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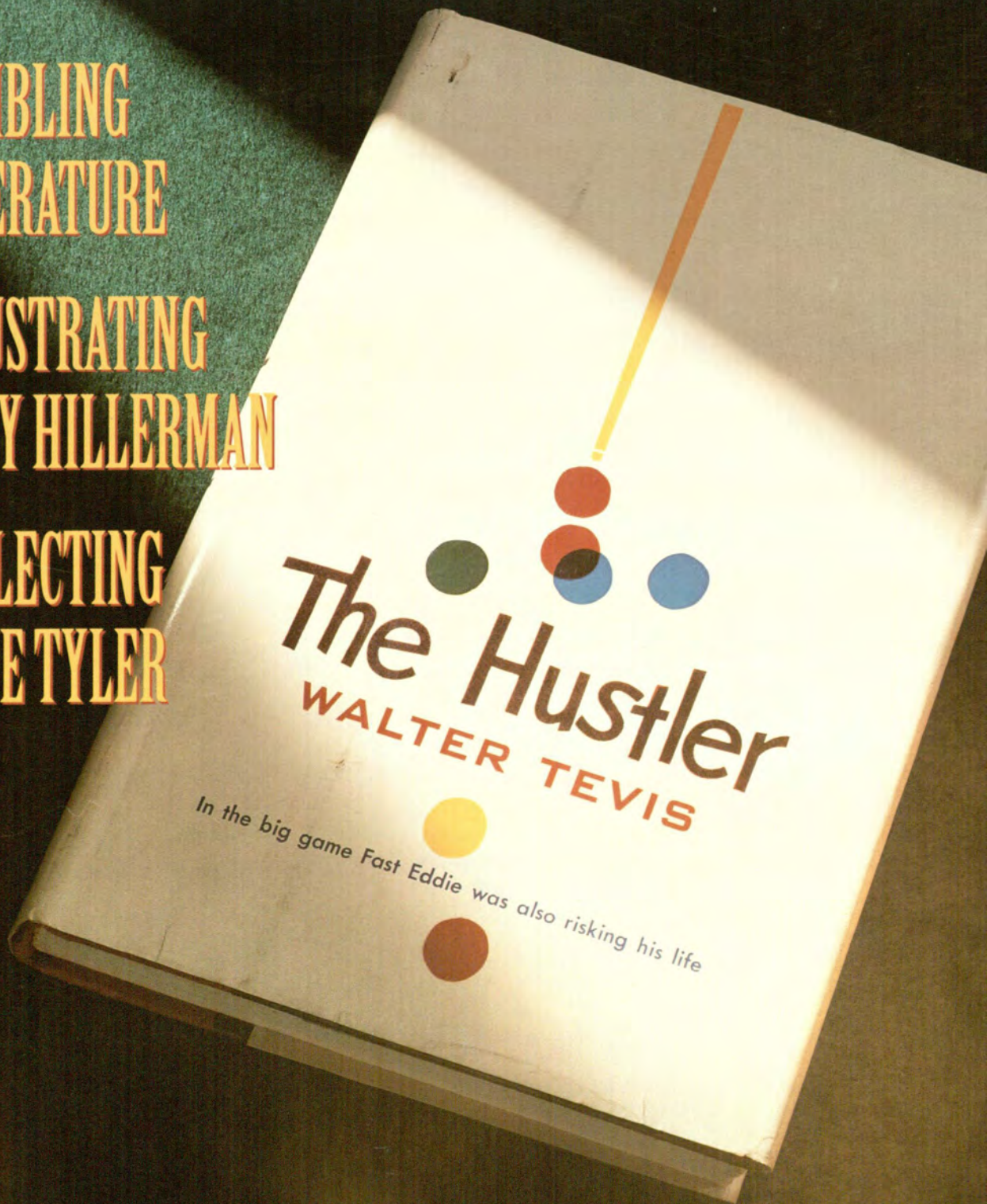
# FIRSTS

