

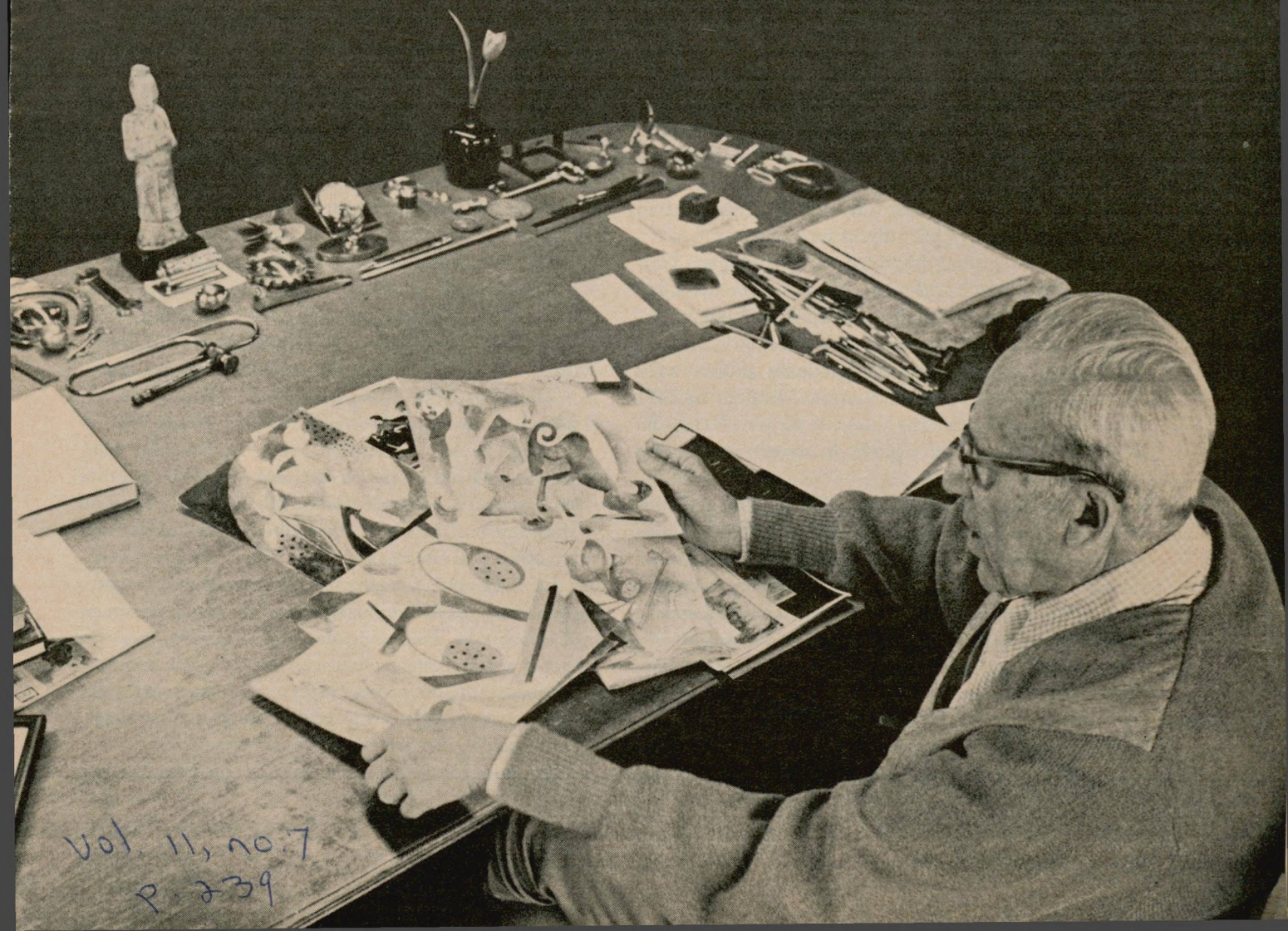
Peace Loving Psychiatrist

■ In the crowded colorful life of Dr. Frederic Wertham the scenes are kaleidoscopic, changing from psychiatric clinic to courtroom drama, from Senate hearing rooms to a dingy basement in a New York slum. His career spans medicine, law and literature but through it all runs a single strong theme: his life's work has been an unrelenting assault on all the conditions that beget violence in mankind.

