



# The Glass Teat

*Harlan Ellison*

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## The Glass Teat Harlan Ellison

Pyramid Books had undertaken to publish virtually every book by the controversial Harlan Ellison. Novelist, short story master, winner of more science fiction awards than any other writer, film and T.V. scriptwriter, creature of myth and fantasy, Ellison is a registered gadfly and troublemaker. For the opening shot in Pyramid's salvo of Ellison explosions, this underground classic of television criticism is the first of two books on the most potent medium of communication the world has ever known. When it was first published, the book mysteriously vanished from newsstands. This book is being used in many colleges as a knowledgeable view of T.V. from the inside by the only man ever to win the Writer's Guild Award for Most Outstanding Teleplay *three* times. The strange disappearance of this book has perplexed the enormous horde of Ellison freaks and fans. Now, in a new introduction written especially for this edition, you'll find the startling answer to the enigma. Readers will have a hell of a good time rampaging with the world's wildest writer.

## The Glass Teat Details

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Author : Harlan Ellison

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# From Reader Review The Glass Teat for online ebook

## Jim Cherry says

“The Glass Teat” started life as a column by Harlan Ellison in the L.A. Free Press, about television and the media. It’s a peek behind the screen that shows not a haggard showman pulling levers, but the slick manipulations of corporations pushing buttons, our buttons.

“The Glass Teat” looks behind the banality of the stories the shows presented and reveals the subliminal messages embedded in the television shows we watch daily and take for granted. Television is far from being the “vast wasteland” of Newton Minow and Ellison reveals the programs for what they are, a palimpsest of hidden ideas and messages meant to influence our views and outlook on life.

Written between 1968 and 1970, the “hip” vernacular the articles are written in seem dated, and the TV shows discussed in the book are all long gone except for reruns or nostalgia stations. But Ellison opens our eyes to how the messages are laced into the shows story line. Was a show like “The Mod Squad” just an appeal to the booming youth market of the late 60’s? Under Ellison’s microscope we’re shown the subliminal message that being a “hippie” some how puts you on the wrong side of the law and the only way to reform yourself is to be an undercover police informant. But Ellison’s approach isn’t that of the dry academic, the articles are very entertaining and a few laugh out funny!

Reading “The Glass Teat” will give you a critical eye towards decoding the subliminal messages in your favorite TV shows and once we discover how to discern those messages we can apply them to the shows and even media we watch today. Anyone who watches TV should read “The Glass Teat,” you’ll never watch TV the same way again, and you’ll be a little suspicious of your TV afterwards.

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## Steven says

“There are warnings herein. I hope some of you get their message before it's too late. 'Cause, baby, time is running out.” This collection spans the late sixties, contains 104 of Harlan Ellison's columns written for the *Los Angeles Free Press*, on the subject of television. The book is described as powerful and uncompromising, and his critiques of certain shows such as *What's It all About, World?* and *The Groovy Show* are as withering as they are hilarious. Ellison was a part of History. There are great personal stories here, which include his Imperial Valley march in The Grape Pickers Strike, organized by Cesar Chavez, and his being thrown out of University lecture halls for being too controversial. He adds some praise of TV shows, such as recommending everybody check out *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour* and *My World—And Welcome To It*. Firsthand we're shown how stupid the TV business and TV writers can be, and how dangerous, how politicians use the tube like lullaby music. What Ellison nicknamed “The Glass Teat” is shown as a frightful battlefield between the Establishment and everybody else. It may have been published in 1970, and since then there are other, more high-tech entertainments that astonish us, but the book is not exactly irrelevant, now is it? Oh, and one more quote. From the sequel, a book they tried to ban: “Spiro Agnew masturbates with copies of *The Reader's Digest*.”

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## Neal Umphred says

Ellison's weekly reviews of television from the Los Angeles Free Press in the 1960s. He was warning us about the vast void that was television at the time when few other serious thinkers even paid attention to the medium.