COLLECTING MODERN FIRST EDITIONS

GAMBLING  
LITERATURE

ILLUSTRATING  
TONY HILLERMAN

COLLECTING  
ANNE TYLER





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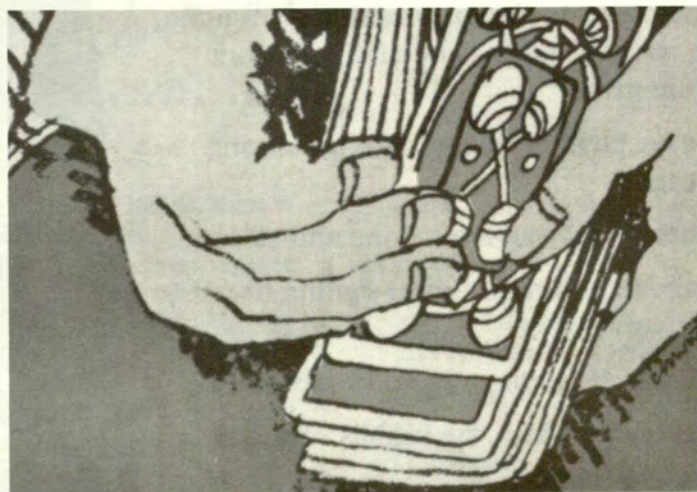
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# FIRSTS

COLLECTING MODERN FIRST EDITIONS



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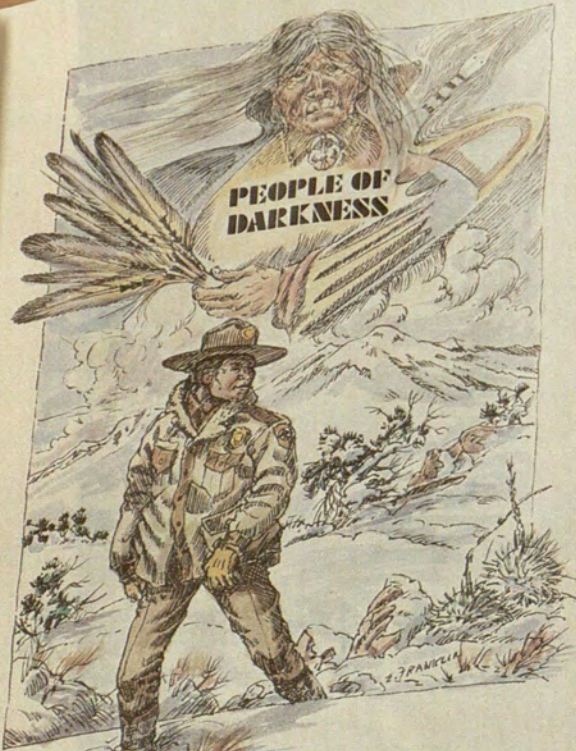
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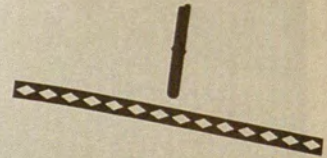
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Illus  
Tony  
Hill



PEOPLE OF  
DARKNESS



THE BLESSING WAY




Tony Hillman

Ernest Franklin





# Illustrating Tony Hillerman



**E**rnest Franklin, born and raised on what Tony Hillerman calls “The Big Reservation,” has been drawing as long as he can remember, and though he is a full-blooded Navajo, he prefers to be called a “cowboy artist.” Like all of the finest Western artists, Franklin’s excellence comes from his firsthand knowledge of the subject. Ernie followed the rodeo circuit for years and still keeps a herd of cattle and some riding stock at his ranch near Twin Lakes, New Mexico. “As a Navajo I have to keep a little flock of sheep, too,” he says with a smile.

Ernie Franklin was born during World War II and spoke only Navajo until he was taken off to boarding school. He grew up familiar with guns, horses, hard work, and the desert landscape of the Southwest.

Going off to boarding school was simply a fact of life. Up through his high school years at the old Albuquerque Indian School, the largely self-taught artist perfected his skills in the most obvious way—he worked at his drawing in every spare moment, which often included history class, math class, English

class.... He studied art briefly at the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe and at Colorado A & M before his studies were cut short by a tour of duty in Vietnam.

His war years were followed by various employment with the Job Corps, the Navajo Tribe, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He taught arts and crafts at the Navajo High School in Fort Wingate for more than 20 years. Now and then he would squeeze in another art class at New Mexico Highlands University or some other school.

Over the years he has tried nearly every medium and technique available to an artist, including a few he invented for himself. I own a sculpted figure of a Navajo on horseback Ernie created out of Bondo, the body putty used for repairing cars.