To Dr. Wertham the nature of such evil is plain: he sees violence arising from social and economic injustice, racial bias, authoritarianism, mass exploitation of fear and hate. The psychiatrist mingles in him with the social reformer, and his views on the complexities of human motivation are interlaced with stern distinctions between right and wrong.

He has battled for his beliefs for almost half a century, always approaching the fray as an optimist. He is an earnest idealist with a streak of ironic humor, a man with a mission who enjoys the zestful adventure of the passing day.

He is also a living link to the founders of modern psychiatry. He was educated in the great universities of Europe, trained in hospitals of the United States; along the way he knew or



worked with Emil Kraepelin, Eugen Bleuler, Ernst Kretschmer, Ivan Pavlov, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Adolf Meyer, Ernest Jones and William Alanson White. He was himself a pioneer in the generation which introduced psychiatry to the United States. Today, at 72, he spends much of his time on a quiet peaceful Pennsylvania farm, commutes to a still active practice in New York City.

THE MAN. Frederic Wertham was born March 20, 1895, in Nuremberg, one of five children in a prosperous middle class family. His father was a successful businessman, the head of the city council, and a reserve officer deeply imbued with German militaristic traditions.

Boyhood was marked by the beginnings of an intellectual struggle: he began early to doubt the values of the society around him, resented the authoritarian discipline, felt stifled by the rigid and pedantic intellectual outlook.

A more congenial atmosphere was found in England where he visited regularly on summer vacations. There he discovered Fabian socialism, was thrilled at a lecture by George Bernard Shaw, investigated the writings of Karl Marx.

English literature which influenced him particularly included the essays of Charles Lamb, the novels of Charles Dickens; he was deeply impressed by the fact that Dickens speeded reforms in debtors' jails by exposing them. Says Dr. Wertham: "I never got over the idea that by expressing oneself properly, one can affect lives."

Youthful questings were interrupted by World War I; he was caught in England at the outbreak, was spared from choosing between his native society and the one he admired. He was interned briefly, then paroled; throughout the war he remained in England as the most friendly of enemies.

English experience included study at King's College (medical) in London. He then returned to Germany, attended the University of Erlangen, obtained his medical degree from the University of Würzburg. Intermittent postgraduate studies were pursued in London, Paris, Vienna, Munich. In 1921 he became assistant psychiatrist at the Kraepelin Clinic in Munich; he regards Kraepelin as his first great mentor.

Postgraduate study in Vienna brought an encounter with Freud. *New Republic* adviser Walter Lippmann wanted to commission an article from Freud, and Dr. Wertham and another student were chosen as intermediaries to secure Freud's consent. Freud gave the young man a long lecture on the impossibility of combining science with popular journalism, ended by saying: "Anyway, in America no one cares about psychoanalysis."

In 1922 Dr. Wertham ignored the master's advice, emigrated to the United States, joined the Phipps



Psychiatric Clinic at Johns Hopkins and applied for citizenship.

He spent seven years at Johns Hopkins, became a clinical associate under Adolf Meyer. From him he learned the value of flexibility in psychiatric approach. He adds wryly: "Meyer himself was very rigid in his flexibility. He didn't like to be contradicted."

Other important influences were friendships with Henry L. Mencken and Clarence Darrow. He used to attend Mencken's Saturday Night Club, devoted to beer drinking, violin music, singing, conversation.