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## Tracey says

I'd been wanting to read The Glass Teat for some time now & finally got around to making an ILL request for it.

The book is a collection of columns written for The Los Angeles Free Press from October 1968 - January 1970. I'm mildly disappointed. I was hoping Ellison would discuss television programming from the time more specifically; instead he focused more on politics & how The Establishment uses the boob tube to disinform the public. As opinionated as ever, Ellison rails against the Administration, with Agnew in particular receiving the brunt of his venom, as Spiro evidently took it upon himself to deal with/quash the media. As expected, Vietnam and race relations loom large; it would be interesting to compare some of these columns to more "traditional" news coverage of the times.

Ellison does discuss a couple of TV shows - The Smothers Brothers and its pale imitation, Laugh In. He also speaks well of The Ghost and Mrs. Muir; unfortunately, I've never seen it. He also rips into such bland fare as The Mod Squad and various variety shows, most of which I'd never heard of. His columns are far ranging, discussing the state of television in the then-dictatorship of Brazil and his experiences with guest appearances in Dayton Ohio, among other topics.

While I generally enjoy Ellison's work; I still don't like him very much. His protestations to the contrary, he \*does\* come off as a misogynist; as well as always on the verge of an apoplectic fit. I admire the strength of his convictions, even if I think he's occasionally an ass in the way he expresses them. Recommended to anyone looking for a counter-culture look at the Sixties, with a focus on teevee.

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## Inanna Arthen says

I read this book chiefly for its example of contemporary writing style and attitudes in a "free press" publication in the late 1960s. I bought a used copy planning to cherry-pick the essays and ended up reading it straight through. Read in retrospective, it's a fascinating picture of how much some things have changed and how much (depressingly) some others have not. I'm old enough to remember most of the TV shows that Ellison discusses, and in some cases, I wish he'd gone into more detail (he reserves the detail for the stuff he didn't like). For instance, I also loved the show "The Ghost and Mrs. Muir," principally because of star Edward Mulhare; but I'm surprised that Harlan Ellison, of all people, liked it so much. He never really says why!

The essays not only paint a picture of how a certain type of person thought in 1969, but of Ellison himself; there are essays in which he is clearly oblivious to the way he appears and sounds to others around him, and any conflicts he runs into are entirely the fault of the dunderheads he's forced to deal with. Like many self-

justified confrontational people, Ellison is not familiar with the notion of "disarm and conquer." But that was typical of the times--except for the fact that Ellison was at least 10 years older than most of the contemporary exemplars of this approach. But at least he wasn't blowing anything up. (At least not \*literally.\* He did a pretty good job "blowing up" the Writer's Guild and Dayton, Ohio.)

We see where the 1970s and the "P.C." mania have brought us with Ellison's statements about "chicks," sex and casual use of the "n word". Anyone who wrote stuff like that today would be anathematized and probably get death threats. His forecasts of where the future might be leading--either in general assumptions or in a piece he wrote for a magazine speculating about the year 1980--are amusingly, and sometimes sadly, short-sighted. But as such, they're an object lesson about the way we all generalize trends from our own present-moment concerns. Ellison's imagination of 1980, for example, includes a never-ending Vietnam war, Nixon still in office, rationing, and "dissidents" all forced underground and hunted down by law enforcement like resisters in WWII France. He had no idea what really lay just a few years ahead: Watergate, the oil embargo, the Recession, the rise of militant Islamic fundamentalism, the Carter administration and the birth of the 1980s with his Nemesis, then-Governor Reagan, elected to the White House.

This book and its sequel (*The Other Glass Teat*) are not easy to find, and now I want to read the second book!

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### **Rob says**

Harlan Ellison is a writer whose style I have always admired. His emotion bleeds from the pages.

This book is a collection of columns he wrote for *The Los Angeles Free Press* forty years ago. Technically they're all about television, but they are more an historical document that gives the reader an insight into the zeitgeist of America during the Vietnam era.

