



# THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE®

FALL 1993 • VOLUME 26 • NUMBER 4 • \$7.50

## THE OTHER SIDE *of those* MEAN STREETS

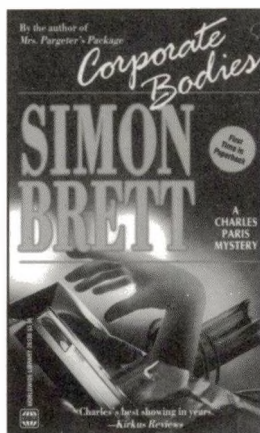
*An Interview  
with Walter  
Mosley*

THE FICTIONAL LIVES OF KIM PHILBY  
THE MOON FOR A NICKEL: FREDRIC BROWN  
A LITTLE CLASS ON MURDER:  
AN INTERVIEW WITH CAROLYN HART



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October 1993  
**CORPORATE BODIES**  
by Simon Brett

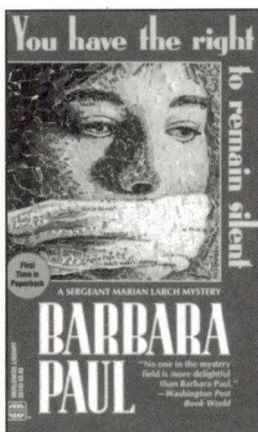
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— *San Diego Union-Tribune*



November 1993  
**YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT**  
by Barbara Paul

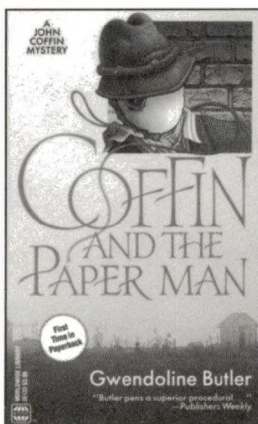
As if a lousy love life, an unwanted transfer and a lazy partner weren't enough, things get worse for cop Marian Larch when four men are found handcuffed together and shot through the right eye. It's a sensational killing meant as a warning, but to whom — and why?

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December 1993  
**COFFIN AND THE PAPER MAN**  
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PETER SERLING

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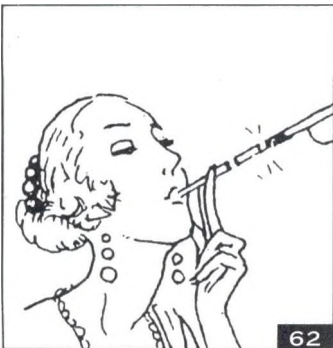
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*Cover photo by Peter Serling*



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# UNEASY CHAIR

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"Journalism allows its readers to witness history; fiction gives its readers an opportunity to live it." —JOHN HERSEY

**W**ith a little judicious reading you can live more lives than Shirley MacLaine, have lots of fun and acquire a detailed knowledge of history to boot. The following is a short—and highly arbitrary—tour through the mysteries of the ages.

The earliest setting for a mystery that comes to mind is Agatha Christie's *Death Comes as the End*, set in Egypt about 2000 B.C.

There are two excellent mystery series set during the Roman Empire. Stephen Saylor's *Gordianus the Finder* performs duties for Cicero, among other luminaries, in the first century B.C. and Marcus Didius Falco walks those mean Roman streets with a delightful swagger in Lindsay Davis' newest *Poseidon's Gold*. (A true republican, Falco often finds himself unwillingly entangled in imperial business for Emperor Vespasian.)

The development of the medieval Catholic Church in England plays a large role in Ellis Peters' chronicles of Brother Cadfael. Henry VIII's libido-fueled schism with Rome and the consequent turmoil figure in Michael Clynnes' colorful *The White Rose Murders*.

The new world, specifically the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, (soon to be renamed New York) is the setting for Mann Meyers' *The Dutchman*. (Complete with maps of the 1664 Big Apple.)

Miriam Grace Monfredo brilliantly explores the roots of early feminism in *Seneca Falls Inheritances* immediately prior to the first Woman's Rights Convention in 1848. Her newest book *North Star Conspiracy* continues that interest as well as exploring the growing



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abolitionist movement. Anne Perry has two popular series set in Victorian England featuring respectively William Monk and Charlotte and Thomas Pitt.

1908 Cairo provides the setting for Michael Pearce's engagingly witty *The Mamur Zapt and the Men Behind*. (The Mamur Zapt is the title of the chief of police, political division.) A careful reader will come away with some insights into Egyptian politics today.

Philip Kerr thoughtfully explores the Nazi legal system in his much praised novels featuring Berlin P.I. Bernie Gunther.

Moody, evocative, beautifully written, Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins novels are perhaps the most acclaimed historical mystery series of recent times. Starting with *Devil in a Blue Dress* (set in 1948 Los Angeles), Mosley's Black P.I. goes down mean streets even Marlowe couldn't walk. In our interview, Mosley discusses his life, his career and his most famous fan, President Bill Clinton.

TAD is happy to announce a new feature in this issue—The Independent Mystery Booksellers Bestseller list (see page 6). Other articles in this issue include a lively interview with Carolyn Hart, an examination of the fictional lives of the infamous British spy Kim Philby, Fredric Brown's early career as a short story writer, and much more. Enjoy!

KATE STINE  
Editor-in-chief

NOTE: Due to circumstances beyond our control, there are no short stories in this issue of TAD. We will continue to feature fiction in future issues. ■

# Letters

## More Mystery!

Dear TAD:

I discovered your magazine a few years ago on a trip east, and have enjoyed it ever since. The design has been improving steadily and the features are increasingly entertaining.

However, in issue 26:3's letter column, Don Sandstrom of Indianapolis, Indiana contends that Crime Screen columnist Ric Meyers should not chide PBS for the eroding quality of *Mystery* since it "merely buys the programs from the BBC and thus has no control over the content and casting."

Not true. Apparently, I've been reading TAD longer than Mr. Sandstrom, because in issue 23:3—in Meyers' own interview with the Executive Producer of the *Mystery* series—they discuss the fact that WGBH (the Boston PBS station that produces the series) has been regularly doing co-productions with a variety of foreign producers (not just the BBC).

While they maintain they don't interfere during the actual filming, they openly acknowledge being involved in the conception and scripting stages, by right of the money they contribute to the production. To contend that they have no influence over casting as well is naive at the very least.

I'm in agreement with Mr. Meyers about *Mystery's* lack of respect for their most recent adaptations, especially *Campion*, *Poirot*, and *Maigret* (their *Ngaio Marsh* work was simply dull). The subtle, and not so subtle, changes they have made in the original authors' work have been a disservice to anyone who loves a good mystery.

Although I work in the entertainment industry, and we're not exactly angels in honoring authors either, I'll stick to books, thank you. *Mystery* has evolved into being part of the problem—a more insidious one, in that they have the reputation for quality—and is now rarely a refreshing solution.

GEOFFREY MERRICK  
Hollywood, CA

Dear TAD,

I thought the article by Ric Meyers on the television adaptations of *Maigret* (TAD 26:2) rather badly thought out. I do not subscribe to the theory that English actors speaking English portraying Frenchmen speaking French should adopt the accent of a Frenchman speaking English badly (as, say, Poirot—although, of course, he's Belgian). The producers, correctly in my opinion, used the appropriate English accent to portray the rank or position of the speaker, so a doctor would speak with a polished accent where a labourer would adopt a rougher, less educated, one. A foreign sounding accent was only used for characters who were not French and could be assumed to be speaking French with a foreign accent. The difference is that *Maigret*, in the stories, is speaking French whereas Poirot is speaking English badly.

It seems we should have had a French actor playing the part of *Maigret*, although Meyers doesn't make it clear if the actor should be speaking in French or bad English, however I suspect that he'd be looking for a French actor who speaks English, but not well.

He also says: "If we wanted an Englishman playing the part, we'd watch a repeat of the dreadful American TV movie starring Richard Harris." I'm quite at a loss as how to evaluate this statement. Apart from the fact that Harris is not English anyway, is he saying that once an actor has portrayed a character, even if badly, he would watch it repeatedly rather than watch an actor from the same country playing the same role?

Admittedly the series was not perfect and lends itself to criticism on several aspects, but I suspect here that Ric Meyers has gone for the cheap laugh and failed. So much for his "very simple and obvious logic."

.....  
GEOFF BRADLEY  
England

### Mysterious British Slang

Dear TAD,

Jann Turner-Lord's piece on Slang for British Mystery Fans (TAD 26:3) was clearly intended, like her book, to reduce reader confusion over the words

used in this language we share. Please accept this letter as having the same objective.

I assume, from her examples and definitions, that Ms. Turner-Lord has used the context of these expressions in some British mysteries to give her their meanings. This has not served her well, and I suggest that she adds her sources to her definitions, so that the offending British authors can be blamed for misleading at least one reader. The date of publication of the source could also



indicate whether the expression would be recognised in Britain today.

Of the expressions listed in the article, I have never encountered "Dob in," "Stair Dancer" or "Tum-jack," so I can't comment on their meanings, but the definitions given for some of the others are not common 'British English':

**Clanger:** (As in 'to drop a clanger') This is not usually something said in bad taste, but rather something said which causes unintended embarrassment. (e.g., if Ms. Turner-Lord is a Professor of English, I will have dropped a clanger.)

**Manor:** This expression refers to the district for which the policeman is responsible (like a Precinct in your cities?) not the whole county covered by that police force.

**Shifty:** I suspect a slip of the typing finger here. Shifty applies to any suspicious behaviour. You could invite someone to 'take a shifty' at a shifty character.

**Swans off:** Far from leaving in a huff, people swan off thoughtlessly to do something they enjoy, leaving everyone else in a huff because they have to finish the job!

A few of the other definitions in the

article prompt minor niggles (I haven't seen the original book,) but would not create serious misunderstandings. Besides, we British have some strange ideas of our own: you now know that a Panda Car is a type of Police Car, but I'll bet you wouldn't have guessed that it is *pale blue* with a white stripe!

I wonder (in view of the article on Martha Grimes in the same issue) whether there is anyone setting mysteries in a foreign country who has used a resident of that country as a proof-reader. The only problem I can visualise is the introduction of more words unfamiliar to their readership—but that would give Ms. Turner-Lord an excuse for a new edition!

BILL WELLAND  
Broxbourne, England

### Re: Poe

Dear TAD,

I wish to correct some of the inaccuracies offered by Dan Crawford in his review of my pamphlet *Edgar Allan Poe and The Philadelphia Saturday News* (TAD 26:1).

The *Saturday News* did not specialize in "culling the most sensational of the previous week's events." It was a well-regarded family newspaper which featured in its mix some sensational stories—and these were what attracted Poe.

There was no *Saturday News* source for "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" about an ape escaped from a zoo. There was, however, a source concerning an ape in the London Zoo and another concerning an ape escaped from a city stable.

I do not "forgive" Poe for his racist association of a black man and an orang-outang—I provide a context for this association.

I do not state that "Poe didn't think of it [this racist association] himself"—I leave the matter open, stating, "Had this synthesis not already occurred in Poe, it is suggested here [in the *Saturday News*]; had it already struck him, it is reinforced here."

It is not true that I suggest that "Poe had to swipe the phrase 'horribly mutilated' to describe the face of someone thrown out of an upper story window." It was a face so characterized in the

source, but Poe was describing Madame L'Espanaye's body. Furthermore, the pejorative tone of "had to swipe" is wholly inconsistent with my work. I suggest that the phrase in the *Saturday News* "anticipates" Poe's use of the phrase. Implicit is the suggestion that Poe may have chosen to employ this language from the newspaper. Moreover, as I noted, Poe wrote, "To originate is carefully, patiently, and understandingly to combine." "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is a wonderful "griffin" (to use Poe's figure for "a creation of intellect")—it seems new, but comprises already existing parts. It may well have taken genius to imagine this extraordinary bird. And certainly Poe left us clues as to the nature of his combining.

Crawford claims that in my work, I am "on the verge of pursuing this research to the point of insult." I am not sure who might have been insulted. Certainly it is not Poe, for, as I observe in my study, his story invites the kind of detective work—the "analysis"—which would yield the story's origins.

Certainly it is not the reader, who is offered ample documentation of the long-unknown genesis of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the first modern detective story.

I am proud to have solved the mystery of the origin of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"; I remain baffled, however, by the mystery of Crawford's handling of my work

RICHARD KOPLEY  
DuBois, PA

*Dan Crawford replies:*

*The main difference of opinion between Professor Kopley and this reviewer seems to me to be in the danger area he identified himself in his book. He several times expressed a hope that the reader would not construe his discussion of Poe's use of the Saturday News as belittling Poe's creative process. In spite of his intent, it did seem to me that he did belittle.*

*I feel Professor Kopley's research in the Saturday News is significant. As to the matter of belittling, it is for intelligent readers to buy the book and decide for themselves.* ■



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## The Independent Mystery Booksellers Association

# Mystery Best-Seller List

APRIL-JULY 1993

### Hardcovers

1. *The Holy Thief*, Ellis Peters
2. *Black Ice*, Michael Connelly
3. *I Is For Judgment*, Sue Grafton
4. *Wolf in the Shadows*, Marcia Muller
5. *Cruel and Unusual*, Patricia Cornwell

### Paperbacks

1. *Booked to Die*, John Dunning
2. *A Stained White Radiance*, James Lee Burke
3. *I Is For Innocent*, Sue Grafton
4. *The Bootlegger's Daughter*, Margaret Maron

5. *Pennies on a Dead Woman's Eye*, Marcia Muller
6. *Zero at the Bone*, Mary Willis Walker
7. *The Jewel That Was Ours*, Colin Dexter
8. *Venus in Copper*, Lindsey Davis
9. *Dead in the Water*, Dana Stabenow
10. *Desert Heat*, J.A. Jance
- Lullaby Town*, Robert Crais

This list was intended to represent sales from members of the Independent Mystery Booksellers Association, and will in the future do so. For the moment, reporting stores are: Deadly Passions, Kalamazoo; The Mysterious Bookshop, New York; The Poisoned Pen, Scottsdale; The Rue Morgue, Boulder.

IMBA is a trade association of independent bookstores or related businesses having a strong interest in mystery. Its purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas, a channel for communication, and an effective force for change.

For further information write to:  
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*The Poisoned Pen*,  
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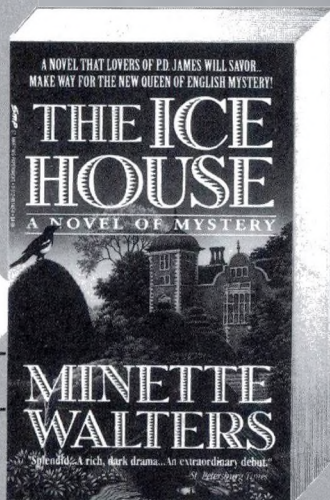
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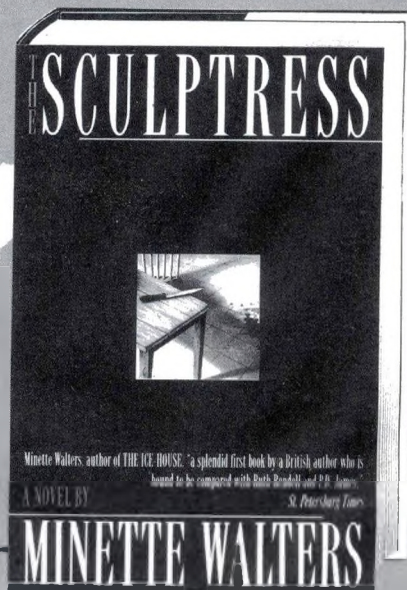
Minette Walters' newest mystery finds a journalist drawn into the world of "the Sculptress," a huge and menacing woman imprisoned for the savage murder of her mother and sister.

