

By Johnny D. Boggs

Max Evans, the 2015 Western Writers Hall of Fame inductee and prolific author of mostly post-World War II Westerns, recalls when he first read Jack Schaefer's *Shane* – widely regarded as one of the greatest Western novels.

"I said the whole premise is [bull manure], but there's not one word out of place," Evans recalls. "It's damned near perfect."

First published in 1949, *Shane* was adapted into a screenplay by Pulitzer Prize-winning Western novelist A.B. Guthrie Jr. The movie version, filmed in Wyoming, directed by George Stevens and starring Alan Ladd, Jean Arthur and Van Heflin, became one of the most revered Western films of the 1950s. "The beauty of the Tetons shown in the movie became part of the story for me," says Nancy Curtis, publisher of Wyoming's High Plains Press. "I can't help but see those shots of the sky and peaks in my mind as I read the words."

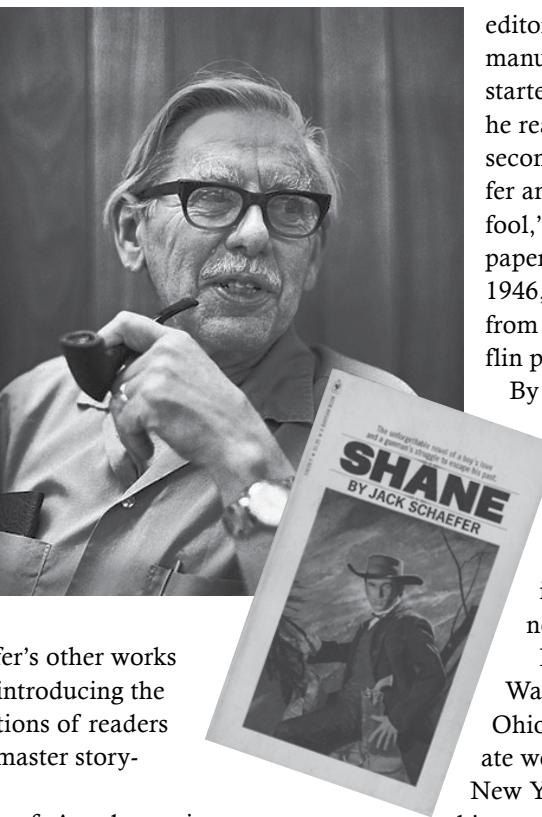
The novel has remained in print, and now, thanks to the University of New Mexico Press, *Shane* and many of Schaefer's other works are being reissued as trade paperbacks – introducing the legendary Western author to new generations of readers and letting old fans enjoy the prose of a master storyteller once more.

"He always wanted to be a writer," Schaefer's only surviving son, 76-year-old Jon Schaefer, recalls from his Santa Fe, New Mexico, home. "Our house was a house of culture. We'd have these gatherings, and my dad would force all these cultural people to listen to him read what fiction he was writing."

When he started reading what became *Shane*, those cultural people took interest, calling it "great," and saying he had to send that to a publisher.

You don't know Jack?

With UNM Press's reissues of most of Schaefer's works, the Western Writers Hall of Fame inductee rides again



Schaefer knew about newspapers but nothing about the book or magazine business. "He sent his only copy of the manuscript, which was written on cheap pulp paper, to *Argosy*," Jon Schaefer says. "With no self-addressed stamped envelope, which was the policy for all publishers back then."

A chance phone call stopped the editor from throwing the unsolicited manuscript in the trash, and when he started to dispose of the work again, he read the first sentence. Then the second. Eventually, he called Schaefer and said, "Jack Schaefer, you're a fool," Jon Schaefer says, but the newspaperman had his first fiction sale. In 1946, *Argosy* published "The Rider from Nowhere," which Houghton Mifflin published as *Shane* in 1949.

By the time the movie premiered

in 1953, Jack Schaefer had established himself as a writer of Western literature.

"*Shane*," the *Springfield (Missouri) Leader and Press* noted in 1957, "set a new standard for novels and Western movies."