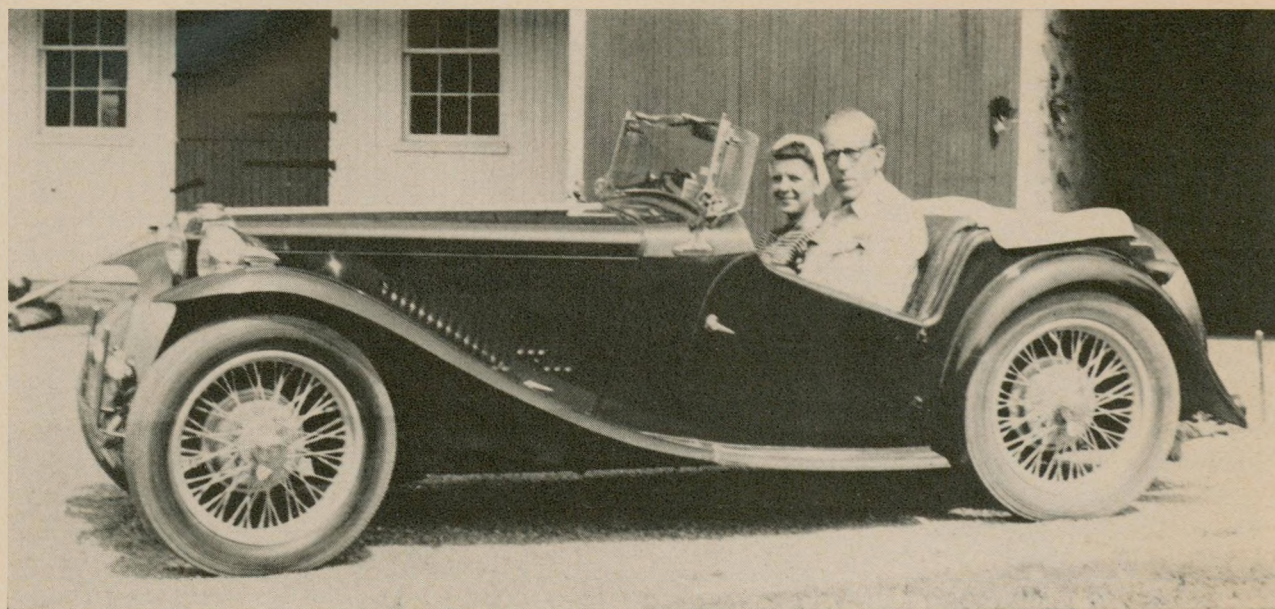
At Johns Hopkins he met Florence Hesketh, an artist and biology teacher who was working at the hospital on a medical research grant. She assisted Dr. Wertham with his first book and the collaboration blossomed into a lifetime partnership in marriage.

The Werthams co-authored *The Brain as an Organ*, a massive postmortem study in neuropathology that is still a standard work in the field. Dr. Wertham received for it the first psychiatric grant ever made by the National Research Council in Washington; his wife contributed the drawings, wrote several chapters.

In 1932 Dr. Wertham was named senior psychiatrist at Bellevue by the New York Department of Hospitals. The same year he organized and directed a psychiatric clinic for the Court of General Sessions, now the State Supreme Court; it was the first court program to provide a complete psychiatric screening for every convicted felon.

In 1936 Dr. Wertham became director of the

On opposite page is rare photograph of Dr. Frederic Wertham during his early years in America. He is seen at the International Psychological Congress at Yale University with Russia's Dr. Ivan Pavlov. Below he is seen with his wife in an English MG sports car. They met when both were at Johns Hopkins, she working on a medical research grant.



Mental Hygiene Clinic at Bellevue, and four years later director of psychiatric service at Queens Hospital Center in New York. He went on to organize and direct two pioneer psychiatric ventures in New York, the Lafargue Clinic founded in 1946 and the Quaker Emergency Service Readjustment Center (for sex offenders) in 1947.

The Lafargue Clinic was opened in Harlem as a bold experiment in psychiatric treatment of the poor. Dr. Wertham had long urged the creation of such a center; when he was unable to obtain financial aid he decided to go ahead without money, depending on contributions and volunteer aid. He received advice and encouragement from prominent Negroes who ranged from Tammany political leader Earl Brown to singer Paul Robeson; other advisers were authors Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison. The clinic was named for Dr. Paul Lafargue (1842-1911), a Cuban-born French-Negro physician, philosopher and social reformer.

The clinic obtained the rent-free use of two dingy rooms in a Harlem church basement. Furniture consisted of cast-off tables and chairs; the secretary at first wrote letters in longhand because the institution lacked a typewriter. Staff members worked free, at twice-a-week night sessions. The charge to patients was 25 cents a visit, a fee schedule that made Dr. Wertham famous in Harlem as "Dr. Quarter."