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A N I N T E R V I E W W I T H W A L T E R M O S L E Y

P H O T O G R A P H S B Y P E T E R S E R L I N G

# THE OTHER SIDE *of* THOSE MEAN STREETS

Walter Mosley achieved instant recognition with the publication of his first Easy Rawlins book, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990). The critics were uniformly complimentary about the novel. They loved his historical re-creation of post-war Los Angeles and the unique voice he had captured with his characters. *A Red Death* (1991) was equally well-received. Mosley moved his time frame forward into the early 1950s

BY CHARLES L. P. SILET



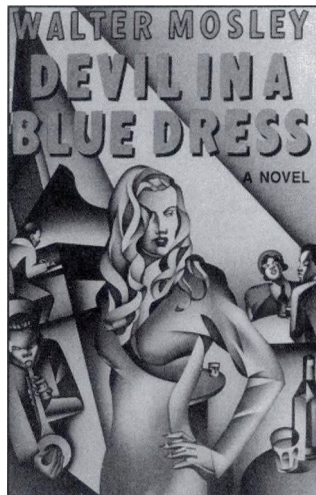
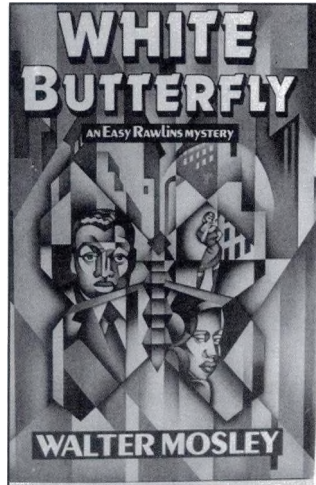
and once again explored the Afro-American world of L.A. The critics placed Mosley squarely in the hard-boiled tradition of Hammett, Chandler, and Cain, even though Easy walked down mean streets not explored before. Once again, the critics recognized the unique voice and perspective of his central character, Easy, a black man who expressed his feelings within the traditions of the crime story.

With the publication of *White Butterfly* (1992), Mosley arrived. It did not hurt sales when candidate Bill Clinton was seen carrying copies of his books on the campaign trail or when he told reporters that Mosley was his favorite mystery writer. By then the paperback editions of the first two were on the stands and selling. Once again the critics were highly complimentary. Easy's world was becoming better known, Mouse, Jesus, Mofass, the locale of the "other" Los Angeles had become familiar to a growing number of mystery readers.

Walter Mosley now has a four-book contract with W.W. Norton to deliver three more Easy Rawlins books, plus a non-genre novel, titled *RL's Dream*, which is about the world of jazz and explores the character of the legendary blues guitarist and songwriter Robert Johnson. His next Easy Rawlins novel is called *Black Betty* and is to appear in the summer of 1994, *A Little Yellow Dog* is to be released in 1995, and *Bad Boy Bobby Brown* is scheduled for publication in 1996.

Walter Mosley has said he hopes that his success will have a positive effect on young, black writers and encourage them to write genre fiction. His books so far have opened up the world of crime writing not only to a new voice but also to a new perspective. As Mosley works his way forward in history, he is presenting his readers with a uniquely ethnic vision, one that brings favorably to mind the writings of Chester Himes, until now the best-known black writer of crime fiction. Like Himes, Mosley celebrates his heritage, warts and all.

Mr. Mosley is also a highly articulate and thoughtful conversationalist about all manner of literary things, as readers will discover in this his first major interview. It contains revealing material about Easy Rawlins, crime fiction, Black history, and fame.



**TAD:** Let me begin by asking for some background information, where you were born, something about your family.

**MOSLEY:** I was born in Los Angeles in 1952, Black father, white Jewish mother, lived in Watts for quite awhile

in south central LA, and then moved to west Los Angeles into that great vast middle-class ocean. Then, as soon as I possibly could, I left and went back east, first to Vermont, then to Massachusetts, and then to New York.

**TAD:** You said that your father was Black and your mother was Jewish. Did this present problems, was it an enriching experience?

**MOSLEY:** One of the interesting things which most people who are white don't understand is that the Black community is pretty accepting in general. So there was really no problem. I had a white mother, but it was just different, nobody made a big deal out of it. The neighborhood I was in was half-Black and half-Jewish, just like me.

**TAD:** Tell me something about your schooling.

**MOSLEY:** Actually elementary school was very important for me. I went to a place called Victory Baptist Day School which was the only private black elementary school in Los Angeles. It was a very poor school where mainly the teachers just loved you to death. I went back there just the other day and the school is exactly the same. Everybody is new but it hasn't changed one bit. The principal was walking through the schoolyard and she knew every little boy and every little girl and what all their issues were. One of the interesting things about education for children is children can't help but learn, they always want to learn, they can't stop learning. The problems are mostly of an emotional kind. We felt so loved in a real way. I think it was a great experience for me, a really wonderful experience.

**TAD:** Then you went on to high school?

**MOSLEY:** Yeah, I went on to junior high school and then high school. They were public schools, predomin-

Charles L.P. Silet, teaches contemporary fiction and film at Iowa State University. He is currently putting together a book of his interviews with crime writers and editing a collection of essays on Alfred Hitchcock's classic film *Psycho*.

antly Jewish, where I learned a great deal but I wasn't very happy in those schools because it was more like a factory education.

**TAD:** Were you interested in writing at this point?

**MOSLEY:** Nope.

**TAD:** What about college?

**MOSLEY:** I went to a place called Goddard College in Vermont where I was actually asked to leave. It's almost impossible to be asked to leave from Goddard but they did. Then I went to Johnson State College, some years later. I studied political science, and then I went to political theory school at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. I finally decided, "Hey, this isn't making any sense." So I returned to computer programming, that's the big thing in my life, returning to programming.

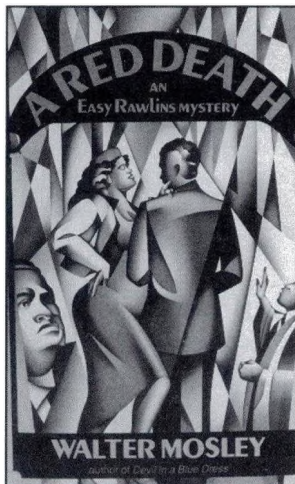
**TAD:** How did you get into programming?

**MOSLEY:** I had been in Europe with a friend of mine when I was about 19 or 20 and we were staying with his relatives who were very wealthy and I realized that not only did I not have as much money as his relatives, but I didn't have as much money as the people they hired to work for them! On the way back to LA, I was thinking, "Ok, now, I have to have a job. I don't really want a profession; I don't want to be a doctor or a lawyer because I don't have any commitment to that stuff. So I need a craft." Then I thought of all these possible things to be and finally I got down to nurse or programmer because you could move around a lot with either one of those jobs. Then I thought, "Oh, God, I can't stand the sight of blood!" So, programmer.

**TAD:** At some point, you went to the graduate writing program at CCNY.

**MOSLEY:** After I left graduate school in political theory, I moved to Boston and then later to New York where I was a programmer for many years. I had written a series of letters to my wife and

she said they were 'wonderful letters and other people in my past said I had always written wonderful letters. One Saturday I was at work when nobody else was there and I started writing these sentences and I really loved them and I thought, "Maybe I really could be a



writer." That was in '85-'86. Then I studied writing with a guy in his office for about a year. He had a little workshop behind his house. After that, I went to City College.

**TAD:** How did you decide to write professionally?

**MOSLEY:** Well, I never did really. What happened was that I was going to City College in the writing program and it was kind of artistic. It was not a commercial base. But I was there and I was very serious about writing. I wrote a novel that wasn't a mystery and nobody seemed to be very interested in that book.

**TAD:** This was *Gone Fishing*?

**MOSLEY:** Yes. After I wrote that book, I sent it out and nobody bought it. So, then, I started writing something else that turned out to be *Devil in a Blue Dress*. My plan was that I was going to go to school, get a degree, and after the degree get a job somewhere, not New York, as a teacher of creative writing and I would keep writing and one day I would be accepted as a writer. But I

wrote this book, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, which I kept in the closet. The head of the writing program, Frederic Tuten, said, "Why don't you let me take a look at that?" This is abbreviated, but it's not much. So I did and I went away for the weekend and when I came back he said his agent, Gloria Loomis, was going to represent me, and she said, "This is a good book, this is good literature, and we're going to do something." And I've never been happier.

**TAD:** Where did you get the idea for Easy Rawlins?

**MOSLEY:** Oh, it came from writing like so many ideas. The way I write is I think you have a guy and the guy is going to the door and is about to open door. He doesn't know what's on the other side of that door and neither do I. That's the way I write. When the door's opened, kind of magically we both see something at the same moment and I write it down. I was writing a short story about Mouse but from a first person point of view. It started out: His name was Raymond but we called him Mouse because he was small and had sharp features. It goes on and on explaining Mouse, and by page four, Mouse looks up and says, "Hey, Easy, how you doin'?" and he was talking to my narrator and that's where he started. So Easy started from his relationship, his feeling for this guy Mouse.

**TAD:** Why did you decide to set the books back in time?

**MOSLEY:** It's a migration only rather than through space it's through time. The first book, *Gone Fishing*, happens in 1939. Also it just turns out to be important because the books are really about Black life in Los Angeles, how the people got there, what they were up to. The big influx, not only for Black people but for everyone, was right after WW II. Then there are all these important events since WW II, contemporary, historical events which Black people have been edited out of. I'm talking about, for instance, in *A Red Death*, the juxtaposition of the lives of Black people and the lives of those people who

were destroyed by McCarthy. So there's all this important history. Because real history, it seems to me, is held in literature not in history books; people simply don't read history books. The history as it appears in novels is always flawed but emotionally true.



**TAD:** What is this progression in time designed to do?

**MOSLEY:** One reason is to go through these moments of history of Black people. Then another is the moments of history of Los Angeles itself; and then America, like with the McCarthy period. I love the mystery genre, I really do, and that's the reason that I was able to work in it, and the genre itself is in flux, it's changing. It's worthwhile to take a look at it from an intellectual or scholarly point of view. The original characters in "hard-boiled detective" fiction were a kind of spirit, the sad spirit of Western humanity looking at how low we've come, where we are and what kind of moral and ethical world we live in. The characters were ageless and completely unanchored; no mother, no father, no sisters or brothers, no children, no property, no job. All they had was their moral life. In a way, it's beautiful and most beautiful in a book like *The Maltese Falcon* and also in the series of books by Dashiell Hammett on the Continental Op because there's no progression; there's just all this terrible, insane world. But as the genre developed, it was done to death; Hammett did it, Chandler did

it, MacDonald did it. I think that there's really not much left to do. What else is Sam Spade going to do? He's static. What I'm doing with Easy, I'm making him get older and older, so the world around is changing.

His mind, to some degree, is staying the same, and to some degree, aging, and his body is getting older, his friends are dying. He's much more of an everyman in that case rather than an overman which is the way I see Sam Spade or Marlowe.

**TAD:** Obviously you don't see much distinction between what we would describe as genre or crime fiction and straight fiction or literature.

**MOSLEY:** No, I don't see any difference in it. Of course, in the genre there are certain kinds of things that you have to do, but it's the same in a coming-of-age novel, somebody has to come of age. So you have to follow the conventions. Good fiction is in the sentence and in the character and in the heart of the writer. If the writer is committed to and in love with what he or she is doing, then that's good fiction.

**TAD:** Let's talk a little bit about some of the individual books. *Devil in a Blue Dress* was your first. What did you want to do with that?

**MOSLEY:** It's very interesting. The subtext of it is jazz language. The period of the book was a time of incredible hope. All of these very poor people

from the Deep South, had left the South, which was even worse than the war, and had come to LA. This was a time of absolute possibility. We were going to make it. But there were built-in problems. There was the racism of the world around them and the limitations in themselves that they were carrying with them. That's how I went with Easy. I wanted to talk about him as this incredible, complex psyche who comes out of the Deep South into LA with all of these hopes and aspirations and what he can and cannot do for both external and internal reasons. Those were the dynamics I was talking about.

**TAD:** One of the early Chester Himes' novels is about working in a war plant and it deals with thwarted aspirations.

**MOSLEY:** But that is very different from my characters. One of the things about Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Chester Himes, all of the characters at the end of their novels end up in Paris. Easy is not the kind of guy who would end up in Paris. He wouldn't know how to end up in Paris. So he does make it here in America. But how he makes it is flawed and scarred. I mean he gets money, he buys property, but he pays for it. It's such a complex thing that I can't break it down to any kind of social, political, or racial level. If you push against life, if you try to make it in life, then you create even more tragedy. It's not that you don't make it, it's that you realize that getting there wasn't what you thought it would be. And that really comes out of the *noir* genre, that whole idea of you can't really get what you want.

**TAD:** What do you want to explore in *A Red Death*?

**MOSLEY:** *A Red Death* has several things going on. One is the concept of friendship in this modern, civilized world. Easy finds himself working for the IRS and the FBI, and he hates them and they hate him. The other thing is, of course, the McCarthy period itself. Most Black people were poor and working-class and had nothing to do with Communist organizers. They were Black already. You don't need to be on

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a blacklist if you're Black. I just want to make that connection between the oppression of people.

**TAD:** You also talk about the church or a church.

**MOSLEY:** The church is a very important part of the Black community. It's different than a middle-class church where you go there on Sunday and you're part of the church but it's not really the heartbeat of the community; it's maybe like the conscience or something behind you whispering "Don't do that. Don't do that." But the Black church in the Black community is the heart of your life—everything goes on there. When I went back to Victory Baptist Day School, which I modeled my church after, they showed me an apartment building and said, "This is where all the elderly ladies go for the church wing; when they get too old to work and pay their rent." It wasn't like bragging or anything. It was this is what we do for the young people and this is what we do for the old people. Of course, whenever you have that much emotional weight on an institution you have some amount of corruption and some problems. So I just wanted to talk about that.

**TAD:** There is a dense texture to the social fabric of the novel.

**MOSLEY:** Yes, the book portrays a kind of life that doesn't exist in literature as a rule. Certainly most white people don't know it and therefore can't really write about it. One of the problems when starting to write about Black people is that it's very hard for those outside to understand our life because the way the media deals with us: we're drug addicts, we're welfare people. So when I sent out my book, *Gone Fishing*, which is just like a lot of other Black novels—it's not a mystery particularly—publishers were concerned about who would read this book. The book is about two young Black men in the Deep South

following some kind of quest. The publishers weren't interested in this. It wasn't political; it wasn't about women; it didn't really work for an external audience. So what I was able to do in the mystery was to pull people in who are interested in the genre and still talk about the lives of Black people.