What's most surprising is how contemporary they seem. You could easily replace Nixon/Agnew with Bush/Cheney.

Also, Ellison's observations on the shallowness, racism, sexism and support of the status quo on 'The Glass Teat' still ring true.

Kinda sad when you think about it. Sigh.

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### **Pam Baddeley says**

A re-read of a collection of polemical TV columns written for an independent newspaper, *The Los Angeles Free Press*, beginning in 1968. This book contains the first 52 columns up until January 1970. Ellison uses the medium of TV criticism to discuss the ills of contemporary society in the Vietnam War/pre Nixon impeachment era.

For those not familiar with his style, be warned that there is a lot of swearing and words that would these days be completely unacceptable, including derogatory ones about race, although the writer is not using them to be racist: quite the opposite. However, it is rather ironic that while criticising the treatment of e.g. black

people in the real world as well as TV, he does bandy around demeaning terms for women such as 'chicks', without seeming to realise these are insulting. As the columns go on, the penny does seem to drop and this does improve.

Also rather ironically, in view of his later views about science fiction (as I've read again recently in a 1990 writing handbook), in these columns he is perfectly happy to be described (among other things) as a science fiction writer and to give talks on the subject.

Some of the material in these columns is so of its time that it would have gone over my head even when I first read this as a teenager, as the TV shows and actors under discussion were long gone. However, there's enough of interest in Ellison's rancour, despair, occasional ray of hope that young people will be the saving of the USA, and the insight this collection gives about Americans of liberal views, despised as "intellectuals" at that period and probably also nowadays, to be worth a read.

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### **Seth says**

This is a great book if you're interested in the socio-political climate of the late Sixties through the viewpoint of an intelligent, critical thinking progressive. Thing is I read it because I'm interested in television, and a minority of these collected columns from the *Los Angeles Free Press* look at TV without 44-year-old activist glasses. (Though history repeats, and I was struck how some of Ellison's smartest, angriest rants--with just a few proper nouns substituted--could've been peeled straight off of my favorite smart, angry blog, Kara Vallow's Teen Sleuth.)

But the few essays that gave me what I was seeking are excellent. It's rare and wonderful to find a writer of that era analyzing popular TV shrewdly and fairly and claiming it to be "as worthwhile an art-form as ballet, the opera, books, movies and painting." Ellison more often than not rips into television creators for dishing out gruel, but he without shame praises what he likes. Ellison doesn't like *Mannix* and *Bonanza*, but does like *Adam-12* and *Mission: Impossible*. He hates *Blondie* and *The Debbie Reynolds Show*, but thinks Barbara Eden's comedic talents save *I Dream of Jeannie*. And he'll take *George of the Jungle* over any of the above. (I should note that I'm of the age that when I was a kid most of the shows Ellison writes about aired in daytime reruns, and I hated them all. I watched the first 30 seconds of *Petticoat Junction* and *Ironside* more times than I could count -- the amount of time it took me to get up and change the channel. Though for whatever reason I did like *Jeannie* and *Bewitched*.)

That all makes *The Glass Teat* a fantastic primary-source document of couch-potatoing in 1969. It shines when Ellison reels at the first reports of the My Lai massacre, feels underwhelmed by the moon landing, and most of all when he attends the pilot taping of a sitcom so new and challenging that he feels obligated to write a column daring ABC to put it on the air. The network chickened out, and Norman Lear's *Those Were the Days* starring Carroll O'Connor needed two more years and a name change before it would get its time slot and make history.

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### **Karen-Leigh says**

Scary stuff. Forty years down the road from Nixon, Kent State, Vietnam, a president demonizing the media and lying through his teeth. History repeats itself in such a shocking manner.