Franklin has had a dozen one-man shows at the Gallup Public Library and local galleries since 1960. He regularly takes awards at the Gallup Intertribal Indian Ceremonial, and this year an oil painting of his was awarded first place at the New Mexico State Fair.

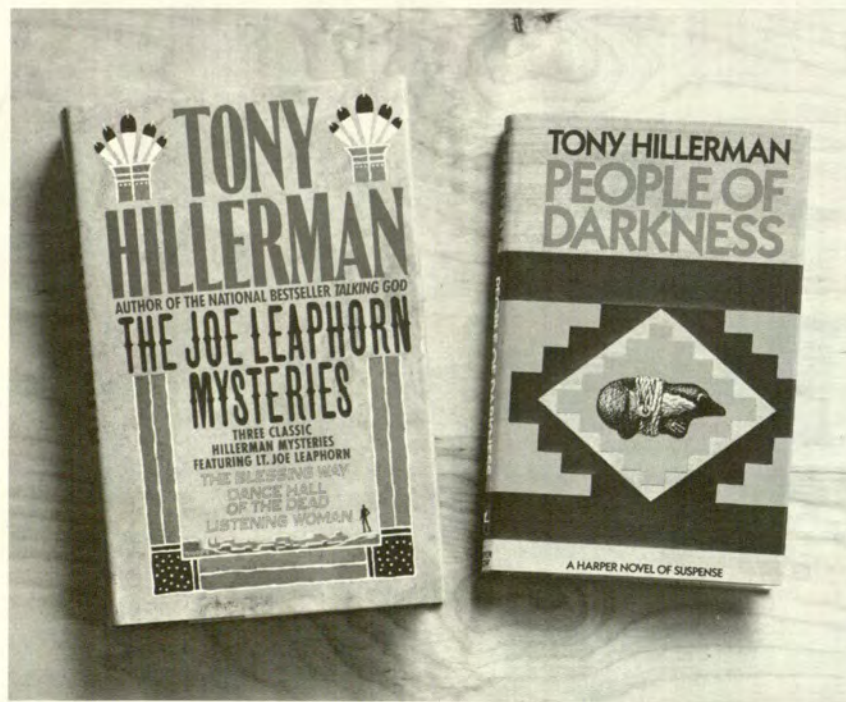
In spite of all this, he has considered his art a hobby and his teaching a vocation until recently. I worked with Ernie at Fort Wingate in the late Sixties and have been a major collector and supporter of his art ever since.

When I became personally acquainted with Tony Hillerman

by Ernie Bulow



# Franklin described the of illustration as “like tr with my hand in a smal



about ten years ago, it was inevitable that I would have the idea of getting the two of them together somehow. Like most seemingly natural ideas, this one had a lengthy and roundabout genesis and gestation.

Years ago I had seen a few books hand-illustrated by Southwestern artists and thought it seemed like a good thing for Franklin, who had some background in illustration. The first books I gave him were *Laughing Boy* and *Son of Old Man Hat*, books about Navajos that only a Navajo could illustrate with precision and cultural sensitivity.

“Just fill in all the blank spaces with art,” I told him.

Even these first books are exquisite, though the actual process of drawing and painting on the blank pages has undergone a lot of refinement over the years. The older books were often printed on fine coated papers and it

was possible to create jewel-like watercolors directly on the pages.

Having Ernie Franklin illustrate Tony Hillerman seems to have been an obvious move, though it didn't work quite like that.

As an extension of the book illustrating, Franklin began to specialize in miniature watercolors which have been avidly collected by fans of his work. He created two wonderfully complex watercolor paintings on Bull Durham cigarette papers, just to see if he could do it.

He happened to come by my place the day I got two copies of *Skinwalkers* and I asked him if he had ever read Hillerman. “I'm a big fan of those Hillerman books,” he told me. “I hate waiting for them to come out in paperback.” I handed him a copy of the book and told him to enjoy.

A week or two later he brought it back filled with 20 watercolors ranging in size from full-page illus-

trations to small vignettes. It was probably the only time in my life I was left speechless.

The same day I took the book to Albuquerque and showed it to Tony who loved it as much as I did. He went straight to a copy store and pulled color Xeroxes to send to his New York editor.