**TAD:** Let's talk about *White Butterfly*.

**MOSLEY:** I think all novels are failures. This is what I honestly believe: that a novel is an impossible art form. It's too large to attain perfec-



tion so what it has to do is have an intention and how close it gets to that intention is how good you think the book is, which is one of the reasons that people like crime books because you can always have a mystery and have the mystery solved. So you get a sense of resolution at the end of the book even though the book itself may not have been completely successful. In *White Butterfly* I was trying to talk about the relations between Black men and Black women and then have some kind of reflection on men and women in general and I completely failed, I think. However, in trying to do that, I brought out a lot about the relations between men and women. Easy's relationship with his wife, Mouse's relationship to women, women's relation-

ships to him, and so on. The whole book is just men and women all over the place dealing with each other on all kinds of different levels. Easy gets older and as Los Angeles begins to change, he necessarily becomes more involved with the white community through his property investments, his motels. As he gets more involved, he becomes more aware of his limitations.

**TAD:** You mean limitations placed on him by the social world.

**MOSLEY:** Right. In this new book I'm working on, *Black Betty*, it's the same thing. Easy is more and more outside of his own world and also he tries to distance himself from his life. He's just not very happy with what he is doing. Easy likes to do favors for people because he feels responsible, but he wants to be respected and he wants to be above board. He doesn't want to be like Mouse. He doesn't want to even be with Mouse. He loves Mouse because Mouse has saved his life too many times for him not to. He doesn't identify himself with that world of Mouse but the world itself won't let him go. So it's not only outside oppression from the world but inside he is really held back. The same thing happens with him and his wife, Regina. He was raised in a world where you don't tell people what you have. You don't let people know things and just because she's your wife doesn't mean you've got to open up. She had a hard life, too. Maybe she's going to take away what you got.

**TAD:** In *White Butterfly* your opening lines are about a man who is "rage-colored," and I thought about anger and I wondered if you had the recent L.A. riots and Rodney King in the back of your mind.

**MOSLEY:** When people start talking about the riots it's like this is the first thing that happened. The issue is the violence

that happened to Rodney King but it's not particular to Rodney King. It happens every day in every city. You can be sure that there's some Black man or not-white man or it may be a white man too, who has come from poverty, being beat to death in some back alley by some cop who doesn't like him or by some cop who thinks he's doing the right thing which is even worse. That's the violence, that's the cost. Someone talks about how the riot costs us a hundred million dollars, think of the cost of that implosive violence happening every day to people, think of what happens to that guy who gets the shit kicked out of him in some back alley—60 to 70 of them every day—that violence has to come back somehow. It's not like it just happens and it goes away. It's not like you can kick the shit out of somebody and then they just forget it and go back to their lives.

**TAD:** Americans measure the cost in terms of property rather than human suffering.

**MOSLEY:** Right. Exactly. There's been no understanding of it. None whatsoever as far as I'm concerned.

People talk about Rodney King but it's Rodney King and the thousands of others like him. Everybody Black knows that you're always on the edge of this happening to you. It's the truth and it's frightening and you better not say what you think. When I'm talking about *White Butterfly*, Easy always remembers this: Don't say what you think, don't even let it show because if you do you're in trouble.

**TAD:** So Easy is a reluctant detective who doesn't want to get involved.

**MOSLEY:** Right, he doesn't want to. He's an intelligent man and he has a philosophical bent and so he realizes in *White Butterfly* even after he refused to cooperate with the police that then when a white girl gets killed, he has to become involved. So he recognizes that he, unwillingly, has become part of the racist structure.

**TAD:** Except as he says, the one thing he won't do is run down a Black man for the law.

**MOSLEY:** Right, as a rule. But he will do it and has done it. It's always that back and forth thing. This is so much more interesting and I think it's so much more what we need to do in fiction because I hate setting up heroes that we really can't live by. You know, real people make mistakes, have flaws, do the wrong thing, and you have to be able to deal with that.

**TAD:** Why did you have him get married?

**MOSLEY:** Because people get married, that's why. It's so totally the right answer for me. I just sat down and started writing the book and he was married. The genre has to develop. That *noir* character, who used to be outside of our lives is now inside of our lives. So instead of looking at him from (to use the title of your magazine) your armchair, I want you involved. I want Easy to be like everybody else. He's not the smartest guy in the world; Jackson Blue is the smartest guy in that world. He's not the toughest guy in the world; Mouse is the toughest guy in that

world. But he's a regular guy, maybe a little better, maybe a little stronger, maybe a little smarter but he's a regular guy. He has children, he has a wife, that's the way life is. I'm not being critical of Ross MacDonald, Chandler or Hammett, because they had a different project than mine but in today's world to write about a guy who doesn't have any responsibility or a woman who doesn't have any responsibility and so therefore can just make her decisions unhampered is a fantasy and it's a little too light for me. I don't particularly want to read it.

**TAD:** Who have you read both in crime fiction and in regular fiction that's had an influence on you?

**MOSLEY:** In crime fiction, I've read lots and lots of people. Charles Willeford, I just adore. Every one of his books is so deeply flawed plot-wise, but it matters nothing to me because he's such a wonderful writer. I was reading one of his books the other day about some old guy and his wife; he was 72 but looked older and she was 63 and looked older than him. It was so funny; just the way he wrote it. My God, this guy is fantastic! Hoke Mosley is a real guy. It's so right. I've read everybody. Gregory MacDonald—I've read all the Fletch books, I thought they were wonderful. Parker, of course. Vachss, whom I adore because I think that he is so deeply committed to what he believes in. I feel the heart coming through it and I compare him to Dickens. Rex Stout. I've read almost everything Simenon ever wrote. The people I love for writing are the French: Malraux, Camus, Gide, for just the style of writing; it is almost the heart of fiction for me. And then the older guys: Proust; and tons of Black poets: Gwendolyn Brooks, Derek Olcott, Amiri Baraka. It doesn't matter who writes it, no matter their sex or their race or what period of time they lived in. I mean when you read Shakespeare, it's still alive today. It's amazing what a wonderful writer he was or whoever wrote that stuff.


**TAD:** You've been treated very well by the critics. How do you respond to critics?

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**MOSLEY:** When they treat me well? I love them. I have been treated very well in two ways. Number one, I've been reviewed a lot therefore a lot of people know my name, whether it's good or bad. I've also gotten a lot of very good reviews and I'm very happy about that. I try really hard to write well; I think I know my limitations. I'm a new writer, really. I'm not young anymore but I'm a new writer. There's a lot more that I could do a lot better and so the fact that people overlook my flaws to see what's good about my fiction, I'm very happy about. I don't mind people criticizing, but it doesn't seem worthwhile to me to trash anybody in public no matter how successful they are. But I've been very happy about the criticism.

**TAD:** President Clinton has been very excited about your books. Any comments or responses?

**MOSLEY:** Well, I'm very happy about Clinton because of what he's done. The way I see Clinton is that he is reaching out for people who have been completely ignored before by the Oval Office. I'm really happy he likes my books, and I believe he does. But the thing that I'm even happier about is the fact that he would even say it. Partially for me, of course, because it's good for my publicity, and partially because Black people are out here, writing and doing work and trying really hard and changing the country in so many ways and people just ignore it. So I'm really very happy about what he's doing and I feel included in a way in the world. He recognizes that here's a Black writer in America doing some important work. That's certainly his position in the world and I'm very pleased, doubly pleased.

**TAD:** Let's talk a little bit about *Black Betty* and then what you have on the docket for the next couple of novels.

**MOSLEY:** *Black Betty* happens in '61. It starts off in a dream and stays in a nightmare. It's a book basically about the violence between Black men. The book talks about the dark side of hope. It's '61 and Kennedy's in office and

Martin Luther King is marching down South and all of a sudden all of that unconscious Black anger and rage is concentrated. Easy is sitting there, a part of this world of bright hope, but feeling like he is the dark, shadowy underside of that hope. He's trying to work his way out of it. There's his belief that "If I can just save one person's life." But the only thing he can do is take somebody's life, he can't really give life. He comes to all these realizations throughout the book. I'm taking a chance with this book because I'm doing a lot of new things for me like having more than one mystery going on at once. Easy has children and he lives kind of far away from his basic native community.

**TAD:** What about Easy's children?

**MOSLEY:** They live in a house he rents; him and Jesus and Feather. Jesus is going to junior high school and everybody is happy. It starts off in a dream. In 1956, after *White Butterfly* was over, Mouse got into an altercation.

Somebody said something he didn't like and he killed him. He was captured and sent to prison. So the book starts off with this dream of Easy remembering the death and how senseless it was and how horrible it was. Mouse gets out of jail and he's looking for revenge while Easy is looking for Black Betty. He has to keep Mouse from getting revenge and he has to find Black Betty and both of them are very difficult.

**TAD:** It sounds like Easy is back to juggling.

**MOSLEY:** I remember a long time ago I read a story about a woman who was on a telephone which had call waiting. She was one of three women who were good friends. One of the other women was on the phone telling her how the third woman was having an affair with her husband and this woman did not know if she was angrier at her husband or at her friend for this betrayal. On the other line there is this guy from Chile who is being kicked out of the country, but if he went back to

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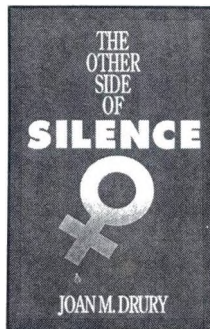
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Chile he's going to be killed because of his political beliefs and she was trying to help him. In the meanwhile, she was making dinner and the children are having some kind of discussion, which she is a part of trying to keep them on the right track; and her husband is coming home. So she's doing five things at once. I said, you know, this is really a woman's way of seeing the world because men are very linear, they go to work and they start laying bricks, not all men are like this but most male work is like that. But women have to deal with all kinds of things all at once and I started realizing that this is also true for poor people. You're always struggling to survive. If you're doing one thing and you happen to see something else which you know is important you've got to include it. So that's what I was trying to do with Easy, with what I call a feminine sensibility. I was thinking about that in writing this book. Everybody's in this book. Easy is trying to weave his path through it in order to get out of the nightmare, but I don't think he's successful. I promise he'll be happier in future books.

**TAD:** After *Black Betty*, you've got two more books lined up.

**MOSLEY:** Well, actually I have three. The next book is *RL's Dream*.

**TAD:** It's about Robert Johnson.

**MOSLEY:** Yeah, which I'm very excited about. I believe that it's some of the best writing that I've ever done. It's a blues novel and doesn't have anything to do with mystery or anything like that except maybe the mystery of life as

Vachss says. Then I have two more Easy books. One I'm very, very excited about. It's great. I finished the first draft of *Black Betty* a few days ago and I'm about to go back into it but the thing that I love is that I've already planned the first chapter of *A Little Yellow Dog*, which is the next Easy book. It's going to be a love story, which I had never thought of doing before and I'm really very pleased with that. Then I'm writing a book called *Bad Boy Bobby Brown* which is going to be my homage to Malcolm X.

**TAD:** And these are going to continue to move forward in time?

**MOSLEY:** Yeah, definitely, '63 will be *A Little Yellow Dog*, and '65 will be *Bad Boy Bobby Brown* and then I'm going to have to have something about the summer of love.

**TAD:** It's plenty to keep you busy for the next several years.

**MOSLEY:** Oh, yeah, it's so much fun to do. I love writing about Easy. I really do think along with Jerome Charyn that detective fiction is very important in this contemporary world. It really helps people to think and understand and open up. Crime fiction is very compelling to people; they want to know what happened, they want to know what happens next, they want to know why and they want to feel some sense of resolution.

**TAD:** Because of your success, you're breaking new ground as a Black crime writer. How do you feel about that?

**MOSLEY:** I feel comfortable, to tell you the truth, with myself which is a nice place to be in. I don't think that I'm the last word. I'm the first one who could give you a whole bunch of criticism of my work; what it does and what it doesn't do. One of the things that I understand, like understanding Easy, I can't do everything. I think that I have a good ear for Black language, not slang because slang is something that lasts for about six months and is gone. Black dialect has been with us forever. I feel like I'm doing something that's good and I guess important. It's

important for me and my sense is that it's important for a lot of Black people in America and also a lot of white people who are interested in hearing and thinking and opening their minds to different things. So I guess the answer is that I feel comfortable with it.

**TAD:** You're opening up a whole view of a Black community that largely has not been accessible in large measure before.

**MOSLEY:** My favorite novelists are Charles Dickens and Mark Twain and the reason is they are completely open to the reader and that's really the thing I want to be. I'm not going to shirk from saying what I think my character is or what I think my character's world is like, but I want to write fiction that's really embracing, that will bring in people and people will want to read it. Like E.M. Forster said in his book, *Aspects of the Novel*, the main thing about a novel is the story and the story is what happens next. I want my readers to say, "Oh, wow, and then what?" and I want them to turn the page because that's what is most important about writing. It just so happens that because I'm writing about Black characters and Black people, the thing that I'm most interested in, that they'll be wondering what happens next in these Black lives, whether it's a white reader or whether it's the President, or some Black person who really knows this life and is happy to read about it.

**TAD:** Engaging your readers is very important to you.

**MOSLEY:** I met a guy in LA (I'll never forget this) and he came to me and said, "I read your first book and I'm going to read the next, too, because I want to figure out why Easy's such a jerk!" His personal thing about what Easy did with a woman was unacceptable to him. That's real! Easy is a real character for this guy! It's very funny, but I really like that. My characters, I hope, are real enough for people to respond to. My dream is to write the series and have it treated as one of those series in crime fiction which mean something. I would love to do that. ■

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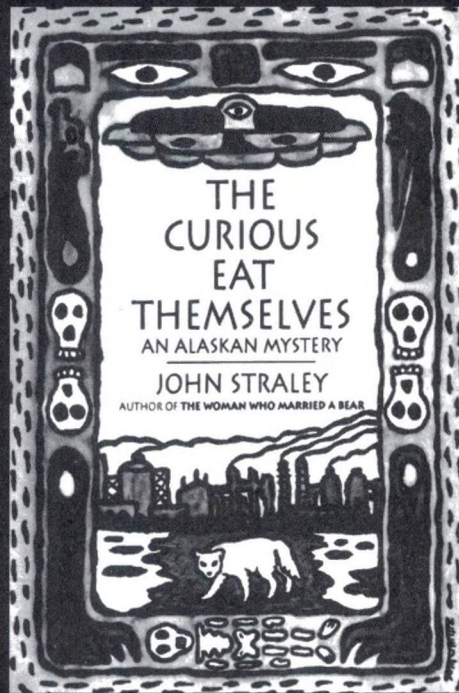
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Any fan of detective fiction knows that there is no substitute in all of literature for a few hours of reading pleasure at 221 B Baker Street. The tobacco in the persian slipper, the piles of monographs and newspaper clippings covering the floor and table, the unanswered correspondence affixed to the mantle with a dagger. What will the next visitor or urgent message bring? Perhaps a request from a mysterious stranger to help prevent "A Scandal in Bohemia." Perhaps Watson will tell us the story, discretely leaving out certain names, of how he and Holmes had to step outside the law to protect a certain royal personage from a blackmailer in "The Case of Charles Augustus Milverton." Or, for a very unusual treat, perhaps Holmes himself, in quiet retirement in Sussex, will tell a tale in his own words as in "The Lion's Mane."



In the more than a century since the publication of the first tale featuring Sherlock Holmes, *A Study in Scarlet*, Arthur Conan Doyle's characters and stories have inspired countless films, plays, pastiches, literary tributes, and tens of thousands of imitations. Now, Oxford is proud to



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Holmsian arcana. A goldmine of reading pleasure, *The Oxford Sherlock Holmes* is an essential addition to the library of anyone interested in crime fiction.