Born in Cleveland in 1907, Jack Warner Schaefer graduated from Ohio's Oberlin College and did graduate work at Columbia University in New York City. "Schaefer wanted to do his master's thesis on the development of motion pictures," University of Oklahoma

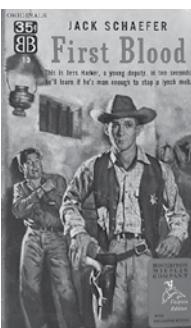
Press editor Charles Rankin says. "The faculty told him he couldn't, so he got into the newspaper business. He worked 20 years as a journalist, first as a rewrite man for United Press International and then on newspapers"

During the Depression, he wrote editorials for the *New Haven (Connecticut) Journal* and also worked at a nearby reform school for boys. He spent as much time as possible researching at the Yale University Library and tried writing fiction on the side. "He really loved the West," Jon Schaefer says.

After *Shane*, Schaefer had been encouraged by friends to try writing anything but a Western. He finished an "eastern," as he called it, and found no publisher. He tried another Western short story and sold it to a major national publication. Another Western story also sold.

In 1951, Schaefer started a Western novella. When he finished it, he sent it to his agent, who promptly sold it to Houghton Mifflin. Schaefer wanted to title his novel – which would be serialized in *Collier's* magazine – *Solstice*. "But no, insisted Houghton Mifflin," Schaefer wrote in the introduction to the 1988 Bantam Books reissue of *First*





Blood and Other Stories. "Not enough direct appeal to inveterate readers of 'westerns.' Not sufficient suggestion of violence and gunfire and gore. *First Blood* would do nicely."

Collier's decided to use *The Silver Whip* instead, even though Schaefer argued that there's no silver whip anywhere in the novella. That's the title 20th Century-Fox used when it released the 1953 movie that



featured a young Robert Wagner. The screenwriters, however, did incorporate a silver whip.

The Silver Whip was released before *Shane*, and Schaefer had found his niche. *Tribute to a Badman*, starring James Cagney and based on Schaefer's short story "Jeremy Rodock," was released in 1956, a year before *Trooper Hook*, based on Schaefer's short story

TOP 10

Reading and watching Jack Schaefer

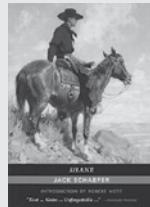
From Staff Reports

Most Western fans are familiar with the screen adaptations of Jack Schaefer's *Shane* and *Monte Walsh*, but the Western Writers Hall of Fame inductee has a large body of work, in print and on film. Here are 10 worth reading and worth watching, listed in order of publication/release.

1. *Shane* (1949)

"It's the plot people have loved since the beginning of stories: The handsome mysterious stranger appears to save the good guys and overpower the bad guys and then rides away, leaving behind the beautiful but unavailable woman and the kid-as-narrator. Schaefer had the education to purposely twist classic mythology into the form of a Western, but he said he did not. But the tale is familiar to readers, and we know we're going to love it."

— Nancy Curtis, publisher, Wyoming's High Plains Press



2. *First Blood and Other Stories* (1953)



Schaefer's follow-up to *Shane* is a complex portrait of a young man forced to make a lethal choice between his two idols. Exciting, thoughtful and vivid. Some consider this as good as *Shane*.

— David Morrell, author of a quite different novel that's also titled *First Blood*

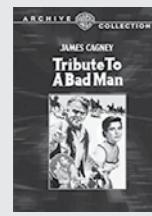
3. *The Silver Whip* (1953, based on Schaefer's *First Blood*)

The Silver Whip finds a cocky kid anxious to prove himself along with his hero, a short-tempered guard, driving a stagecoach hauling \$27,000 in gold dust. Robbery and killings ensue with retribution demanded and harsh lessons learned.

Schaefer thought highly of the screenplay but called the finished film 'another rather routine Western.'

— Thomas D. Claggett, author of the forthcoming *Line of Glory* from Five Star

4. *Tribute to a Bad Man* (1956, based on Schaefer's short story "Jeremy Rodock," 1951)



"Directed by Robert Wise, *Tribute* is the best of James Cagney's 1950s Westerns. A blistering drama on horseback, it highlights Schaefer's jagged edge when writing about family life on the frontier, where the human dynamic can be more dangerous than any shoot-out."

— C. Courtney Joyner, author of *The Westerners: Interviews with Actors, Directors, Writers*

5. *Company of Cowards* (1957)

"*Company of Cowards* is a Western *Platoon*. Hollywood twisted its theme of a troop made up of soldiers cashiered for cowardice into a slapstick comedy, *Advance to the Rear*.