The clinic began with a handful of volunteers, eventually acquired a staff of more than 20 including psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, clerical assistants. Patients both white and Negro waited in line

for the evening sessions; therapeutic treatment was combined with practical efforts to relieve anxieties over food, rent, jobs, family problems. To those who dismissed it as psychologic first-aid Dr. Wertham retorted that it was the best available for those who needed it most. The clinic continued for more than a decade, forged strong bonds among all those who shared in the labor of love.

In the 1940s Dr. Wertham emerged as a popular writer with powerful impact. A series of works began with *Dark Legend*, published in 1941; it was a case history of matricide which presented psychiatric insights with literary skill; though true in every detail it read like a tragic novel. Eight years later Dr. Wertham published *The Show of Violence*, devoted to other famous cases in which he had participated. In 1954 he produced *Seduction of the Innocent*, a blistering attack on sadistic comic books, and in 1956 *Circle of Guilt*, a case study of a juvenile murder. His most recent work is the current *A Sign for Cain: An Exploration of Human Violence*.

As public advocate he has fought to correct the evils of which he writes: in one losing battle he served as psychiatric consultant to Senator Estes Kefauver's investigating committee on crime; over Dr. Wertham's bitter protest the committee report exonerated comic books as a prime factor in juvenile violence. Later Dr. Wertham took part in a similar investigation by a New York state legislative committee; the legislature accepted his recommendations for a drastic cleanup of comic books but Governor Thomas E. Dewey vetoed the measure.

He won a battle in 1951 when he appeared as psychiatric witness in a suit to desegregate Delaware schools. Dr. Wertham studied white and Negro children involved, testified that segregation was detrimental to the emotional health of both groups. His findings were cited at length in a state court decision against segregation; when the case was appealed Dr. Wertham's testimony became a key factor in the historic Supreme Court ruling that ordered the desegregation of all public schools.

Today Dr. Wertham divides his time about equally between psychiatric practice and writings; the practice is conducted in a modern New York office, the writing is done on his picturesque Pennsylvania Dutch farm. He regards his country squire role with mild amusement; he considered himself a confirmed cosmopolite until persuaded to spend a summer on the farm 18 years ago; he bought the place and has returned to it with increasing fondness ever since.

The farm nestles amid wooded hills on a back country dirt road. Deer tracks are seen around the corncrib in winter, muskrats inhabit the pond, quail whirl up from clumps of bushes. The atmosphere has changed Dr. Wertham's writing habits; he used to do all his writing in the peace and quiet of night but in the rural retreat he takes up his pen at any hour.

The farmhouse is a restored fieldstone building more than a century old. A few yards away is a former piggery which serves Dr. Wertham as a spacious and pleasant book-lined den. There is also an immense old barn partly converted to an overflow library for Dr. Wertham's enormous collection of books and papers; the library is divided into sections still designated as horse stables and cow stables according to former use. Outbuildings forming a guest cottage arrangement complete the facilities.

Scattered throughout the buildings are innumerable mementos of a varied and colorful life. Random examples: a picture of Dr. Wertham with Pavlov, another in earnest debate with movie producer Alfred Hitchcock, a prison photograph of Gino, the central figure in *Dark Legend*, watercolors by Zelda Fitzgerald when she was a patient at Johns Hopkins, an autographed likeness of Clarence Darrow.

The buildings are all emblazoned with "hex" signs which farmers of the region once employed to ward off evil spirits. Dr. Wertham treasures the tradition but holds to his own firm notions as to how evil can really be warded off.