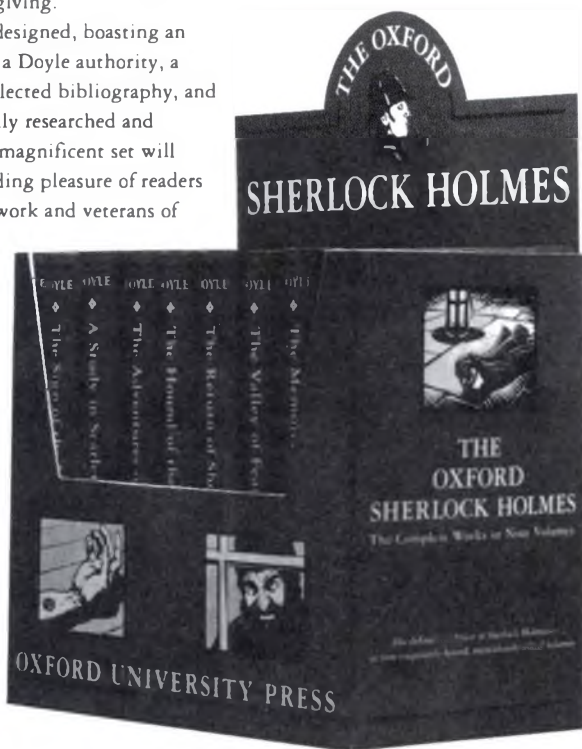
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O X F O R D U N I V E R S I T Y P R E S S



# A J H R E V I E W S

BY ALLEN J. HUBIN

I'd like to begin again with a reference work: **A Reader's Guide To the American Novel of Detection** by Marvin Lachman (G. K. Hall, \$45.00). Based on his five decades of mystery reading, diligent research in connection with this volume, and a keen sense of what in our genre is good and/or important, Lachman gives bibliographic information and five line plot summaries for 1,314 titles by 166 authors. Separate sections match pseudonyms to real names and series characters to their creators, as well as tabulate occupations of series characters, time periods (1670 to 1979) of stories, locations and settings, and more. Lachman ends by providing his list of 100 notable American novels of detection. What would our field be like without such grand labors of love as this?

Denver P.I. Jacob Lomax's fourth appearance is **Blood Relative** (Scribners, \$20.00) by Michael Allegretto. That Samuel Butler bludgeoned his wife to death with a wrench seems pretty evident, but Lomax, back broke from a Mexican vacation, can't be too choosy when Butler's attorney wants to hire him to locate a few folks who might support Butler's contrary story. And also identify the dead woman's alleged lover. Just ordinary family passions, exploding once and not likely to lead to anything further—right? Well... Butler's children are a curious lot, however, and it soon appears that Jacob has inadvertently kicked over a pretty deadly rock. But where, and who was under it? Allegretto has an agile and lively style, Lomax is quite an engaging character, and the plot convinces. Good stuff.

Robert Barnard's **A Fatal Attachment** (Scribners, \$20.00) has many of his usual strengths for much of the journey: intriguing, well captured characters, dynamic and revealing interactions, a goodly puzzle—in fact, the plot partakes of classic detective story elements. But the ending is a considerable disap-

pointment: Barnard pulls a killer out of a hat, and the final surprise comes from the same place. Lydia Perceval, esteemed author of biographies, befriended her two young nephews some years ago. Stole them, their parents would say, do say. One of the nephews later died and the other managed to escape from Lydia's influence. Now Lydia has two new boys to draw into her life. They're from the village near Lydia's home; their mother is ill and their father welcomes any help in caring for them. Sounds like a happy arrangement all around; maybe Lydia will even leave the boys some of her considerable money in her will. Of course, she has no plans to die...


The continually-between-engagements actor Charles Paris returns for another go at murder in Simon Brett's **Corporate Bodies** (Scribner, \$19.00). Paris here finds a smudgen of work playing a forklift operator on a P.R. video for Delmoleen, a food products company. Not a setting in which one would expect to find a corpse, but of course one turns up. Accidentally dispatched and quickly forgotten by all. Except for Charles, whose mind (in those infrequent moments when not saturated in alcohol) doesn't run along accidental lines. He nurtures some suspicions, and a further assignment for Delmoleen (in connection with the introduction of a ghastrly new green product) allows Charles to explore

these suspicions in the corporate structure. Eventually he might even get it right... Brett's nicely amusing swipes at the business world go down very well.

Dublin-born John Brady, now living in Canada, has a series going about Insp. Matt Minogue. The third novel is **Kaddish in Dublin** (St. Martin's, \$18.95), which begins with the discovery of a body—shot—washing up on a beach near the city. The dead man was a reporter, the son of a judge. The judge in turn is one of Dublin's leading Jews, and the case begins to take on anti-semitic overtones. And it gets worse: evidence suggests that a policeman may have pulled the trigger... I found this slow going as a mystery. Judged on the basis of its insights into the workings of the city, the social and political landscape, it fares better.

Transport the Rodney King affair to Miami and you have much of the story line in Edna Buchanan's **Contents Under Pressure** (Hyperion, \$21.95). But for all its similarity to the events in L.A., Buchanan makes her tale fit the city she knows well and rings some very creative changes on the King theme. Wayne Hudson, black, sports hero and civic champion, is an unlikely motorist to be pursued by the police and fatally injured in a run-away crash. Britt Montero reports the police beat for a Miami newspaper, where she works for a terminal nincompoop. She smells the

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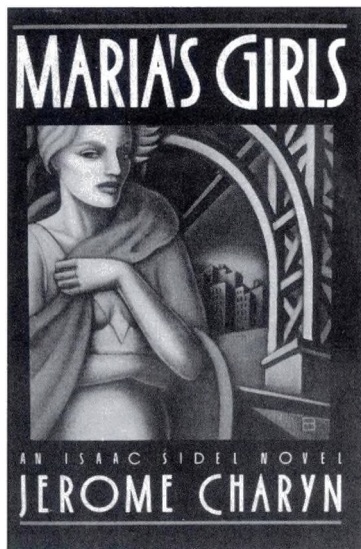
odor of fish around the Hudson death, but her inquiries please no one—the police, said nincompoop, the cop she's ill-advisedly bedding. But the black community smells fish, too, smells cover-up, in fact, and the lid on Miami looks to come flying off.

**A Stained White Radiance** (Hyperion, \$19.95) is another moving, evocative Dave Robicheaux novel by James Lee Burke. Dave is here a policeman again, in a parish outside New Orleans. He's married to Bootsie, and she has lupus, which terrifies both of them. On the side, he and Bootsie and Alafair, their adopted daughter, run a bait shop on a bayou. That's supposed to be off limits to Dave's police work, but it doesn't always turn out that way. Dave grew up with the Sonnier family, a tortured, driven, twisted and, as children, abused family. One of them has become an evangelist. Another, whom Dave dated in his youth, something of an unpaid prostitute. A third, ex-CIA (if one is ever ex-CIA), is now into oil. He's Weldon, who has a spaced-out wife, Bama. Someone wants to kill Weldon, it seems, and does in due course kill a policeman. Lots of unsavory connections here. Such as to Bobby Earl, successful New Orleans politician and ultimate racist. And to Joey Gouza, a piece of human sewage who runs the mob in New Orleans. And maybe even to Verise Sonnier, the abusing father, who's supposed to be dead. Enough here to make quite a story. It does.

An entry in the new Australian reprint series edited by Michael J. Tolley and Peter Moss is **The Whispering Wall** by Patricia Carlon (Wakefield Press paperback; obtainable from Mysteries by Mail, P.O. Box 679, Boonville, CA 95415). Carlon is an Australian, but this ambitious 1969 novel is here in its first Down Under edition. The story is told from the perspective of Sarah Oatland, 62 and totally paralyzed from a stroke. She lies in the upstairs bedroom of her home, utterly helpless and completely dependent on others, conscious but unable to communicate. Her niece Gwenyth rents the downstairs to Murray and Valma Phipps, whose murderous plotting drifts up a peculiarly constructed wall to Sarah's ears. If only she could speak...but she can, she dis-

covers, control the winking of one eye. Can she make anyone understand? Carlon explores her good idea very effectively, building character and suspense adroitly. There is only one minor flaw: how Sarah is fed is never mentioned—it must be intravenously, but her nurse is on one occasion said to be preparing her eggs for breakfast!

The works of Jerome Charyn are, I suspect, strictly an acquired taste. His



retailing of the adventures of Police Commissioner Isaac Sidel has reached six volumes with **Maria's Girls** (Mysterious, \$18.95), the first I've had the courage to tackle, and I made it all the way through in search of a plot and an ending. The setting is a cock-eyed New York, full of characters at least a few degrees out of plumb. All policeman seem bent, though some with the purest of motives. The mob, the FBI and the cops do a sort of waltz to the beat of bullets, linking and unlinking arms. Relationships are bizarre. Deaths are frequent and unreliable. All these fantasies do have a certain fascination, I acknowledge; could it be that I'm dangerously close to acquiring the taste?

Carol Higgins Clark, daughter of Mary, debuts with **Decked** (Warner, \$17.95), a shallow and unconvincing affair. Regan Reilly, a further addition to the ranks of female private eyes, here forsakes her L.A. territory for a 10-year reunion of her junior class at St. Polycarp's, Oxford. While there she

learns that her Greek roommate, who disappeared one day from campus, has never reappeared for good reason: someone strangled her. One or two leads emerge, but Insp. Livingston has little to go on, just a small connection with Polycarp's Prof. Whitcomb. Reunion over, Regan heads back to the U.S., but unexpectedly by sea, as companion to Whitcomb's wealthy aunt, Lady Exner. More dirty work may be expected on deck.

I'm not always impressed by Mary Higgins Clark's work, but **All Around the Town** (Simon & Schuster, \$20.00) suited me just fine. The misdirection in the tale didn't succeed for me, but everything else did, and Clark submerged me in her story until she was done. At age 4 Laurie Kenyon was kidnapped, held for two years by persons never convicted or even identified, and then released. Now she's 21, and those dark years have been repressed beneath her conscious memory. She is a confident, beautiful, athletic college senior. Until her parents are killed in an accident for which Laurie blames herself. She changes dramatically, variably, unpredictably; she exhibits several different personalities. At the same time her abductor has risen to prominence as a television preacher, and is determined to do what's necessary to prevent Laurie's remembering. If that weren't enough, one of Laurie's personalities seems to have developed romantic fantasies about one of her professors, while another has stabbed him with a butcher knife. A fine brew, indeed.

The protagonist in **No Way Home** (Dutton, \$20.00) is not model cop or citizen, but author Andrew Coburn spins an intriguing tale around him. James Morgan is chief of police in Bennington, a Boston suburb. He's a troubled man, a widower who acts out his hurts and loss by bedding the wives of the town's leading citizens. He seems "better" at this than solving crimes when the murder of an inoffensive couple rocks the town. Leftovers from Morgan's liaisons complicate his investigation, as do the weaknesses of some of these same leading citizens. Town confidence in him—along with that of Lt. Bakinowski of the state police—sinks to new lows. Morgan, remembering an

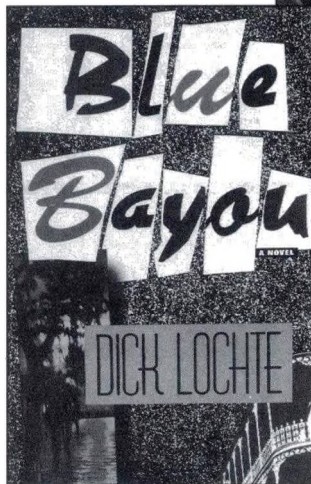
old unresolved death, thinks low-life Papa Rayball and his retarded son had a hand in these fresh killings. Bakinowski thinks one of Morgan's policemen did it. Nobody in this story to like or even much to sympathize with, but many characters sharply caught in a narrative not easily forgotten.

The New Orleans policeman called Skinny (which he is) returns in James Colbert's **All I Have is Blue** (Atheneum, \$20.00). At first I found Skinny repetitively and tiresomely profane, but as the story moved along he grew on me, he and his girlfriend Ruth and the 11-year-old boy someone wants to kill. One fine day Skinny and Ruth are outside of the city, hunting driftwood, when an offshore supply boat detonates before their eyes. Its pilot is killed, but Skinny rescues his son. The explosion was no accident, Skinny thinks, and says so to Gatzke, agent for Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Curious sort of policeman to turn up, even for a non-accident. But Skinny still has the boy and decides to return him to his aunt. Another death rather puts an end to that idea. Looks like Skinny can't stay out of this one—why, with a couple of plot twists he might even do for a suspect. An effective and involving tale.

**False Profits** by David Everson (St. Martin's, \$18.95) is my first experience of his Bobby Miles series, of which this is the sixth. It's a bit of a muddled affair, which despite an interesting premise did not hold together for me. Guarding Abraham Lincoln's reputation is important in Illinois, and when documents surface which purport to show Lincoln had a hand in Mormon founder Joseph Smith's assassination, Senator Courtney hires Miles to—he hopes—prove the documents a forgery. The person holding the documents is one Joseph X. Smith, a dissident Mormon and descendant of the founder. Joseph X's motives are unclear, and he himself elusive. Trying to trace him proves deadly to folks Miles interviews—somebody has taken to cutting throats. I assume earlier books in the series are more convincing.

**Driving Force** (Putnam, \$21.95) is mainstream Dick Francis, which means

a male protagonist tells the story in first person and gets battered in the proceedings, the plot is wound about horseracing in inventive ways, and the tale is wondrously engaging. Freddie Croft is making a tidy business trucking race horses around Britain and the continent. The first hint of something gone awry turns up in the cab of one of his vans: a corpse. It's that of a hitchhiker Freddie's driver had picked up (despite Croft policy). Happily, the chap seems to have died of natural causes. Unhappily, inspection of the van turns up some unauthorized apparatus. And not only in that van. In due course we've another body, whose passing seems unnatural. What's going on is by no means clear, but someone's malignancy has Freddie in focus.



**Blue Bayou** by Dick Lochte (Simon & Schuster, \$20.00) is quite an intriguing departure, in both setting and protagonist, from the author's Dahlquist and Bloodworth series. We meet New Orleans private eye Terry Manion at rural Evangeline Spa, where he's drying out from involuntary drug addiction acquired in L.A. while tracking a runaway. In due course he's released and returns to New Orleans where: a) his mentor has died, an alleged suicide; b) the scion of the local mob family is plotting a takeover of the family enterprises; c) someone found it of interest to steal a copy of a disposition Terry

gave while at the Spa; d) Terry's office has been broken into; e) a cop named Eben Munn has his own creative agenda for mob control. The only matters of practical interest to Manion are c and d, but one thing leads to another... Good thing he has Nadia Wells, septuagenarian, ex-madam, operator of a prominent detective agency, and his former employer, on his side. There is certainly a sufficiency of violent dying here, but the action is continuous and the narrative highly absorbing.