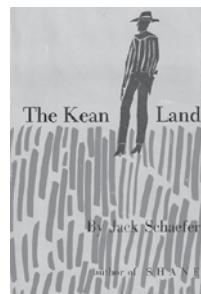
Historical authenticity, strong characterization and the premise of misfits fighting two enemies — Apaches



"Sergeant Houck." The latter starred Joel McCrea and Barbara Stanwyck. Both of those stories, originally published in magazines, were included in *The Big Range*, a 1953 anthology of Schaefer's short stories.

The movies might never have reaped the laurels of *Shane*, but critics were steadily lauding Schaefer's fiction.

A *Philadelphia Inquirer* reviewer opined: "Schaefer doesn't write 'shoot-'em-ups' or even 'adult' Westerns. He is aiming higher. His ambition is literature, and he frequently achieves it with stories that are better than Bret Harte and compa-



rable to Stephen Crane, whom he most resembles."

While living in Watertown, Connecticut, Schaefer finished the novella *The Kean Land*. Collier's acquired the serial rights, which, Schaefer acknowledged, "helped finance the long trek west."

So in December 1955, Schaefer – now divorced and remarried – headed west with his new family. They settled on a small ranch near Cerrillos, southwest of Santa Fe.

"When he got West, he was home," says Jon Schaefer, who came to Santa Fe in 1963.

Jack Schaefer would remain in New Mexico, mostly in Albuquerque and Santa Fe – except for a brief stay in California – until his death in 1991.

"He always called me 'Rounder,'" says Evans, the writer of the popular comic Western novel *The Rounders*, "because we both knew that was what I'd always be remembered for, and I always called him 'Shane' for the same reason."

Schaefer's 1957 novel *Company of Cowards*, about a Union soldier court-

and the U.S. Army – make this cavalry-versus-Indians story a classic."

—Loren D. Estleman, *Owen Wister Award recipient and author of The Ballad of Black Bart*

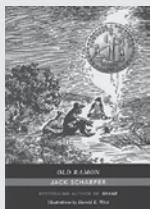
6. Trooper Hook (1957, based on Schaefer's short story "Sergeant Houck," 1951)

"This inexpensive black-and-white adaptation is an effective character study of a career military man (Joel McCrea) helping a white woman (Barbara Stanwyck) find hope and redemption as he escorts her and her half-breed son home. Though the film takes liberties with Schaefer's story, it stays true to its story of two middle-aged people trying to start over again."

—Robert Nott, author of *Last of the Cowboy Heroes: The Westerns of Randolph Scott, Joel McCrea, and Audie Murphy*

7. Old Ramon (1960)

"Schaefer had been living in New Mexico about six years when *Old Ramon* was published, and that's apparent in



the rich and integral role the landscape, weather and culture of the state play in this tough, tender, bittersweet tale about an old shepherd teaching a young boy the ways of sheep and of life."

—Ollie Reed Jr.,
recipient *WWA's 2014 Stirrup Award*

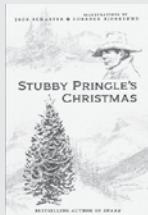
8. Monte Walsh (1963)

"Schaefer might be most remembered for *Shane*, but this is his masterpiece. Through a series of vignettes, *Monte Walsh* follows the life of a cowboy from 1872 to 1913. Told with sentimentality, humor and Schaefer's unerring ear for dialogue, this remains the definitive novel of a working cowboy and one of the best Westerns ever written."

—Johnny D. Boggs,
seven-time Spur Award winner

9. Stubby Pringle's Christmas (1964)

"*Boys' Life* magazine strives to enchant our young audience with the wonderful world of reading. I can think of no writer



more equipped to enchant than Jack Schaefer. 'The Cowboy's Christmas Eve,' first published in December 1963, has become a treasured piece of *Boys' Life* lore."

—Michael Goldman,
Boys' Life editorial director

10. Heroes Without Glory: Some Good Men of the Old West (1965)

"No longer able to abide 'the asinine and despicable' bad men of western literature, Jack Schaefer compiled a counterweight. In it, Schaefer told with a novelist's verve the true stories of 12 'good men.' As he said, just as the West 'was not so much lawless ... as simply lacking law,' good men were never missing from western stories. Schaefer just gave them stories of their own."

—Charles Rankin,
University of Oklahoma Press

martialed for cowardice and sent west to command disgraced soldiers, was a dramatic, well-researched novel with a climax at the 1864 Battle of Adobe Walls in the Texas Panhandle. It was turned into a poorly received 1964 comedy, *Advance to the Rear*, starring Glenn Ford.

