his disgust, was scrubbed to within an inch of his

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<sup>12</sup> *Peck’s Bad Boy in an Airship*, pp. 158, 170-71.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-20.

life, dressed in an outfit cut from old saddle blankets, hazed cruelly, and fed bullheads. Finally, he ran away, but not before he had practically destroyed the orphanage with numerous improbable pranks.

Peck also took a jaundiced view of the general conduct of the Spanish-American War. Properly enough, he came down hard on profiteers and contractors who supplied troops with inferior products. He had a tender spot in his heart, he said, for soldiers who fight for their country. When they are abused, he continued, he felt that somebody is guilty of treason. Uncle Ike told Hennery that "a dog biscuit would have been mince pie to the soldiers in comparison to the stuff the rich beef packers furnished to those young noblemen with the kyack uniforms on." Before the boy could answer, Uncle Ike continued, "The business of packing meat ought to be combined with the undertaking business, so you could order your meat and your coffin from the same man."<sup>14</sup>

Peck, speaking through Uncle Ike, also answered Hennery's question, "What good does a trust do?" Economists of the early 1920s would not have agreed, generally speaking, with Uncle Ike's definition, nor would some Republicans, but Peck and Uncle Ike were Democrats. Indeed, Peck was elected mayor of Milwaukee in 1890 and 1892. He was no particular friend of Big Business or of trusts. A trust, Uncle Ike told Hennery in a long-winded explanation, "is a combination of several factories, for instance." He continued:

The promoter gets all the factories in one line of business to combine. They pay each factory proprietor more than his business is worth, and he is tickled, but they only pay him part money, and give him stock in the combine for the balance, and let him run his old business, now owned by others, at a good salary, and he gets the big head and buys a rubber-tired carriage, and sends his family to Europe.

That was part one of the definition. In the second part, Uncle Ike explained the results.

Then the trust closes down his factory and throws his men out of employment, lowers the price of goods to run out others who have not entered the trust, and the people who get goods cheap say a trust is the noblest work of God. After the outsiders have been ruined, and the man who entered the trust in good faith has spent the money they gave him, and tries to sell the stock he received,

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<sup>14</sup> Peck's *Uncle Ike and the Red Headed Boy*, pp. 14, 15.

it has gone down to seven cents on a dollar, and the trust buys it in, and he cables his family to come home in the steerage of a cattle ship.<sup>15</sup>

Soliloquies by Uncle Ike on profiteering, trusts, syndicates, and whether or not Admiral George Dewey should move into the White House provided slight instruction and probably less amusement for Hennery. He and his readers had more fun when the boy was stealing from the groceryman or greasing the front steps with soft soap in order to facilitate the departure of the minister and two deacons. After the turn of the century, Peck's humor lost much of its spontaneity. Prior to then, despite Peck's abecedarian literary style, the rather small man with red carnation on coat lapel, was a reputable, if not first-class, humorist in the field of bad-boy writing. For years, he kept a loyal following. The pranks of Hennery passed from lip to lip, and the adventures appeared in cheap editions. Train butchers peddled the books.

In 1969, Literature House, Gregg Press, reprinted *How Private Geo. W. Peck Put Down the Rebellion*, and the following year did the same for *The Grocery Man and Peck's Bad Boy*. Both volumes were in a series devoted to American humorists. In his introduction to the latter volume, an editor wrote that Hennery was an *enfant terrible*, which is correct enough. In the introduction to the Civil War volume, it was explained that Peck wrote the book "in order to deflate the prestige of the enormous number of Civil War recollections written by patriotic Union and Confederate 'generals and things,' which *Century* magazine ran as one of its most successful features." It is admitted that the volume contained quite a bit of slapstick "recruit" humor and "some effective debunking of the pious rubbish and solemn, pompous exhibitionism that accompany war even today."

There were, of course, other authors who, inspired by the times, created bad boys, who sought to capture *real* boys, who debunked the foibles of American life during the years from about 1870 to shortly past the turn of the century. Benjamin P. Shillaber (Mrs. Partington) delighted audiences of the 1850s with Ike, a boy ever alert in mischief. Then came Aldrich's Tom in 1869. The following decade witnessed the appearance of John Habberton's Jack, Walter T. Gray's Georgie, Billy Nye's Henry, and C. B. Kewis' Detroit boy. All these boys, together with Peck's Hennery, Twain's Tom Sawyer, and Burdette's Master Bilderback fit the format. The first and best of Booth Tarkington's Penrod books, *Penrod*, was published in 1914.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

By then neither young nor old Americans found fascination in the bad-boy genre, and that was understandable, for the nation which fought World War I was not the rather uncomplicated, rural-oriented country of former decades. Certainly the facets of national life changed radically after the Civil War. A new industrialism and urbanization imposed new patterns, the influence of the older physical frontiers was beginning to wane, and a breakdown of both public and private morality became increasingly apparent. The matrix of an earlier—perhaps colonial—myth, together with its symbols, was broken and cast aside to make room for new myths and symbols—big business, imperialism, financial tycoons, trusts, and among others, the inner city and new concepts of education. The nation's people, canonizing new heroes, moved toward a new destiny which in literature became for some decades a confusion of realism and romanticism in which the bad boy found no place.

The plaguy Ike, together with his mischievous, even miscreant, companions, became a period piece both in humorous literature and in real life. He now is only a nostalgic remembrance. He is as dated as the old-time barbershop, the kerosene lamp, the horsecar, the tintype. He is as dead as the authors who created him. If the shades of any of the young hellions return to practice pranks upon their elders, surely they must be Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, not "Model Boys of the village," but nevertheless boys. But today they search in vain for a picket fence to whitewash, a pinchbug to set free in church, a raft upon which to float to adventure. Grope as they will, they cannot, in the vapors and mists of yesterday's myths, find the river and the islands and the helpful, faithful hand of Miss Watson's Jim or Uncle Ike. Someone should tell them that the Gilded Age is gone.<sup>16</sup>

Someone should underscore the fact that the bad boy was neither the "brave, bright, pleasant" little thing which an English visitor to the United States saw in 1852 nor was he Horatio Alger's boy of 1906 who believed that he "must stick at his work and watch every opportunity for advancement."<sup>17</sup> It should not be forgotten that many authors of the bad-boy genre, mixing humor with satire, wrote about a life which, as Parrington says, was past or on the way out.

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<sup>16</sup> For the Gilded Age, see Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), chap. 12; Vernon L. Parrington, *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1900* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> Mrs. M. C. L. Duncan, *America As I Found It* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1852), p. 17; Horatio Alger, *Joe the Hotel Boy* (New York: Cupples & Leon Co., 1906), preface.