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## Marvin says

Lost my copy years ago and would love to find another. *The Glass Teat* was a column by Ellison in The L.A. Free Press in the 70s (I think). The collection is an exceptional example of Ellison's essay writing talents; abrasive, insightful and usually controversial. There is a lot of emphasis on screenwriting for TV and the TV business, both about Ellison experiences and his opinion of other writers, producers and shows. I do get the feeling that Ellison must have been hell to work with on a set. Yet, these columns are always entertaining and informative. It helps if you seen or are at least familiar with the TV series he discusses as most are now relics of the times. However the collection remains a good example of one of the best essayists in the later 20th century.

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## Craig Werner says

Enough to give serious flashbacks to anyone who lived through the tail end of the Sixties in a pissed-off mood, which, as Ellison makes clear, was the only sane response. The first of two volumes collecting the TV column, sci fi/tv writer Ellison wrote for the LA Free Press from late 1968 through 1970, *The Glass Teat* is fueled by equal parts cynical/realistic humor and righteous anger as the world turned over thoughts/hopes/dreams of real social transformation to...pause for sad music--Spiro Agnew and Tricky Dick. There are times Ellison loses all sense of "balance," though what that meant in context would be difficult to say. He's nauseated by the rise of the ideology apotheosizing the "silent majority," the middle american," the "common Man" (named Time's Man of the Year for 1969). And he's more than nauseated by television's complicity in the dulling down (at best) or flat out lying (cf. the coverage of My Lai) that dominated the age. He chronicles some of the attempts to do better, which led to the symbolic cancellation of the Smothers Brothers show; vituperates (why not?) against the way the tube transmits ideologies of race and gender to the viewers he dismisses as "scuttlefish." He has zero tolerance for anything resembling political correctness, quite a bit less for those who attack "liberals" while putting up with all sorts of right wing bullshit. He's seriously worried about the US embracing fascism.

That's the way it felt.

In some ways, the most sobering part of the immensely entertaining collection is the 2011 preface, which begins: "This is my final communique to you prisoners of war. No more warnings. I'm done with all that. We've lost. I began actively warning you how it was closing in, what the prison would look like, how they would try to fool you with new meanings to old words, how they would convince you that everyone was your enemy, and you were too stupid to know who the Bad Guys were. Told you they'd lie to you, but mostly they'd frighten you...."

Feels like documentary realism to me.....

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## Angelia Sparrow says

Wonderful book on the banality of television. VERY dated, but an excellent time capsule.

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## Markt5660 says

This is one of those books I've been waiting years to read (it's pretty hard to find). It's early Ellison in all his fiery liberal glory. Completely unabashed and unrepentant (ok, there are a few, rare moments when he does apologize). The modern reader will need to work to get past all the hip, 60's language but you're rewarded with a singular view of the times. Ostensibly about TV, these columns are really about TV's ability to manipulate and be manipulated. He uses TV as a medium to talk about most all of the social issues of the day. Some of his commentary about figures like Nixon, Agnew, Reagan and various Hollywood types are even more interesting when reminded that much of what we remember them for hadn't yet happened when these columns were written. Such as his take on ABC's refusal to pick up the impressive new Norman Lear series called "Those Were The Days" starring Carroll O'Connor and Jean Stapleton. We now know that year or so after the column was written, the show was picked up by CBS and the rest is literal TV history. On the other hand, there are some odd "misses" when it comes to names. In one column where he talks about his love of Saturday cartoons, he says quite a bit about Spiderman but refers to the main character as "Peter Palmer". In another column, describing his march with Cesar Chavez, he repeatedly mentions how impressed he was with one of Chavez's supporters named "Joe Serda". I'm pretty sure he meant Joe Serna, who later became the first latino mayor of Sacramento. Overall though, Ellison's razor was never sharper.

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## William says

This was one of my favorite books as a teenager. I read the entire thing (and its sequel) out loud to myself, some columns more than once. Ellison seemed like the most vital writer I'd ever encountered. 40 years later, it all seems kind of embarrassing, Ellison seems particularly uncool despite his self-regard, his political statements never get below the surface. His accounts of things that happened to him seem untrustworthy--he tends to come off as the One Righteous Individual in most situations. I tend to doubt that Spiro even \*noticed\* him, much less engaged in a campaign to silence him. Even his apology to the kids he insults in one of the final chapters is structured around their praise for him (which doesn't sound like it was really written by teenagers).