In the years that have followed, Hillerman has never been able to get his publishers interested enough in the art to produce illustrated versions of his books. He pushed hard to have Ernie illustrate the omnibus editions of his first three Leaphorn and the first three Chee books. Nothing. Tony hasn't given up. He owns a large personal collection of Franklin-illustrated copies of his mysteries. He is always willing and eager to tell people how much he admires Franklin's work. Curiously, they have only met face-to-face on a single occasion.

At first Ernie produced only fully illustrated copies, but they are time consuming and difficult, and are therefore expensive on the open market. Then we got the idea of doing just a frontispiece (with perhaps a vignette or two) and boxing the books as handsome gift copies. Hillerman has been most generous about signing these and sometimes praises Franklin in an inscription.

For the record there have been fewer than two dozen of the fully illustrated books, and most of these were either *Skinwalkers* or *A Thief of Time*. There are several copies of *Talking God* floating around, but the only *Coyote Waits* is in Hillerman's personal collection. Just one copy of *The Blessing Way* has ever been done, and one *People of Darkness*. Ernie remembers only one full version of *Dancehall of the Dead*. Two or three copies of each of the others exist.



# e physical job trying to draw all box.”

Franklin described the physical job of illustration as “like trying to draw with my hand in a small box.” He is also aware that early copies of Hillerman’s books are valuable on the market and that knowledge adds to the strain. It would be all too easy to ruin a book in a moment of carelessness.

So far the only damage has been a smudge or a fingerprint or two.

Another problem that Franklin has had to contend with is the varying papers used in the different books. Most of them are porous, uncoated stocks, not made for watercolor, and the paper tends to wick away inks and paints, smearing and blurring the work.

He began with crow quill pen and India ink, worked his way through Pelican inks, opaque watercolors, watercolor pencils, and other media. After years of experimentation, he has found he gets the best effect using Prismacolor pencils and illustration pens called Tombow Roll Pen, Jr., a kind of ballpoint with permanent, waterproof ink.

His usual method of working involves laying out the art with

light graphite pencil strokes, inking in the image, and then coloring it with the Prismacolors. The final step is a shot of spray fixative, which gives the finished illustration the look of watercolor.

No two illustrations are exactly alike, of course. I once had two copies of *Talking God* in my possession at the same time. They had been done weeks apart. As I looked through them one day I happened to notice a curious thing. All the drawings in one copy faced left—meaning the action moved to the left, people faced left, cars turned left. In the other copy—you guessed it—all the drawing was oriented to the right. I showed them to Ernie and he was as surprised as I was. I wonder what this does to the left-brain, right-brain theorists.

One of the questions that bothered us only briefly concerned the collectability of the Ernie Franklin-illustrated copies. We loved them and Hillerman was totally enthusiastic, but Harper was uninterested and several specialist book dealers thought the drawings were a ruin of a perfectly good first edition. However, many

collectors were entranced by the visualization of people and places in the books by a person who really knew what they did or should look like.

A version of the Hillerman short story “Chee’s Witch” appeared in the Phoenix based magazine *Native Peoples*. It featured several Franklin watercolors and a pen-and-ink drawing of Chee. I have thought from the beginning that it was only a matter of time until Ernest Franklin became the



Ernest Franklin

“official” Hillerman illustrator.

I cannot readily think of a similar collaboration between writer and artist except in children’s books, or a few works from the nineteenth century.

For the enthusiastic collectors of the illustrated Hillerman, there really isn’t much question about whether or not the books have been publicly validated. Like Tony, they simply love them and appreciate their unique character. **E**



**E**arly on, I formed a clear idea of Joe Leaphorn. In my mind he had appeared, no matter how I may have described him in early books. He was sort of short, sort of muscular, with one of those strong necks you see on a lot of older Navajo men. And as he grew older, he began to become “portly.” He wore his hair, as many Navajos of his generation wear it, cut short. Ernie Franklin, the Navajo artist who sometimes illustrates my books, had exactly

the same idea. His watercolor Leaphorn and my imagined one are virtually identical.

Chee was another matter. I knew his personality, his quirks, his habits, but I had no clear idea of how he looked. Then one day Ernie Bulow showed me a copy of *Skinwalkers* which Ernie Franklin had illustrated. There was Jim Chee. And as soon as I saw him I recognized him. Of course. That’s how Chee would have looked.

—Tony Hillerman