

## FAQ 78

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On Tuesday, January 6, 2009, ARCADE PUBLISHING President/Editor-In-Chief, Richard W. Seaver succumbed from a heart attack in his New York residence. He was 82.

Dick Seaver was not only my publisher, but also my personal editor on **BLACK DAHLIA AVENGER**. We worked closely on the manuscript for more than a year, from January 2002 until its publication in April, 2003.

Dick's personal insights and contributions to BDA were unparalleled. Without his careful editing and insights BDA would never have become a NYT bestseller. His friendship, support and great sense of humor will be missed. **REST IN PEACE DICK.**

Steve Hodel  
Los Angeles, California



Publisher/Editor-in-Chief, Dick Seaver working with author on **BLACK DAHLIA AVENGER**, in Los Angeles, May, 2002

**SEE BELOW NYT OBITUARY FOR DETAILS OF HIS REMARKABLE LIFE AND MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORLD OF LITERATURE AND PUBLISHING**

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*The New York Times*

## Richard Seaver, Publisher, Dies at 82

By [BRUCE WEBER](#)

Published: January 7, 2009

Richard Seaver, an editor, translator and publisher who defied censorship, societal prudishness and conventional literary standards to bring works by rabble-rousing authors like [Samuel Beckett](#), Henry Miller, William Burroughs and the Marquis de Sade to American readers, died Tuesday at his home in Manhattan. He was 82.



Richard Seaver

The cause was a heart attack, said his wife of 55 years, Jeannette Seaver.

For the past 20 years, Mr. Seaver and his wife ran Arcade Publishing, which has endured to become one of the most prominent independent publishers left in the United States, specializing in works by far-flung and underexposed authors from all over the world. But the mission of Arcade, to publish new voices that seemingly flout the wisdom of the marketplace, was one that Mr. Seaver began pursuing decades earlier.

He was a Fulbright scholar in Paris, studying at the Sorbonne in the early 1950s, when he and several other scholars founded a literary quarterly, Merlin, which published, in English, early works by Eugène Ionesco and Jean Genet. In 1952 Mr. Seaver himself wrote an essay extolling the work of a young Irish novelist and then-unknown playwright, Samuel Beckett, that became instrumental in Beckett's finding an American publisher and champion. That was [Barney Rosset](#), the publisher of Grove Press, who read the essay and sought out the young Mr. Seaver on a trip to Paris. Eventually, Mr. Rosset not only published Beckett. He also gave Mr. Seaver a job.

Grove Press, founded in 1951, was a notoriously adventurous publisher that by 1959, when Mr. Seaver went to work there, had already given Americans a taste of Beckett, Ionesco and Antonin Artaud through its books and its literary magazine, Evergreen Review. (It had also published Beat writers like [Jack Kerouac](#).) Shortly after Mr. Seaver's arrival, Grove published D. H. Lawrence's long-suppressed novel, "Lady Chatterley's Lover," which was quickly banned from the mail; it took a court decision to declare the book not obscene and fit to be sold openly.

During Mr. Seaver's dozen years at Grove — he eventually became its editor in chief — it mounted many similar challenges to decency statutes, publishing literary but taboo-challenging works like Henry Miller's autobiographical sex odysseys, "Tropic of Cancer" and "Tropic of Capricorn"; Burroughs's semi-surreal travelogue of a homosexual junkie, "Naked Lunch"; and Hubert Selby's novel "Last Exit to Brooklyn," which dealt unflinchingly with drugs, homosexuality and rape. In 1965 Grove published a translation of "The Story of O," a 1954 French novel about a woman who gives away her body in slavery to a man.

The novel's pseudonymous author, Pauline Réage, kept her identity to herself until 1994, when she revealed herself to be a French journalist, editor and translator named Dominique Aury. The translator also went by a pseudonym, Sabine d'Estrée, whom some literary sleuths long suspected was Mr. Seaver, though he never admitted to it.

"He wanted people to guess," his wife said in an interview Tuesday. "But yes, he did it."

Richard Woodward Seaver was born in Watertown, Conn., on Dec. 31, 1926. He graduated from the [University of North Carolina](#). After a stint teaching high school, he took off for Paris and the Sorbonne, where he met the former Jeannette Medina, whom he married in 1953, and wrote a dissertation on [James Joyce](#). Mr. Seaver served two years in the [United States Navy](#) before he and his wife moved to New York.

Overall, Mr. Seaver translated more than 50 books from the French, including works by de Sade, [Marguerite Duras](#) and André Breton. He left Grove in 1971 and established his own imprint at Viking, where he published Octavio Paz, John Berger and [Robert Coover](#). He was subsequently president and

publisher of Holt, Rinehart & Winston's trade division before starting Arcade, whose backlist includes some 500 titles from authors in more than 30 countries.

In addition to his wife, Mr. Seaver is survived by a sister, Joan Aichner of Raleigh, N.C.; a daughter, Nathalie, of Los Angeles; two sons, Alexander, of New Canaan, Conn., and Nicholas, of Crestone, Colo.; and four grandchildren.

In a recently completed memoir, Mr. Seaver recalled the great literary moment of his youth. It was 1952, he was 25 and he had just finished reading two novels, "Molloy" and "Malone Dies," which he deemed to be masterpieces. He wanted to say so.

"How do you write a meaningful comment on such rich, complex, still undiscovered work, without making a critical fool of yourself?" he wrote. "So make a fool of yourself."

"Out, damned modesty," he added. "If conviction means anything, then write from the heart. Slightly less tentatively, I wrote: 'Samuel Beckett, an Irish writer long established in France, has recently published two novels which, although they defy all commentary, merit the attention of anyone interested in this century's literature.'"