**Zombies of the Gene Pool** (Simon



& Schuster, \$18.00) is something like Sharyn McCrumb's ninth mystery novel and my first reading of her work. It's a rare gem, so I'm McCriminously behind in my reading. It's more a deliciously witty carve-up of 1950s science fiction fandom than a crime novel, though a corpse does turn up in the later stages. Some fanciful-writers called

the Lanthanides established a commune in a Tennessee valley, bickered and fought and wrote, consigning each a story to a time capsule buried on the property. A dam turned the valley into a lake and the years turned the dispersed communers into fairly famous this and thats. Now the valley is to be drained for dam repair, and an idea is conceived: a reunion of the Lanthanides (at least those still alive), a disintering of the capsule, and sale to the highest bidder of the anthological contents. Jay Omega, an engineering professor with a semi-secret sci-fi novel and a previous McCrumb appearance to his credit, accompanies one of the Lanthanides, also resident on his faculty, to the reunion at the latter's request. Also along for the ride is Omega's friend, English professor Marion Farley, who assists in Omega's sleuthing. So the egos are gathered, including an entirely unexpected one, and the stage is set. ■



FAMILY TRADE  
THE JANUS MAN  
MOSCOW QUADRILLE  
ALBATROSS

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# THE FICTIONAL KIM PHILBY

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CHESS PLAYER  
THE SPANISH GAMBIT  
A SPY IN WINTER  
THE MOLE  
TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY

**BY JEANNE F. BEDELL**

THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE  
THE ENDLESS GAME  
NIGHTSHADE  
THE SECRET FAMILIES  
THE KREMLIN CONSPIRACY  
THE THIRTEENTH DIRECTORATE  
GENTLEMAN TRAITOR  
THE MAN WHO WAS SATURDAY  
TROTSKY'S RUN  
THE FOURTH PROTOCOL



Something I owe to the soil that grew –  
More to the life that fed –  
But most to Allah Who gave me two  
Separate sides to my head.

–Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*

**F**iction and reality blend, merge, and blur almost from the beginning. In the city of Ambala in the dusty Punjab, the small son of a British civil servant, chattering in Hindi with his ayah and Indian friends, was nicknamed Kim after the hero of Rudyard Kipling's novel. More than seventy years later, the tombstone erected to Harold Adrian Russell Philby in Moscow's Kuntsevo cemetery read in Russian, "Kim Philby, 1.10.1912 – 11.05.1988."<sup>1</sup> Chance, or fate, had given Philby – called by *Time* "the spy of the century"<sup>2</sup> and by the *New York Times* the KGB's "most stellar recruit"<sup>3</sup> – the name of a master spy.

The details of Philby's career as a Soviet agent, from his conversion to Communism at Cambridge in the early 1930s to his death in Moscow in May 1988, have been the subject of numerous books, both fiction and nonfiction. And, although the publication early in 1989 of Phillip Knightley's *The Master Spy*, based on extensive interviews with Philby himself, has clarified some aspects of his life, much (necessarily) remains unknown. The exact date of his recruitment as a Soviet agent and the name of his recruiter are still mysteries, as of course are the names of his controllers, the methods of his contacts, the extent of his involvement in the flight of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean in 1951, and the means by which he fled Beirut in 1963 to escape interrogation and possible arrest by the

British Secret Service (SIS). His public career as a foreign correspondent for the *London Times* when he was attached to Franco's forces during the Spanish Civil War; his entry into Section D of SIS in August 1940; his rise to head Soviet counterintelligence; and his appointment to Washington as liaison with the CIA, are all a matter of record. Because of his simultaneous service as a Soviet agent, this record is problematical and, at least in part, fictional. No doubt exists about such now legendary aspects of Philby's personality as his disarming stutter, excessive drinking, or compulsive womanizing, but the passion for secrecy shared by all intelligence agencies effectively precludes full and accurate knowledge of the career that earned Philby General's rank in the KGB and the Order of Lenin.

These lacunae, however, are partially accountable for the widespread fascination with Philby, who, according to Robin Winks, "stirred up more prose than any other spy in this century,"<sup>4</sup> and for the major role he has played in contemporary espionage fiction. His outstanding success has made him the standard by which double agents and "moles" are measured and has inspired the countless novels featuring molehunts published since 1963. Critic William Henry believes that "Philby's perfidy seems to have been pivotal in the mood swing from derring-do to dour pessimism"<sup>5</sup> in spy stories. This shift in mood from the positive and victorious

emphases of the Kipling-Buchan tradition is usually attributed to John Le Carré, whose first significant novel, *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, was published in 1963. Le Carré's cynical view of British intelligence is doubtless indebted to his experiences in the Foreign Service, but his comments on Philby reveal careful consideration of his personality and career and tellingly refer to "the story of Kim Philby" as "a great novel, and an unfinished one at that."<sup>6</sup>

"Finishing" the Philby story, filling in its gaps, or simply exploiting it to lend credibility to fictional events and situations is commonplace among writers of spy stories. In a form noted for implausibility, the use of actual people, places and events—the mingling of fact and fiction—serves a threefold purpose: it provides verisimilitude, emphasizes the importance of agents' work, and increases the tension by making the events of the novel seem historically plausible and therefore more frightening.

Kim Philby appears most frequently in espionage fiction as the standard by which the nefarious activities of double agents are evaluated and their significance established. In Colin Forbes' *The Janus Man* (1988), in which one of the four European sector chiefs of British intelligence is working for the Soviets, his East German controller refers to him as "bigger Philby," and in Ted Allbeury's *Moscow Quadrille* (1976) the agent is "in a better position than Philby." James Carroll's protagonist in

Jeanne F. Bedell is a frequent contributor of articles and essays for several mystery publications. Her previous contributions to TAD included articles on Anthony Price and Rudyard Kipling.

*Family Trade* (1982) suffered grave disillusionment as a boy when his uncle, “with Philby...one of the great traitors of the century,” defected. Such comparisons are so frequent as to form a *leitmotiv* in spy stories.

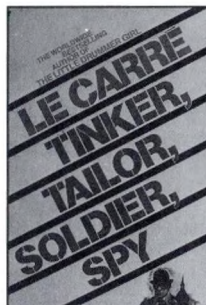
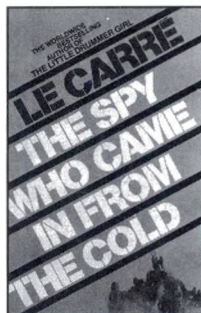
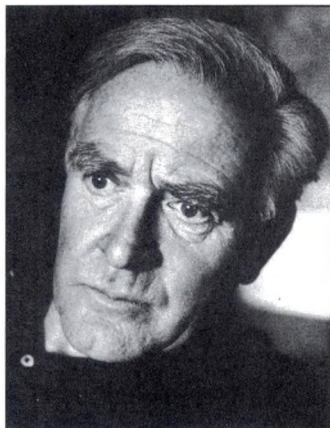
## THE CAMBRIDGE CONNECTION

Sharing certain aspects of Philby’s background, or having been associated with him, are often indications of treachery. Of especial importance is attendance at Cambridge in the 1930s. Philby went up to Trinity College from Winchester in 1929 and left in 1933, a period which witnessed the radicalization of the university. Philby’s involvement in politics and his gradual move from Socialism to Communism were not atypical; the impact of the depression, the deplorable record of Labour under Ramsay MacDonald, and what many saw as his desertion of Labour after the formation of a coalition Government in 1931, disenchanted scores of undergraduates with traditional political systems. Suspicion of 1930s Cambridge is reinforced by the presence there of such notable radicals as Julian Bell, David Haddon Guest, and John Cornford, all of whom were killed in the Spanish Civil War, and by that of Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, and Alistair Blunt, whose devotion to the Soviet Union was not exposed until decades later.

In Evelyn Anthony’s *Albatross* (1982), the chief of SIS refers to rumours about a retired agent – “He had unfortunate connections at Cambridge” – but, later in the novel, a captured double agent reminds his interrogator that “basing everything on the Cambridge connection, recruiting among the undergraduates destined for places in the Establishment,” can be misleading since agents can be recruited *after* joining SIS. Owen Sela’s *The Kiriov Tapes* (1973) uses a suspect’s Cambridge background and pre-war membership in the Anglo-German Federation (to which Philby belonged as part of his cover) to mislead both investigator and reader.

## THE GAME IN SPAIN

Despite the large numbers of innocent people who must have known Philby,



his acquaintance evokes suspicion, especially in readers familiar with his career. William Pearson’s *Chessplayer* (1984), in which a CIA mole is unearthed, plants a major clue to the mole’s identity when he tells a subordinate that he was captured in Spain when Bilbao fell in 1937 but that “a British correspondent for the *London Times*...intervened on his behalf.” Later in the novel, he confesses that it was Philby who saved his life, a confession that precedes his sending the subordinate to Beirut—supposedly to lure Philby into ambush but actually to warn him that capture is imminent. In the climax of the novel, when the mole is unmasked, he is told: “You’re going home...Like Philby...Think of it as a reunion with an old friend.”

Philby’s service in Spain is also featured in Stephen Hunter’s *The Spanish Gambit* (1985), one of the few novels to emphasize his pre-war activities and to speculate about both his recruitment and the impact of Stalinist atrocities in Spain upon his commitment to Communism. Philby appears here as *Times* correspondent David Harry Allen Sampson, the

name an immediate clue to his identity. More complex psychologically and richer in historical background than most espionage fiction, *Gambit* pairs Philby/Sampson with poet and PQUM soldier Julian Raines, whom SIS suspects of being a Soviet agent.

Under pressure from intelligence authorities, Robert Florry, Eton classmate of Julian Raines, is sent out to Spain to expose him. Tormented by a Forsterian dichotomy between loyalty to one’s friends or one’s country, Florry comes only slowly to believe in Julian’s treachery. But this belief, as the reader learns when Julian is dying, is false: Raines is the pawn sacrificed by Russian chessmaster E.I. Levitsky to protect Sampson, his “lasting legacy to the revolution.”

Until the end of the novel, David Sampson (Philby) is seen only through Florry’s eyes: he appears cold and cynical and “looked as if he’d seen nearly everything there was to see in the world, even if he was only thirty.” He is, however, extremely competent; he serves as Florry’s SIS contact in Spain and so pleases his employers that he will be brought back to London and promoted. His real master is of course not in London, and, just before the dying Levitsky is flown back to Russia, he has a final interview with his protégé. Here the emotions concealed beneath a cold surface emerge as Sampson comes to understand what Levitsky has done:

And so you recruited *two* agents. Deep and shallow. Or no, I see it now...Julian was your lover but never your agent. As I am your agent but never your lover. Because you knew that anyone who investigated Cambridge in 1931 would uncover you. And so you would lead them to Julian and not to me.

Spain has shattered Sampson’s faith in Communism. He cannot accept Levitsky’s belief that the sacrifices and betrayals, the torture and death he has witnessed have been part of a necessary historical process. His final devotion, like that of Julian Raines, is not to a political philosophy but to an individual:

I no longer believe in it, Emmanuel Ivanovich Levitsky, in any of it, revolution, politics, history. It’s all just murder and theft. But now I have found a new faith to sustain me over the years. I believe in *you*.

However implausible this may seem—although it is easily acceptable in the novel—it represents an attempt to understand what Le Carré sees as crucial questions in the lives of the 1930s spies, all of whom were recruited as very young men: “As they grew to manhood, and the youthful dreams of an adventurous crusade gave way to the tedium and fears of criminal betrayal, who sustained them in the faith?”<sup>7</sup>

## MARRIAGE, VIENNA STYLE

Michael Hastings features a Soviet recruiter who later defects in *A Spy in Winter* (1984), but the emphasis upon his thirty-year service as Philby’s controller is merely a plot device. Hastings does, however, briefly treat Philby’s first marriage to a Viennese Communist called Lily Hartman in the novel, actually Alice (Litz) Friedman.

Philby went to Vienna in the summer of 1933 when he was only 21. Supposedly sent by the Comintern to act as a courier between the outlawed Austrian communist party and sympathizers outside the country,<sup>8</sup> he soon became involved in more dangerous activities. In February 1934, Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss moved against the Socialists, and the conservative militia shelled and destroyed two blocks of workers’ flats. As the Socialists were being rounded up and sometimes killed, Philby and Litz worked with an underground organization to smuggle revolutionaries out of Austria. In this same month, Philby married Litz to give her the protection of a British passport. Several people have written or spoken of Philby during his months in Vienna as being a convinced Communist, and, although he joined the Anglo-German Federation when he returned to London, dropped his left-wing friends, and frequented the German Embassy, the records of both his marriage and his Communist sympathies were available to anyone who cared to look.

## THE OLD BOY NETWORK

The question why no one investigated Philby has been asked repeatedly since Burgess and Maclean defected in the early 1950s. In his autobiography *My Silent War* (1968), Philby says that the ease of his entry into SIS surprised him:

It appeared that the only enquiry made into my past was a routine reference to M15, who passed my name through their records and came back with the laconic statement: “Nothing recorded against.”<sup>9</sup>

Philby was a skilled operative, who, as he says, “was careful not to advertise the truth,”<sup>10</sup> but the lack of what we would now call positive vetting says more about the nature of SIS than about Philby. Many SIS officers were ex-military or former members of the Indian Police, and recruiting was done through friends and relatives. Establishment background and education were presumed to guarantee loyalty. Colonel Valentine Vivian, deputy chief of SIS, said that, when Philby’s name was mentioned, he felt able to vouch for Kim “because he had known his father in India.”<sup>11</sup>

The influence of the “old boy network” is a widely used ploy in espionage fiction to explain the entry of agents with questionable pasts or leftist leanings. American Dan Sherman in *The Mole* (1977) talks about the CIA in its formative years as an extension of the Ivy League: “Wealth, good breeding became its hallmarks. One was most conscious of the little things: the wardrobes of agency personnel, the decor of executive suites and the liqueurs served there.” The mole uncovered here is, like Philby, an upper-class product of an elite university during the Depression who came to hate “the Club,” the whole network of school ties that comprised the elite of the company.” He has been won over, not by the ideology of Communism, “but rather by the lack of any competing conviction in American society” and “the need to believe in something.” Bill Haydon in Le Carré’s *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (1974) has betrayed not only his friends and his country but also “that inestimable body that Ann loosely called the Set,” that is, his class. Double agents in fiction, although often motivated not by faith but by lust for power or simple greed, are almost always men of “good family” who have achieved high position in sensitive areas. In Ted Allbeury’s *The Other Side of Silence* (1981), agent James McNay, who does not share Philby’s back-

ground, says bitterly, “D’you think I’d have lasted five minutes if my wife had been a communist official?” Philby’s Cambridge associations were not secret; McNay says Philby was kept in the service because, “He was like them. A gentleman. Being a Communist was just a boyish prank like scrupping apples.”

Philby’s commitment to Communism is, however, significant in the generally favorable treatment he receives in fiction. Although few go so far as Graham Greene when he compared Philby to Catholics working for Spain during the reign of Elizabeth I,<sup>12</sup> many others hold a grudging respect for his long-term commitment. Agent Alec Hillsden in Bryan Forbe’s *The Endless Game* (1986) thinks “how comforting it must be to have the unshakeable convictions of a Philby, to make a decision early in life and never renounce it, to prefer exile to home”; later he says, “How wonderful it must be...to have no doubts.” In the same novel, an agent who is a contract killer working for money says that he never sees Philby in Moscow: “Not my cup of tea.” The contrast is explicit and surely in Philby’s favor.