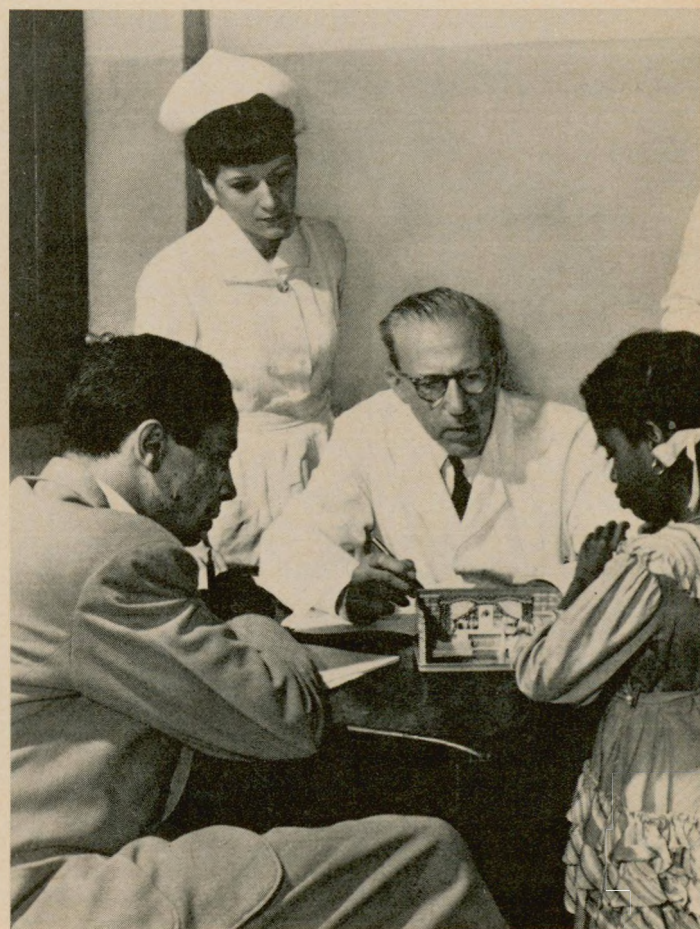
Dr. Wertham has pioneered in several techniques; in the 1920s he was the first to publish an experimental study on mescaline, one of the first to observe the effects of insulin in psychotherapy. He also developed the mosaic test, a diagnostic procedure in which the patient assembles small multicolored pieces of wood in a freely chosen design; Dr. Wertham uses it to probe ego organization.

He was president for eight years of the Association for Advancement of Psychotherapy, is now co-editor of the association's journal. He is also one of the few clinical psychiatrists who maintains triple membership in the American Psychiatric Association, the American Neurological Association and the American Association of Neuropathologists.

He is keenly interested in differing schools of psychiatric thought, believes that the various approaches are rooted in basic attitudes toward society. To substantiate the view he offers his own theory on the evolution of psychiatric concepts.

Dr. Wertham's version: psychiatry began much earlier than is generally acknowledged, with, for example, the behavior studies conducted by 16th century Catholic bishops in Würzburg. He describes the early clerical work as paternalistic in tone, reflecting the church sponsor. Similarly Kraepelin's early disease classifications typified the tightly disciplined outlook of German authorities who supported his work. Bleuler is seen as introducing the more liberal attitudes of Swiss society, and Freud as contributing an individualistic outlook which grew out of private practice in a competitive society.

Dr. Wertham finds differing values in each approach, believes that effective synthesis must be ac-



accompanied by rigorous analysis of both the strength and weakness of disparate schools. In particular he believes that some Freudians concentrate on individual emotional development too heavily, all but ignore the fact that man lives on a street, works at a job, deals with problems arising out of his situation.

Emotional attitudes must be viewed in terms of the subject's social and economic background; a reaction that is normal and predictable in one set of circumstances might be abnormal in another. He quotes Shakespeare's "The quality of persons and the time," and José Ortega y Gasset's "I am myself plus my circumstance." He adds dryly: "Some people are mostly circumstance."

In the same vein he believes that psychiatry must restrict its claims, recognize that the psyche is only one of many factors that determine human actions. He is enormously skeptical of loose theories on motivation. "Psychiatry is not a good basis for philosophy. If it is any good, it must be based on the clearest observable fact."

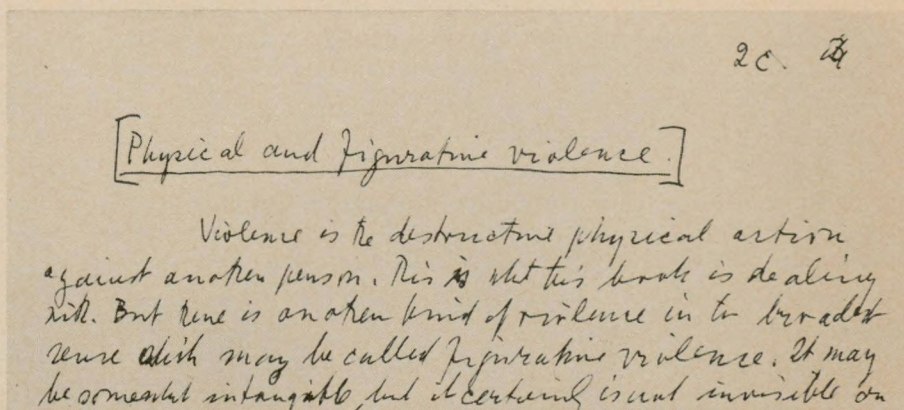
In his own practice Dr. Wertham is unlikely to overlook details. He believes in a multi-level approach combining elements of analysis, chemotherapy, physical examination and treatment. Dr. Wertham considers also the patient's intellectual