It's fun to read his savaging of the television of the '60s, although the dramatic shows he praises don't really sound any better (nor do the terrible shows sound particularly worse).

His desperate insistence on using his coinage "scuttlefish" for all the television viewers he doesn't respect wears awfully thin after the first couple of instances.

His lengthy takedown of a vapid blonde hostess of a music program seemed obsessive, and hardly worth the time. He doesn't let her go, either; she's referred to several times later.

I suppose the demands of filling a weekly column necessitate a certain amount of hogwash. It's always been tough for freelancers. But at a writer's workshop in high school, one of the instructors told me, after he'd asked who my influences were, "Don't read Harlan. He never re-writes." That's probably not true, but I'd suspect these columns were not exactly labored over.

Still, they're a fascinating glimpse of a time, and of a man navigating his way through it, out of the



mainstream, but never quite in the counterculture.

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## **Paul Dickey says**

A little while ago I had written an article about rediscovering Harlan and of my goal on reading all of his books in published order. Well, in moving forward with this goal I recently read *The Glass Teat*.

I was looking forward to this book, since it has a great reputation, being well reviewed and received. Also the book contains columns of articles Mr. Ellison wrote in the late sixties for the Los Angeles Free Press and I am a huge fan of Mr. Ellison's essays.

Now I had heard this book was about television, and I had heard that these columns got the attention of then Vice President Spiro Agnew, who helped limit the popularity of the book and killed the Sequel. This never made sense to me. How does television criticism make you an enemy of the government? Well I have read *The Glass Teat* and all my questions have been answered.

*The Glass Teat* is not really about television shows it is really about television as a medium, and how that medium relates to our society at that time. Television is an amazing invention of man. It is a tool which can reflect our society as a whole and in parts, it also can inform society about current news and of our history, but it also can be used to shape or society with ideas and opinions.

Harlan Ellison was commenting on all of this within the pages of *The Glass Teat* as well as telling you why *Family Affair* Sucked and why everyone should be tuning into the *Smothers Brothers*.

Ellison was using these columns as a way of pointing out political climate of our times as they were being broadcast into everyone's living room. His beliefs are very liberal and his language at times is raw and full of passion. He observes current events of the time, through his television and gives the reader his observation and opinions, right down their throats!

The subject matter ranges from Vietnam, college protest, religion, education, film, tv shows and the *Common Man*.

As I read the book, I found that it was affecting emotionally. It was making me depressed, sad and very angry! Why? Because as I read I began to realize that we have not changed. Many of the issues that Ellison was writing about has not changed one bit since the late 60s. In fact if anything they have gotten worse. At least in the 60s there were protestors marching in the street demanding change, today everyone is too damn busy looking into their iPhones to care. For example, Ellison touches on news outlets shaping political opinion, today we have FOX news and MSNBC news each with their own political propaganda (However I do believe that FOX has this down to an art). Ellison notes about cover ups of mass killings of Vietnam civilians with Senators at the time saying it's okay since they are not Americans. Today we have Gitmo and Senators saying it's okay to torture if they are terrorists. Also Mr. Ellison does a column about a film review of a documentary about the "*Common Man*". While reading his column and their opinions on welfare, race, and war I thought "Oh my god, that's the Tea Party". It appears that the old adage "those who forget history are doomed to repeat it" hold true, horribly true. It's been over forty years since these articles were first written, and we as a society we have not evolved have not grown. Yes it saddens me and I am angry.

Many people before me have stated that Harlan Ellison's book *The Glass Teat* was an important book when it was first released. I contend that it is even more important today. Yes this book upset me, thank goodness for that.

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