Of course, not all fictional characters are admirers. Those who, like Oxford scholar Arthur Padmore in *The Other Side of Silence*, believe that Philby was “misled” by youthful enthusiasm are balanced by those who condemn him: “He was a shit, a twenty-four carat shit.” In Reg Gadney’s *Nightshade* (1987), a selection board member compares a candidate favorably with Philby: he “isn’t an alcoholic, not a womaniser, speaks presumably without stuttering all the time, and isn’t, as far as we know, a Communist.” In John Gardner’s *The Secret Families* (1989), the daughter of a defector asks her mother, “Dad’s not like that bastard Philby, is he?”

## THE VOLKOV AFFAIR

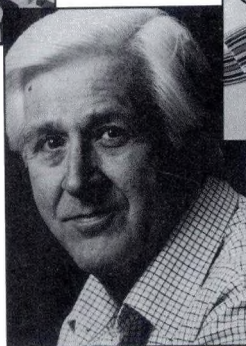
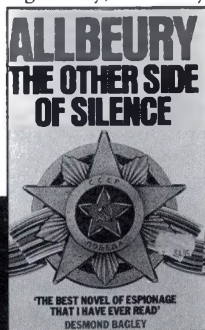
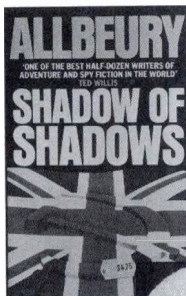
Certain incidents in Philby’s life are usually singled out for adverse commentary. Few authors accept uncritically his belief that he was not a traitor during World War II because Great Britain and the Soviet Union were allies, but his sharing of intelligence data with the Soviets and his intransigent opposition to negotiating peace terms

with groups within Germany are understandable. Novelists instead emphasize the destructive aspects of Philby's post-war activities, especially his involvement in the Volkov affair, his liaison with the CIA, and his share in the Burgess-Maclean defection, which led to questions in Parliament and inspired serious molehunts in both SIS and the CIA.

The attempted defection of NKVD officer Konstantin Volkov in Istanbul in 1945 is central to the Philby story and is significant in fiction. Volkov went to the British Embassy and offered to defect in return for safe conduct to Cyprus and £27,000; as recompense, he promised the names of three Soviet agents working in London. Volkov's approach was referred to London, where it was passed to Philby as head of Soviet counterintelligence. Because Volkov believed that British codes in Istanbul were compromised, it had taken ten days for his request to reach London. Philby further delayed action by asking for time to "dig into the background,"<sup>13</sup> and, by the time he finally reached Istanbul, Volkov had been removed to Moscow. In *A Spy In Winter* (1985) by Michael Hastings, Philby's fictional controller Orloff recounts an anguished meeting with him in which his stutter was "aggravated by distress" and his report given in "dis-jointed sentences" after news of Volkov reached London. Orloff confirms that he notified the KGB (then the NKVD) about Volkov and that "they had Volkov sedated, tied to a stretcher, and flown to Moscow aboard a special plane...And that Volkov was tortured and shot with his wife in the courtyard of Lubyanka prison."

With changes in detail to cast suspicion on a CIA mole, this incident triggers the entire plot of Dan Sherman's *The Mole*, in which the murder in Mexico of station chief Alfred Cook and the discovery of a list of thirteen names lead the agent, code-named

Poet, to investigate Cook's tour in Istanbul. Here Volkov had attempted to defect to the CIA but was removed from an airplane in Paris before he could reach safety. The loss ruined Cook's career, and in his Mexican outpost he spent feverish months compiling accounts of agency failures in order to identify his betrayer. Poet repeats Cook's journey through old files to uncover "Sleeping Beauty," for thirty years a Soviet mole within the CIA. "And what did it mean?" thinks Poet.



"Nothing much. Just over a quarter of a century, and all that history, a pack of lies."

George Smiley shares Poet's devotion to files.

Suspicion of a mole in British intelligence arises from a variant of the Volkov incident. Agent Ricky Tarr is following a Soviet trade delegation member in Hong Kong when he meets the man's wife. Unhappy and emotionally fragile, Irina wishes to defect. Tarr notifies London Station but gets no response. London stalls, as Philby did in the Volkov case, and Irina disappears, taken into a waiting Soviet plane on a stretcher. In the diary she left for Tarr is information about a highly placed mole in London Station. Smiley's search is successful, but his success is marred by the knowledge that he has been betrayed by a friend.

Philby told Phillip Knightley that he regretted what happened to his relationships with his friends and rejected outright the idea that he had been laughing at them: "I have always operated at two levels, a personal level and a political one. When the two have come in conflict I have had to put politics first. This conflict can be very painful."<sup>14</sup> Philby lived for years under great tension, sure-

ly one of the reasons for his excessive drinking. In *The Janus Man*, intelligence man Tweed tells a psychiatrist, "I read a book about Kim Philby once...He drank like a fish but still never gave himself away." The psychiatrist responds: "The alcohol saved him. Release from all that tremendous tension he labored under." Philby himself says in his autobiography that: "Thirty years in the underground is a long stretch, and I cannot pretend they left no mark."<sup>15</sup> David Sampson in *The Spanish Gambit*, face to face with his mentor Levitsky, talks almost uncontrollably, "Because he would never talk of it again: it was the pleasure of explaining that he had denied himself and would go on denying himself for years." The need to talk about his activities perhaps explains Philby's injudicious friendship with the outrageously drunken and notoriously homosexual Guy Burgess. It was this friendship which first caused CIA suspicions of Philby, and, after the Burgess-Maclean defection, it led to his recall from Washington and eventual dismissal from SIS. Although Philby worked for British intelligence in Lebanon from 1956 until 1963, his role was minor and a career that seemed destined to culminate in appointment as head of SIS ended in public bouts of drunkenness in Beirut.

## BACK IN THE USSR

Because virtually nothing is known of Philby's work for the KGB after his arrival in Moscow, it has received considerable attention in fiction. Freed from any necessity to deal with reality, authors have invented lives for Philby. He has been portrayed variously as a lonely and disappointed old man and as an active participant in schemes to harm the West. In E. Howard Hunt's *The Kremlin Conspiracy* (1985), he has "thinning grey-white hair, pale, puffy face, and moist, sunken eyes"; he yawns his way through a meeting and returns to an apartment "furnished with London in mind," where he drinks Bombay gin. One character—a General Bondarenko—refers to Philby's "brilliant but superficial intelligence" and his belief that Philby's mind is "too atrophied to grasp the importance of the operation." This is not, however, borne out by the

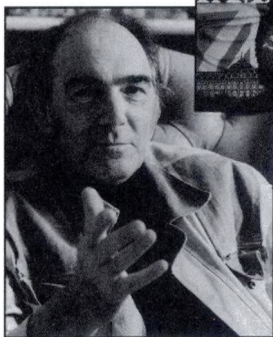
events of the novel. Philby advises Bondarenko that his desire for personal vengeance is misplaced and that the operation should be aborted. He is correct on both counts; the plan fails.

Barry Chublin's *The Thirteenth Directorate* (1986) opens with Philby's reluctance to leave Beirut and then shifts to the present, in which he is responsible for an organization that plans takeovers of high-level political positions in the West. He is now "an old man, slow and cautious in his movements, and shabbily dressed." Although considered a "legend" by younger members of the KGB, Philby displeases Gorbachev, who considers him a hard-liner, "more mixed in the insolvent ethics of the past than any Soviet citizen he knew of."<sup>16</sup>

Most of the novels which feature Philby's life in Moscow emphasize his affections for things English, his subscription to *The Times* of London, interest in cricket scores, and his collection of English books. None of these is in any way remarkable, Philby spoke fluent Russian, but he learned the language late in life and was always more comfortable in English. Phillip Knightley's description of Philby's luxurious (by Moscow standards) flat does not in any way indicate that he had, as Derek Lambert says in *The Man Who Was Saturday* (1985), "tried to recreate the rooms in which he had lived when he was at Cambridge." Some authors no doubt believe that Philby was unhappy in Moscow; Ted Allbeury, who knew him, thought Philby "a totally sad man, dreaming of a cottage in Sussex with roses around the door,"<sup>17</sup> and Frederick Forsyth believed him "profoundly nostalgic for Old England."<sup>18</sup> Whatever truth there is in these views—and there is no doubt that Philby at times was unhappy and depressed in Moscow—both Allbeury and Forsyth, like many other writers, use Philby's supposed homesickness as a plot initiative.

## YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN

Philby's attempts to make contact with Western agents because of his assumed desire to "come home" are crucial to the plots of several novels, of which the most unusual and most defamatory is the earliest, Alan William's *Gentleman Traitor* (1974).<sup>19</sup> Australian journalist Barry Cayle believes that there was a cover-up of Philby's defection from Beirut. He meets Philby in Moscow and likes him, an "urbane, boozy, somewhat bedraggled English gent," but he has been forewarned by literary agent Peter Hennison who says that both Philby and his father, Arabist Sir John Philby, were "Rebels and misfits...That was the real trouble with



Philby—he wanted to fit in and couldn't." Hennison also dismisses Philby's Communism when he says that Philby found "Marx too boring to read" and that he was inter-

ested only in the game, the "snigger" of satisfaction he received from deceiving people. Philby tells Cayle that he is going back into the field, an aim he achieves by escaping from Russia in a hijacked plane shortly after he has murdered his mistress by beating her to death with an oar while they are on a boating excursion. This action, like Philby's fictional responsibility for the massacre of a dozen innocent guests at a Rhodesian resort, seems designed to deglamourize his reputation, and his continued association with British intelligence to reinforce rumors that SIS connived his escape from Beirut.

Nor does Derk Lambert, in *The Man Who Was Saturday*, give a flattering portrait of Philby, whom he calls Dalby and describes as betraying his fellow defectors' respect for him by serving as a KGB informer. A series of defector deaths arouses the suspicions of American Robert Calder, who

learns that they are being killed in a series of staged suicides or accidents when they become dissatisfied. Dalby is cynical, without belief in any political system, and he explains his betrayal by saying that, "For better or worse, the corkscrew that has been my life has straightened out." His failure to prevent Calder's escape from Russia causes his death "from a heart attack, although, as it was known...he hadn't a history of heart trouble"; that is, his death, like that of the men he had betrayed, was staged.

In a much lighter mood is Richard Hoyt's comic romp *Trotsky's Run* (1982), in which the Democratic candidate for President of the United States is a KGB agent who believes he is Leon Trotsky. Here Philby is a triple agent seeking to defect to the CIA while actually working for the Chinese because of profound disillusionment with his life: "The bastards wired my flat. They read my mail. With blood flowing from cupped hands, I delivered up the liver and spleen of MI-6; still they didn't trust me." It is of course very unlikely that an experienced agent would not have expected to be watched, but Hoyt is concerned with comic hyperbole, not mimetic fidelity. In fact, Philby's only function in the novel is to provide a smidgen of verisimilitude to Hoyt's fanciful look at American politics.

Philby's involvement in foreign election is also the focal point of Frederick Forsyth's *The Fourth Protocol* (1984). Shortly before his seventy-fifth birthday, an unhappy Philby is asked by the Chairman of the Central Committee to expand his remarks on political instability in Britain. He works privately with the Chairman to devise a plan to swing the next British election to Labour. A series of maneuvers has placed hardline Marxist-Leninists in control of the party; if elected, they will take Britain out of NATO and the EEC, destroy all nuclear weapons, and expel U.S. forces. To implement this goal, Philby plans to set off a small nuclear device in Britain, using disinformation to ensure that the Americans are blamed. The plan is betrayed to SIS by the KGB to prevent a return to the worst days of the Cold War.

Although depictions of Philby's Moscow years are varied, certain common elements exist. Formulae requirements of the genre ensure the failure of his schemes to undermine the West,<sup>21</sup> but, even when his character is assaulted, his competence is assumed. A KGB colleague in *The Thirteenth Directorate* calls him "still the most astute covert operations specialist in the business," and a CIA operative in the same novel finds him "brilliant, analytical, and at the same time imaginative." Many authors emphasize his supposed unhappiness and feelings of alienation, especially after the euphoria of his welcome faded. Forsyth typifies this view when he writes: "And all the time, for the past fifteen years, there had been a great void of despair that not even the drink and the many women had been able to blank out." Philby admitted to Phillip Knightley that there had been difficulties in his relationship with the KGB, that he had spend long periods without work, and that he had suffered "nagging doubts" about his faith in Com-

munist.<sup>21</sup> Heavy drinking exacerbated his problems and led to hospitalization on several occasions. He detested Brezhnev, whose regime he found "stultifying, leaden,"<sup>22</sup> and the contrast between serving an admired philosophy from afar and living under its application no doubt contributed to Philby's depression. But, in the early 1970s, life improved. He travelled extensively in Eastern Europe and in 1971 married half-Russian, half-Polish Rufa, who remained with him until his death. The KGB again utilized his expertise in foreign affairs: "My doubt and depression vanished. I was doing interesting work. I had a marvellous wife and life was good again."<sup>23</sup>

Novelists speculations about Philby's continued contact with SIS are numerous but improbable except as fiction and constitute, like the often used ploy of his desire to return to England, significant steps in the process by which he was transformed from agent and defector to fictional character whose beliefs and actions reflect not those of the still living man but of authors'

usage of a famous name to lend credibility to treasonous plots.

## PRIVILEGED LIVES

The extent of Philby's commitment to Communism has been the subject of much commentary. As early as 1968, in his introduction to Page, Leitch, and Knightley's *Philby: The Spy Who Betrayed a Generation*, John Le Carré said, "I do not much believe in the political motives of Kim Philby," and attributed what he called Philby's "duplicitry" to the apolitical, insular world of British intelligence.<sup>24</sup> Michael Hastings and Bryan Forbes accept his commitment; his KGB position is in fact too crucial to the ironic plot twist with which Hastings concludes *A Spy in Winter*. Alan Williams sees him as an adventurer, while Barry Chubin characterizes him as: "Still a member of the English bourgeoisie." Chubin does not elaborate his comment, yet it is crucial to the Philby legend. Any student of twentieth-century history can name dozens of well-known people who joined the Communist Party in the 1930s, some who became double agents and defectors. Philby's unique position derives from two sources. The first is obvious: it is difficult to cast even in semi-heroic mold an agent who sold out solely for money. The second, however, is much more important and was acknowledged by Le Carré, when with typical candor he admitted that he was "uncomfortably conscious" of using the first person plural in discussing Philby:

Philby's is one of those cases which force us to define our own place in society. I suppose by "we" I mean the world to which I myself vaguely belong: middle-class, graduate, intellectual.<sup>25</sup>

Dismissing George Blake as "half a foreigner" and Burgess and Maclean as "psychiatric misfits," Le Carré emphasizes that Philby:

an aggressive, upper-class enemy, was of our blood and hunted with our pack; to the very end, he expected and received the indulgence owed to his moderation, good breeding and boyish, flirtatious charm.<sup>26</sup>

Philby's membership in a liberal mid-

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"You know my methods, Watson."

dle-class intelligentsia is the departure point of the most thorough fictional account of Philby's life, Ted Allbeury's *The Other Side of Silence*. In response to Philby's request to return home, SIS employee John Powell is assigned the task of evaluating Philby's career and recommending action. As he delves into the past, interviews Philby and his erstwhile colleagues, and investigates old missions, he learns how important social class is from the responses he receives. To some, Philby represented "unearned privilege, the arrogance of the upper classes," while others emphasize the importance of his father, who was opposed to British imperialism in India and lived the last decades of his life as a Moslem in Saudi Arabia. To some, the atmosphere of the '30s was sufficient reason for his actions; they see him not as a traitor but as a lonely old man who "wants to die in his own country." The refrain Powell hears again and again is: "He was, after all, one of us."

