

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/4

George Sparling

Gottfried Heinwein's *Boulevard of Broken Dreams*

First, James Dean died, then Humphrey Bogart two years later, then Marilyn Monroe's turn, Elvis Presley coming fourth. The large, rectangular poster I bought for \$10 at a reprocessing center (recycle this, death) hangs in my bedroom on the way to the bathroom. We all know Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, three frail strangers (nobodies) sit at the counter and a man (working class zero) behind the counter serving late-nite coffee to anonymous, fictitious nothings. Premature dead performers (somebodies) now replace the diner patrons surrounded by the same lonely, back lot street corner.

They might have excelled with a script written for such a skeletal, B-movie set. Bold caricatures, images of catastrophic, airbrushed entertainers' notorious faces, a scheme dedicated to accentuate death's grip (that's a wrap). The four's memento mori performer's estates' second coming, a wet dream gone public.

I lived with the four at one time or another; they replenished my life, showed me feature movies, but a greater glory they hadn't truly earned, their five-star deaths (coming attractions) unavailable as yet. Their films I'd not likely see if not for star-making paraphernalia. Like runaway dreams, their box office hits splice onto celluloid specters, jump cut revivals. Such lit-up faces in otherwise noirish gloom of this Greenwich Village coffee shop, now a vacant lot.

I ascend from sleep, I among the stars' audience amok in my Technicolor, lingering wakeup nightmares. In a close up, my eye tracks the fours' still life, their permanent midnight. I piss their barbiturates, painkillers, cancer cells, and highway blood into the publicity-churning, award-winning, porcelain (Do I hear a film score?) action-packed flushed toilet.

Ah death, ah celebrity.