outlook, cultural background, environmental stresses.

When he treated slum women who rejected their children he might ask first how many children there were to how many beds, how the grocery bill compared with the paycheck. On a criminal assignment he operates like a combination reporter and detective, often visiting the scene, inspecting the evidence, interviewing witnesses to discover exactly what happened.

FORENSIC WITNESS. Dr. Wertham believes psychiatry should play a strong but subordinate role in courtroom assessments of guilt and innocence. Almost alone among prominent forensic psychiatrists he defends the old M'Naghton rule, and views skeptically the new Durham rule. The M'Naghton rule holds a defendant not guilty by reason of insanity if from disease of the mind he did not know the nature and quality of his act, or was incapable of knowing the difference between right and wrong; the Durham rule allows a broad latitude of insanity plea whenever a crime may be said to be the product of mental disease.

Dr. Wertham believes the old standard provided sufficient safeguards if intelligently applied; he stresses that "to know" can be interpreted "to know and appreciate," that "capacity to know" should



At Lafargue Clinic, opposite, Dr. Wertham examines a disturbed child with aid of a doll house. Standing is a clinic psychologist.

Portion of manuscript of *Dark Legend*, above, case history of matricide which presented psychiatry with literary skill.

Drawing by Mrs. Wertham for *The Brain as an Organ*, massive post-mortem study in neuropathology, which both co-authored.

At left Dr. Wertham discusses his favorite topic, the use of violence in mass media, with Alfred Hitchcock, arch-purveyor of horror films. At right he takes part in television show with Mike Douglas and Barbara Feldon in 1967.



reasonably mean "substantial capacity." Beyond such latitude he will not go: he views with sharp distrust the "psycho-authoritarianism" which hands over to psychiatrists the function of judge and jury.

Says he: "There is a tendency today to say that everybody who commits murder must be insane. That just isn't so. It minimizes the advantage that people get from violence. If you want to prevent murder you must distinguish between sane and insane, healthy and disturbed; they must be treated differently." He dismisses as dangerous nonsense the idea that psychologic flaws provide an automatic exemption: "We all had a domineering father, or a domineering mother. We all live in a violent world. We all have 'diminished responsibility.' That is not an excuse."

He sees punishment as a necessary part of the process: "Many say that punishment is old-fashioned and obsolete. That I think is entirely wrong. Punishment is a language, a form of communication. When a man is killed society speaks or should speak both to the persons involved, and to all other people."

WRITER. Dr. Wertham has written six books, innumerable articles, essays, special reports. A creative urge has been stirred in him by every experience, once even by a near fatal illness; about two decades ago he endured several critical operations for embolism and took careful notes on his reactions to fear and pain. He labeled that report: "A Psychosomatic Study of Myself." It was read to a packed medical meeting; his colleagues assumed from the title that the unpredictable Dr. Wertham was about to analyze himself from the rostrum.

Another now famous article was "The Road to Rapallo," published in a medical journal; in that piece he took public issue with psychiatrists who declared poet Ezra Pound mentally incompetent to stand trial for World War II collaboration with fascists. Dr. Wertham considered it a whitewash, wrote angrily: "Ezra Pound has no delusions in any strictly pathological sense. We have let ourselves be deluded into the belief that responsibility is not responsibility, guilt is not guilt, and incitement to hate not incitement to violence."

His first popular work was *Dark Legend*, a study of Gino who murdered his promiscuous mother; the youth was acting out a fantasy in which he believed the act commanded by the apparition of his dead father. In a probing poetic study Dr. Wertham drew parallels to the myth of Orestes, the story of Hamlet; Ernest Jones later wrote him a note on the Hamlet analogy saying: "Freud and I both underestimated the importance of the mother problem in Hamlet. You have made a real contribution."