In his conversations with Philby, Powell soon realizes that he expects to be allowed to return: "They must know why I want to come back." Slowly, Powell comes to believe that Philby had been recruited to SIS before he became a Soviet agent. In answer to Powell's question, "Were you, are you, a triple agent?" he replies, "I honestly don't know. I never did know." Finding that SIS was as much at fault as Philby, Powell recommends: "On the grounds that actions taken over forty years ago can only be judged in the framework of those times there would be no justification for refusing Mr. Philby's return to the UK."

Fascinating though Allbeury's speculations may be, they are in flat contradiction to Philby's own account of his life. In *My Silent War*, he states explicitly: "All through my career, I have been a straight penetration agent working in the Soviet interest."<sup>27</sup> He refers to stories that followed him into the Soviet Union as "fantasies" and dismisses most newspaper accounts of his activities as "stupid guesses."<sup>28</sup> He admits cheerfully, however, that he was skillful in constructing both cover stories and cover personalities and finds the comments of those who believed his stories "flattering."<sup>29</sup> Philby's autobiography is of

course highly unreliable, but there seems little reason to doubt his commitment to the Soviet Union. Thirty years as a double agent and twenty-five in Moscow with the KGB are convincing evidence.

In 1968, John Le Carré wrote: "Philby has no home, no woman, no faith."<sup>30</sup> Almost twenty years later, when Phillip Knightley interviewed Philby in his Moscow flat, he remembered this comment and responded to it:

Well, you've seen my flat. You can make up your own mind about that. And if "home" is not meant literally, then I can tell you that behind and around this place is the biggest home in the world, more than eight million square miles of it. No woman? Many a man would envy me my marriage to such a woman as Rufa. No faith?...[O]nly a fool would deny me my faith.<sup>31</sup>

With the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, perhaps it will become possible to view Philby's career objectively. Le Carré's statement that Philby's life was "a Marxian novel: a novel without humanity, a novel rich in social decay"<sup>32</sup> reflects Cold War philosophy. But perhaps we, like the writers in whose books he appears, can come to see his life not as one novel but many and to view it as part of the ideologically divided history of our century. Phillip Knightley believes that Philby "forced us to examine our attitudes to patriotism, treachery, class, and political conviction,"<sup>33</sup> and in the best of the novels in which he appears all these issues are significant.

Because espionage fiction is only minimally mimetic and because its formulaic plots are designed to affirm our emotional and political values, the interplay of fact and fiction in the novels I have discussed is often problematical. Patriots will be uncomfortable with sympathetic portrayals of Philby, and readers familiar with his life will question, as I have done, Alan Williams' depiction of him as a brutal murderer. Each reader brings to fiction his own knowledge, political convictions, and values; these in turn determine responses to specific works. The continuing dialogue between author and reader enables us to choose

among various scripts, to select our own Philby. Was he a hero or a traitor? Or both? A believer or an opportunist? Himself a talented constructor of fictions, Philby would quite probably have savored his role as the inspiration of others. And he surely would have recognized that the blurring of fact and fiction in novels reflects a similar blurring in his own life. ■

FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Phillip Knightley, *The Master Spy* (New York: Knopf, 1989), p. 260.
- <sup>2</sup> "The Perfect Spy," *Time* (Sept. 25, 1989), p. 41.
- <sup>3</sup> Bill Keller, "The Soviets Proudly Present Their Friendly K.G.B. Agent," *New York Times* (Sept. 14, 1988), p. A1+.
- <sup>4</sup> Robin Winks, "Traitors of Their Class," *New York Times Book Review* (April 16, 1989), p. 1+.
- <sup>5</sup> William A. Henry, "No Regrets—Kim Philby: 1912-1988," *Time*, May 23, 1988, p. 32.
- <sup>6</sup> John Le Carré, "Introduction," in *Philby: The Spy Who Betrayed a Generation* by Bruce Page, David Leitch, and Phillip Knightley (London: Sphere, 1977), p. 27.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- <sup>8</sup> Knightley, p. 41.
- <sup>9</sup> Kim Philby, *My Silent War* (London: Granada, 1969), pp. 25-26.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- <sup>11</sup> Knightley, p. 80.
- <sup>12</sup> Graham Greene, "Introduction," in *My Secret War* by Kim Philby (London: Granada, 1969), p. 7.
- <sup>13</sup> Philby, p. 114.
- <sup>14</sup> Knightley, p. 254.
- <sup>15</sup> Philby, p. 179.
- <sup>16</sup> This is doubtful. Philby admired Gorbachev greatly and believed that in him "I have a leader who has justified my years of faith." See Knightley, p. 255.
- <sup>17</sup> Knightley, p. 5.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Williams' is the earliest novel I have found to embody Philby's supposed desire to return to England. There may be earlier examples.
- <sup>20</sup> Espionage fiction, even in the "serious" work of Le Carré, still shows the final triumph of the West. Since Philby's fictional schemes were designed to advance the Soviet cause, they had no chance of success. In many cases, such genre requirements are in conflict with the portrayal given of his astuteness.
- <sup>21</sup> Knightley, p. 234.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.
- <sup>24</sup> Le Carré, p. 29.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.
- <sup>27</sup> Philby, p. 14.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>30</sup> Le Carré, p. 33.
- <sup>31</sup> Knightley, p. 257.
- <sup>32</sup> Le Carré, p. 42.
- <sup>33</sup> Knightley, p. 262.

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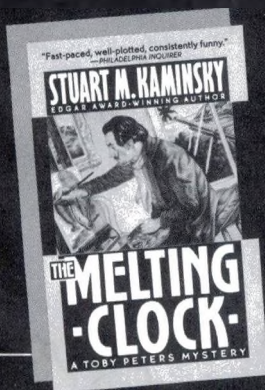
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# J'Accuse!

BY

WILLIAM L. DEANDREA

DATELINE: LONDON

GOSH, THAT'S FUN TO WRITE. IT BRINGS ME BACK TO MY EARLY JOURNALISM DAYS, WHEN I WANTED TO BE EDWARD R. MURROW, AND DODGE BOMBS ON ROOFTOPS. IT WASN'T UNTIL LATER THAT I REALIZED THAT IN ORDER FOR THIS TO HAPPEN, SOMEBODY HAD TO BE OUT THERE DROPPING BOMBS ON ROOFTOPS. THIS WAS SWELL FOR THE BUDDING ED MURROWS (DID YOU KNOW HIS REAL FIRST NAME WAS EGBERT?) BUT KIND OF TOUGH FOR THE OWNERS OF THE ROOFTOPS.

Fortunately, fantasy bombs never hurt anybody, though since the DeAndrea/Papazoglou menage has relocated to the Smoke, we've had our share of real bombs, too, courtesy of those funloving patriots, the Irish Republican Army. These brave soldiers

have killed a few children and blown up a big office building called the NatWest Tower, for the second time. My grandmother's maiden name was McCafferty. I'm not as proud of that as I used to be.

But to heck with that. We're glad to be here. The rationale went like this: we were extremely tired of being outnumbered by dairy cattle in the small town in Connecticut where we'd been living. We wanted to get back to a city. We even considered Third World cities, such as New York has become. We finally decided on London, because it's even bigger than New York, we have friends here, and you don't have to own a car.

So we have settled into a nice little row house in Barnes, Southwest London, where Sarah Caudwell also makes her home. It's very neighborhoody and friendly. We've got Matt in school here, and he loves it, primarily because he doesn't get in trouble for reading better than his age says he should, something that was anathema in Connecticut.

We haven't rented a TV yet, so our biggest pastime is reading the newspapers, of which there are a lot. We play a game called Watch That Exchange Rate, the rules of which go like this: If John Major can screw up faster or more thoroughly than Bill Clinton, it's Instant Money for us. Now, you may think it unfair to expect anybody to screw up faster or more thoroughly than the Arkansas Whiz, but Major's been giving it the old college try.

The game is made all the more challenging by the necessity of trying to figure out, from the English papers, what the hell is happening in America. In fact, it's a challenge to figure out where their supposed U.S. correspondents really are. The best one was a story set in my home town, which one of the papers described as a place "where prac-

tically everybody has a nanny."

We have also faced the mystery of the episode I like to call The War of Clinton's Ear. The papers over here have been full of it. Did this really happen? Did the President of the United States show up with a bandaged ear and tell the Press he cut himself shaving? Did he then change his

tory and say he was wrestling with Chelsea, and she did it? And was the final story that he was wrestling with his cat Socks, and the cat did it?

The prevalent theory over here was that Hillary pitched a hissy over his cavorting with some Hollywood stars while her dad lay dying, and hit him in the head with a well-thrown ashtray.

I don't know about you, but I would rather have it believed I was slow to duck an ashtray than that I was

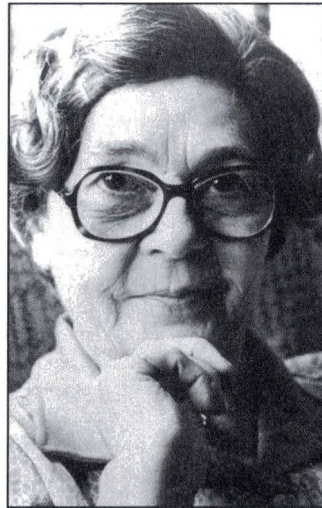
careless in shaving my ears. Or, for that matter, that I was wrestling with my thirteen year old daughter (or my cat) in such a way that they felt obliged to claw me at some stage of the proceedings, but when you're the Leader of the Free World, I guess you get a different perspective.

If this really happened, of course. Documentation welcome.

Anyway, in addition to these current events mysteries, there have been developments in the world of fictional mysteries here, as well. Last week, Edith Pargeter, better known as Ellis Peters, author of the Brother Cadfael novels and many other mysteries received the Cartier Diamond Dagger Award from (naturally) Cartier, as well as the Crime Writers Association. It's the CWA's equivalent of the Grand Master Award. The ceremony took place at the House of Lords.

## IDENTITY CRISIS

Ruth Rendell gave a well publicized interview recently. In it, she said two things that are totally wrong. Actually,



EDITH PARGETER AKA ELLIS PETERS

ROY MORGAN



KEN PROBST

RUTH RENDELL



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AGATHA CHRISTIE

the errors were in succeeding clauses of the same sentence. She called herself "second rate," but at least, she said, "I'm better than Agatha Christie."

Dear Agatha, she goes on to say, is "pure pulp" and "simply nowhere."

No and no. Rendell can write like a dream, and, when she feels like it, she can toss off a fine mystery plot. But you don't need me to tell you this. However, Rendell operates in two modes—gloomy and gloomier. Agatha Christie, as a columnist here pointed out, was a much more daring artist, using *all* the colors of human life, the bright ones as well as the dark.

I suspect what's going on here is that Rendell has bought into the current (and totally bogus) academic definition of what good literature is—i.e., to play

with words like Lego blocks, making pretty patterns laid over good-for-you-like-medicine plots about dissolution and despair.

I submit that the real indications of literary power is the creation of a world and characters that capture the imagination of the reader and hold it until the writer lets it go. Why fiction, which is the product of the imagination, should be chained (as the "serious literature" types would chain it) to the least appetizing aspects of reality, is beyond me.

A simple test—who would you rather have lunch with, Hercule Poirot or Reg Wexford?

The papers here also made note of the fact that a few years back, when one of the awards Rendell has won was accompanied by a check for £2000 from the Christie estate, her contempt for Dame Agatha did not prevent her from accepting or cashing the check.

A footnote. They do Wexford on TV here, and the actor who plays the part was widowed a little over a year ago. He is now going to marry the actress who plays his wife on the series.

How sentimental. How pulp. How real life.

.....  
**TIME FLIES**

Regular readers of this column will remember that I have occasionally berated the mystery world in general or elements of it for neglecting important anniversaries. The seventy-fifth anniversary of the lamented Doubleday Crime Club, and the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Poe's "The Murders on the Rue Morgue" are two prime examples.

Now, I've got to berate myself, because here in the middle of May as I write this, I realize that March 17, 1993, marked the (gulp) fifteenth anniversary of the publication of my first book, *Killed in the Ratings*.

Granted, it's not likely to be a red letter day on anybody's calendar but my own, I should have at least *remembered* about it. My only excuse to myself is that I was going nuts with last minute arrangements to come to England, but that's not good enough. It's like forgetting the birthday of your first child.

The really weird thing about this is

that it seems like only a week or two ago I took up a lot of space in this column talking about the *tenth* anniversary of my maiden publication. I'm certainly not going to rehash everything I said then, and boy aren't *you* glad. There's not even much to update. The mystery boom I spoke of then continues. This is, of course, a mixed blessing. As a writer, I'm delighted. The more good mysteries that are published, the more space bookstores will allot them, the better chance I have of making it in there.

As a reader, however, I am limited by the number of hours in a day, and I become more and more aware that there is a mountain of good stuff out there I may never get to. Sigh.

Fandom increases in size, scope and activity. Bouchercon in Toronto last year was almost too much to take in. We did as much as we could, but I was still left with the feeling of having eaten only the cherry off a banana split. Still, it stands to reason that an increase in the number of people who go to conventions reflects an increase in the number of people who read mysteries, so I can't call that a bad sign, either.

The only really bad thing that has happened in the past five years has been the staged, artificial and totally unnecessary rise of factionalism and Special Interest Crowds. You know who you are, or sadder still, maybe you don't. Anyway, promoting one group of mystery writers over another is bad for the genre, but attempting to squeeze everything through a filter of political correctness is worse. I expostulated on this issue at great length in my last column.

There's been a backlash, too, with the rise of the ultraviolent "splatterpunk" novel. Critics frequently rave about these books, but I have a theory about that. I suspect many critics were regular losers at collegiate gross-out contests, and now wish to prove their stomachs have strengthened since then.

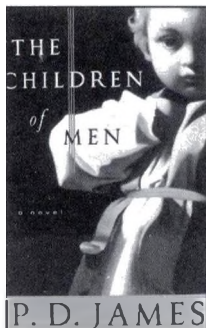
Extremes tend to even out in the long run. If these things haven't ameliorated in another fifteen years, I'll start to worry.

.....  
**ENOUGH IS ENOUGH**

Just out in paperback over here is P.D. James' most recent novel, *The Children*

of *Men*. As most of you undoubtedly know, this is not a mystery. Instead, it's a religious (I think) allegory under the guise of a near-future science-fictionish story about a world in which, for mysterious reasons, the human race has stopped reproducing. I mean, this is ZPG even Al Gore could have trouble with.

I don't plan to discuss the book in any detail, except insofar as it represents a phenomenon I've noticed before. It's a book whose title should be, *I've Made*



*Enough Money*. These get written after a writer has been so successful in a genre, he or she can afford to write something so different as to run the risk of alienating every fan they've ever had.

It's not quite as simple as that, though. Conan Doyle, for instance, tried to kill off Sherlock Holmes, but he never wrote an IMEM. The Holmes stories are of a piece with the romantic and swashbuckling tone of all the rest of his work.

Dorothy L. Sayers tried to have it both ways. She dropped Lord Peter like a hot brick, and took up writing religion (no allegories for her), telling interviewers in so many words that religion was always what she wanted to write, and now, thanks to mere mysteries, she had enough money to do it. However, she still held on in the mystery field, being an imposing presence in the Detection Club until her death.