Other novels included *Old Ramon* (1960), a Newberry Honor Book, and *Monte Walsh* (1963), which was loosely adapted into a 1970 Western starring Lee Marvin and remade in 2003 for TNT with Tom Selleck – “Both movies were crap,” Jon Schaefer says.

Schaefer’s *Monte Walsh*, which followed the life of a working cowboy through interconnected short stories from 1872 to 1913, won Evans’s respect.

“He captured the way cowboys talk perfectly,” Evans says. “I asked him how he did it, and he told me he would lean against the fence and just listen to his cowboy neighbors.”

Schaefer – who styled his title character on Archie West, the young cowboy son of a neighbor – liked *Monte Walsh*, too.

“*Shane* is an example of the myth,” Schaefer told the *Santa Fe New Mexican* in 1987. “*Monte Walsh* is an example of the real thing.”

Adds Jon Schaefer: “About 90 percent of the adventures in that book actually happened.”

With the Western fiction market drying up, Schaefer dabbled in nonfiction – the limited edition *The Great Endurance Horse Race* (1963) and *Heroes Without Glory: Some Good Men of the Old West* (1965) – and moved to writing about natural history, including *An American Bestiary* (1975) and *Conversations with a Pocket Gopher* (1978).

His last Western novel was *Mavericks* (1967).

“He was written out of Westerns,” Jon Schaefer says.

Schaefer still took time to challenge Western tropes and, at the Western Literature and History Conference at Utah State University in 1972, blamed historians and publishers for perpetuating Western myths.

“Everyone wants the massacre to be a little bloodier, the Indians a little wilder and the exploration a little more exciting,” he said.

He even told historian and friend Marc Simmons that if he had to do it all over again, he would rewrite *Shane*, making the farmers the villains and the ranchers the heroes.

Loren D. Estleman recalls meeting Schaefer at the WWA convention in 1986 in Fort Worth, Texas, where Schaefer accepted his

Levi Strauss Saddleman Award, known today as the Owen Wister Award. “He devoted most of his speech to his friendship with Dorothy Johnson, which I thought gracious,” Estleman says. “In conversation, he confided that George Raft was his first choice for the movie adaptation of *Shane*: ‘He hadn’t worked in a while, might find a Western a change from the gangster roles he’d tired of, and he had a quiet dignity ideal for the character.’”

Schaefer brought son Jon, then living in Santa Monica with his mother and siblings, to *Shane*’s premiere at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. When Ladd rode toward the camera, the novelist pointed at the screen and said, “Who in the hell is *that* supposed to be?”

No fan of Ladd, Schaefer later said of the movie: “It was pretty good except for that runt.”

Schaefer, who was awarded the Western Literature Association’s Distinguished Achievement Award in 1975, could be a harsh critic. “He would say what he would say,” Jon Schaefer says. But even Schaefer’s strongest critics couldn’t be too tough on his writing.

“He has not quite freed himself from the Myth of the West,” C.L. Sonnichsen wrote for the *El Paso Herald-Post* in 1967. “His coloring is a little high; his dialect just a bit stagy. But once you start reading him, you can’t stop.”

When Schaefer died, his son followed Simmons’s suggestion for a graveside service: “Have Archie read aloud the last two pages of *Monte*”

Before *Monte Walsh*, Schaefer thought his best novel was *The Canyon*, a 1953 novel about the Cheyenne Indians before the coming of white men, Jon Schaefer says.

But as Estleman said in 2005 when Schaefer was inducted into the Western Writers Hall of Fame: “The reading public will allow a writer only one classic.”

Which explains why Jack Schaefer will always be “Shane” to Max Evans and always remembered as The Man Who Wrote *Shane*. No surprise. The novel has sold in the millions and has been translated into at least 35 foreign languages, including Burmese, Czech, Finnish and Thai.

Most readers will agree with Evans’s assessment that *Shane* is a perfect Western novel, from the first line – “He rode into our valley in the summer of ’89” – to the final paragraph: “He was the man who rode into our little valley out of the heart of the great glowing West and when his work was done rode back whence he had come and he was Shane.”

But after Schaefer’s death, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Bob Greene mused: “When he wrote that elegant ending, did the newspaperman in him ever wonder what a city-room copy desk on deadline might have done to his punctuation?”