Gino was declared insane on Dr. Wertham's testimony; for years afterward the psychiatrist followed up on the case in what became "an intellectual detective adventure." Eventually the patient recovered and Dr. Wertham secured his release.

Next came *The World Within*, a collection of stories edited by Mary Louise Aswell, with psychiatric interpretations by Dr. Wertham. Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Proust, Kafka, Faulkner and others were offered as examples of artistic insight into psychologic realms; Dr. Wertham added an introduction on "The Dreams That Heal."

He followed this with *The Show of Violence*,

presenting his courtroom experience against the medical, legal and social background in which the incidents occurred. The book was no mere collection of sensational crimes; Dr. Wertham called sharp attention to the fact that murder is common, denounced the incompetence of officials charged with prevention and punishment.

In *Seduction of the Innocent* he attacked the comic book industry for exploiting young readers with gory accounts of perversion and cruelty; the report was massively documented with hundreds of eye-gouging, woman-flogging details, and Dr. Wertham was able to prove that hideous juvenile violence sometimes occurred in direct imitation of comic book tales. He charged that these books were mass-conditioning children to "confuse violence with strength, sadism with sex, racial prejudice with patriotism, crime with heroism."

Dr. Wertham carried on his crusade in lectures, stimulated clean-up pressures in numerous communities; many crime comics were driven out of business. In retaliation comics publishers assigned detectives to follow Dr. Wertham, tried to bring pressure against editors who published his work. The running battle has continued intermittently for more than a decade, with an undaunted Dr. Wertham now planning a revised and updated version of the book.

Circle of Guilt was yet another full-length case study of juvenile murder; it concerned 17-year-old Puerto Rican gang member Frank Santana who shot and killed a younger white youth in a New York street fight. Within the dramatic focus of a single child death Dr. Wertham examined the slum conditions, racial discrimination, school neglect, inadequate social and psychiatric services and community apathy; he saw the circle closing inexorably on an angry unstable youth exposed to prejudice and violent mass media and the larger circle of guilt which encompasses a whole community.

The lifetime concern is culminated in *A Sign for Cain: An Exploration of Human Violence*. Here Dr. Wertham ranges over the entire spectrum from individual murder to mass killing; he examines extermination camps, war, the ultimate threat of atomic annihilation, sees in it all some common denominators. Says Dr. Wertham: "Our cultural and psychological atmosphere is charged with the electricity of violence. No previous civilization can equal the amount or the degree of brutality."

Economic forces receive a good share of the blame: "Force and violence are deeply imbedded in our whole economic process. A very substantial part of production, employment, economic planning and research is devoted to the means of violence. We live in a violence economy."

Mass media are also indicated: "The quantity of violence on the television screen is staggering. In one

Dr. Wertham stands in front of barn which serves him as a library. Home is former Pennsylvania Dutch farm.



week, mostly in children's viewing time, one station showed 334 completed or attempted killings. The different channels in one large city showed in one week 7887 acts of violence and 1087 threats of violence."

Psychiatry is not spared: "It is sometimes applied to explain brutal and sadistic acts in a way that actually amounts to condoning them. We are apt to use psychiatry the way a drunk uses a lamppost, not for the light but to lean against."

His sharpest anger is reserved for those who insist that man is inevitably and instinctively violent. Dr. Wertham finds "no evidence in neurophysiology or in clinical psychopathology that we have an inborn, fixed amount of instinctive, destructive aggressiveness. We do not have to behave like rats."

He finds a curious comfort in his own studies which show the rate of violence steadily increasing in modern society. His reasoning: the increase reveals that violence is a social response, not an innate drive; he concludes cheerfully that if violence can be conditioned up it can also be conditioned down.

Dr. Wertham sees the conditioning as a long slow process requiring individual and collective self-discipline, the substitution of cooperation for competition; he warns that to prevent violence is a futile dream while poverty and injustice are the common lot of huge groups and whole nations. He is nonetheless optimistic about the long-term prospects, says: "I really believe that violence can be reduced and can be abolished."

SUMMING UP. Cain asked: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Dr. Wertham: "The answer is yes."