The greatest example of IMEM that I can think of is Gregory McDonald, who polished off his enormously popular Fletch series, then more or less disappeared from the genre and the mystery world completely, while issuing odd novels from publishers you never heard of.

Raymond Chandler *wanted* to write an IMEM, but he never did. Maybe he never did make enough money. Of course, a lot of people keep writing in the genre—Christie, Queen, Stout, Francis—because they just like it the best.

Of course, it doesn't always work. I think Stephen King has intended to write probably four or five IMEMs, but people just keep going ahead and making huge bestsellers out of them. Poor guy, he's a victim of his own genius.

Will yours truly ever write an IMEM? No need to. I've got this column to alienate people with.

.....  
**SHOTS IN THE DARK**

When I did my tenth anniversary column, I presented a list of my ten favorite mystery novels. One of these days, I think I'll do a list of my favorite mystery *movies*. I'm not going to do it now, because all my reference stuff is back in the States.

When I do it, though, it will be for the movies that are the best mysteries; i.e. with the best detection (or in the case of cop movies) the most detective work. This qualification will leave some very great movies off the list, most notably *The Maltese Falcon*. I love that picture (I'm talking about the third version, John Huston, Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor—that one) as much as you do. On the fortieth or fiftieth viewing, though, it starts to creep in that as a detective story it is incredibly lame. That you should be able to solve it before Miles Archer even hits the pavement, which is virtually what Spade does. The rest is a mess of magnificently grilled red herrings.

One movie that *will* be on the list is *Citizen Kane*. Yes, I know it has no crime in it. It's a great detective story all the same. Not only that, but since you never see the reporter's face, the viewer is placed in the role of detective. Not only that, it's one of the most fairly and audaciously clued mysteries ever committed to celluloid, fully solvable, though no one in the movie actually solves it.

.....  
**NEXT ISH**

I track down the British Crime Writers Association in their lair, wherever that is. ■

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# The Black Detective

## in the White Mind

John Ball's  
Virgil Tibbs  
and  
Ernest Tidyman's  
John Shaft

### by Aya de León

Who are Virgil Tibbs and John Shaft? They have become immortalized in celluloid as the faces of Sidney Poitier and Richard Roundtree. Through their strength, intelligence and defiance, they became archetypal Black heroes in the late 1960s and early 70s, a time when the African-American community was desperately hungry for such films. Such are the cinematic myths, but the question still remains unanswered. Who are they really?

Virgil Tibbs and John Shaft are Black detectives created by two white writers, John Ball and Ernest Tidyman, respectively. The Tibbs series began in 1965, with *In the Heat of the Night*, and has

continued into the 1980s. The Shaft series, which began in 1970 with *Shaft*, consisted of seven books, the last of which was in 1975. Tibbs and Shaft are among the best known black characters in the mystery genre, due in large part to their success as film heroes.

But while the cinematic Virgil Tibbs and John Shaft managed to be somewhat authentic in their Black heroism, the case is very different in the novels. Although they differed in their approach, both John Ball and Ernest Tidyman had a decidedly limited view of Black heroism, indeed of Black people in general. Ultimately their vision of their protagonists relied more upon racial stereotypes than reality, and worked to both reflect and support their own white perspectives. This dynamic is

evident in the way Tibbs and Shaft are presented, the way they perceive themselves, their relationships to the Black community, and to Black women.

A close reading of the Tibbs and Shaft books shows that these books tell much more about the minds of the white authors than the Black detectives'. Due to constraints of time and space, I have chosen to discuss only the first three books in each series.

At first glance through the books, Virgil Tibbs and John Shaft appear to be two very different men. While Tibbs is a mild-mannered and by-the-book police officer, Shaft is a disorderly break-the-rules rebel. Despite the fact that Shaft is a licensed private detective, he is often at odds with the law. In addition, while Tibbs is generally sexually conser-

Aya de León is a graduate of Harvard College and is currently living in Oakland California where she is working on a mystery series with an African-American woman detective.

vative, Shaft's extensive sexual exploits are an integral, important part of his persona. Tibbs lives in Pasadena, California, Shaft in Greenwich Village. What Tibbs and Shaft share, however, is that they both spring from a constellation of stereotypes that have a common historical origin.

Both Tibbs and Shaft reflect stereotypes which were introduced into the collective white American imagination in the early twentieth century, and have their origin in the slavery era. In his book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks* (Continuum, 1989), Donald Bogle describes how Black cinematic and literary characters were stereotyped into "five basic types." One such basic type is the "socially acceptable Good Negro" or the "tom," a term which comes from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Another basic type is the "black buck," who dates back to D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation*. The buck "played on the myth of the Negro's high-powered sexuality."

According to Bogle, "as toms are chased, harassed...and insulted, they keep the faith, n'er turn against their white masses, and remain hearty, submissive, stoic, generous, selfless, and oh-so-very kind. Thus they endear themselves to white audiences and emerge as heroes of sorts." Virgil Tibbs, I suggest, is a modern-day tom.

In *In the Heat of the Night* Tibbs solves a baffling murder which takes place in the segregated Southern town of Wells. By doing so, he is able to win the respect and gratitude of two white lawmen, Officer Sam Wood and Police Chief Bill Gillespie. Both Wood and Gillespie express undeniable prejudice at the beginning of the book, but by the end, they have both been transformed. The evidence of Gillespie's supposed transformation is in one of the final scenes of the book:

"Virgil," Gillespie said, "I want to thank you for the help you've given us..."

Gillespie let go of the first Negro hand he had ever clasped. He looked at the man behind it and saw, to his sudden surprise, that his eyes were moist.

"You're a man to be admired, Chief Gillespie," Tibbs said. His voice shook a very little...

Despite the emotional exchange, the power relationship stays the same. Tibbs is called "Virgil" and Gillespie is addressed by his formal title. In addition, we see here in the Tibbs character a childlike emotional attachment to whites that surfaces repeatedly, undermining his accomplishments, and, ultimately, his manhood.

### **The Virgil Tibbs Novels by John Ball**

**In the Heat of the Night (1965)**

**The Cool Cottontail (1967)**

**Death for a Playmate (1969)**

**Five Pieces of Jade (1972)**

**The Eyes of Buddha (1976)**

**Then Came Violence (1980)**

**Singapore (1986)**

In addition to being elated by the approval of white people, he consistently accepts racial abuse to spare their feelings, often taking the blame onto himself. The following interchange, told from the point of view of Sam Wood, is the epitome of this dynamic:

"Virgil Tibbs started to hold out his hand and then, to Sam's immense relief, shifted his coat to his other arm instead...if Tibbs had held out his hand, he would have had to look away...But Tibbs had saved him the embarrassment, and for that he was grateful."

In such cases, Tibbs not only accepts racial insults from whites, but he endears himself to them by accepting it *gracefully*. Ball's vision suggests that the key to transformation of whites' racist behavior is for Blacks to endure their abuse. In addition, historical and institutional dynamics of racism are dismissed.

In the second book, *The Cool Cottontail*, a murder victim is discovered in the swimming pool of a nudist resort. While Tibbs is investigating, a member of the resort makes a racist remark "I guess they don't care who they let in

here," he declared with offensive loudness in his voice." Tibbs responds by telling the owner, "I'm afraid I may have cost you some business...please explain that I'm not a member. Tell them the county sent me to inspect the swimming pool."

In *Death for a Playmate*, Tibbs is in constant contact with the parents of a white runaway boy. The boy's mother uses the word "nigger" then catches herself. "Oh, I'm sorry!" she tells him. Tibbs responds, "Don't concern yourself about that, Mrs. McGuire, you have enough on your mind." Mr. McGuire also evidences prejudice: "Mike despised his visitor [Tibbs] for his black skin...He [Tibbs] did not blame the McGuires, they were under a fearful strain..." The pattern is clear. The importance of racial abuse is minimized and Tibbs is expected to sit back and take it. Like any good tom, Tibbs is more concerned with whites' needs and feelings than his own.

### **The John Shaft Novels by Ernest Tidyman**

**Shaft (1970)**

**Shaft among the Jews (1972)**

**Shaft's Big Score (1972)**

**Shaft Has a Ball (1973)**

**Goodbye Mr. Shaft (1973)**

**Shaft's Carnival of Killers (1974)**

**The Last Shaft (1975)**

In contrast to the passivity of the tom, the buck is much more threatening. According to Bogle, "bucks...were Griffith's really great archetypal figures. Bucks are always big, baadddd niggers, oversexed and savage...they lust for white flesh." The idea from *The Birth of a Nation* that bucks "lust for white flesh" was both a pervasive fear and a paranoid fantasy among white men during that time, as well as a convenient justification for violence against Black men. In this situation, white women were put in a position to both fear and desire Black men. The remnants of this

duality are evident in the Shaft series: Shaft thinks of “the tight-ass chicks he ran into all day. He was part of their fantasies. Scared hell out of them. Big black man with his big black...” White male disapproval of Shaft’s sexual interactions with white women is also evident in the series. In *Shaft Among the Jews*, a white police detective breaks into Shaft’s apartment and finds him in bed with a white woman. The detective “had been staring at her, speculating as to whether or not she was naked...The blanket covered her and he never did find out. He assumed she was, and the thought irritated him.”

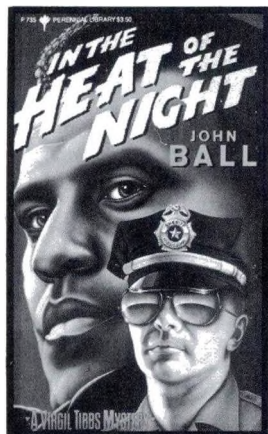
Also in *Shaft Among the Jews*, Tidyman describes Shaft’s desire for a white woman as, “the stallion surge of demand that has torn asunder civilizations for its immediate gratification.” In *Shaft*, his lover Ellie says to him, “You uncoil like an animal coming out of a cave.” Shaft reflects that, “She thought he was an animal...He was an animal...Let her think it. Let her need it.” Thus, Shaft is sexually characterized as savage and sub-human.

In this way, Virgil Tibbs and John Shaft are introduced to the audience by the stereotyping white voice and gaze. Not only are Tibbs and Shaft thus described by the narration, but it is with the internalized white voice and gaze that the Black detectives describe themselves and other Black people.

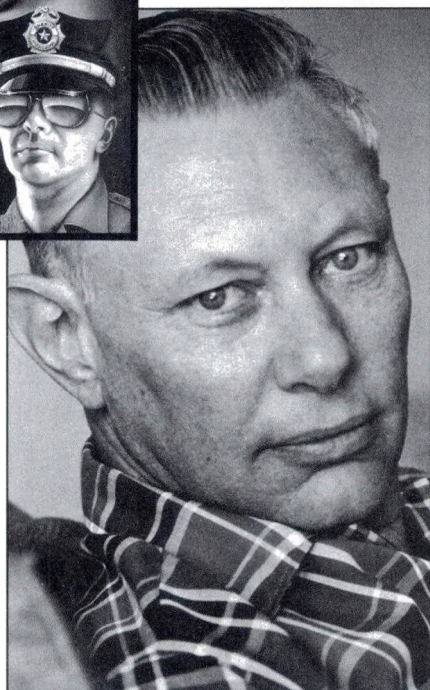
Although Tibbs says in *In the Heat of the Night*, “I don’t especially want to be white,” he does not seem to want to be Black, either. In fact, it is his blackness or black skin that he seems to view as the problem: “countless times he had been forced to accept humiliation he did not deserve simply because he was a Negro.” Tibbs views himself with the internalized white gaze of the long suffering tom. He does not question that he must accept humiliation for being

Black, he merely accepts it. Never does he consider whites to be responsible for their racist behavior. Rather, he faults his Blackness, and therefore, blames himself. While in the South, he makes the following statement: “at home [in Pasadena] I can go weeks at a time without anybody reminding me that I’m a Negro.” What John Ball gives us in the Tibbs character, is a Black man who has internalized a racist gaze, and views his Blackness as inherently negative. For Tibbs, being Black is not something to be proud of; it is something to try to forget.

Many of the same themes are evident in the Shaft series as well. In *Shaft Among the*



JOHN BALL,  
1911-1988



*Jews*, Shaft extends a hand to help a white woman. She refuses. “One of those, he thought...reminded once again that the hand was black.” In another scene, Shaft touches the arm of a white waitress in a cafe. “He smiled. She didn’t pull her arm away from the leprosy of his blackness.” Once again, being Black is viewed as some sort of disease, and Blackness, not racism is characterized as the problem. In each

case, the result of the internalized white gaze is Black self-hatred. Ironically enough, during the time Ball and Tidyman were writing Tibbs and Shaft, non-fictional Black people throughout the United States were proclaiming that “Black is Beautiful.”

The period from 1965 to 1972 was one of heightened awareness of racial identity in the United States. For Virgil Tibbs, however, this wasn’t the case. He rejects Blackness as an important part of identity. In a conversation with another Black man, Tibbs says the following: “Is that all you can say for yourself—that you’re black?...I’m not a black man, I’m Virgil Tibbs...” According to Shaft, “It was such a waste of energy being black. Emotional and physical.”

One major casualty of the dominance of the white perspective is that the relationship of each protagonist to the Black community is written out of the text. John Shaft was born and raised in Harlem, but throughout the series, it is clear that he has little attachment to the Black community, and even less appreciation for it. “Shaft had never felt nostalgia, at least never for anything of his childhood and youth...” At times, he is even hostile. When walking through an apartment building in a low-income section of Harlem, he asks himself, “Why in the fuck don’t they burn them down?”

Virgil Tibbs is similarly detached from the Black community. In one scene a group of whites are accepting of him; Tibbs expresses that, “It was like walking through the gates into Paradise. He looked down at his ebony hands and hated them.” Within the African-American community there are networks of support for Black people that help to insulate them from an alienating, white-controlled society. Tibbs, however, looks to whites for acceptance and support. When he does not receive it, he is understanding, and blames himself. When he does receive it, he is excessively grateful, yet he continues to “hate” his Blackness. The fact remains, however, that the Tibbs character does not even consider the Black community as a viable base of support. The overall theme here is of Black self-hatred, emotional dependency on whites, and dismissal of the value of Black peoples’

interaction with each other.

On the surface, one major difference between Tibbs and Shaft is in their relationships to women, particularly to white women. The following is Tibbs' response to Linda, a young white woman. "Tibbs could not help watching her. The symmetry of her body was perfect and the curve at the small of her back made him wish fervently that he was a painter." The sight of a white woman's body elicits no sexual desire in Tibbs, but rather an aesthetic appreciation. Thus, Tibbs plays perfectly the role of the tom; he validates the Eurocentric standards of beauty, while accepting the fact that white women are sexually and romantically off-limits to him. Shaft, on the other hand, overtly

desires and is desired by white women. In *Shaft's Big Score*, one such white woman, Gail, watches how Shaft drives her Ferrari: "She toyed with the thought of that machinelike energy being directed into her." While the responses differ, they both reflect what Bogle notes as "the assumption that the white woman was the ultimate in female desirability, herself a symbol of white pride, power, and beauty."

Therefore, although Tibbs is aesthetically attracted to white women, and Shaft is sexually attracted to white women, it is taken for granted by each author that their Black protagonist will appreciate or desire white women above all.

In *The Cool Cottomtail*, Tibbs is called upon to solve a difficult murder case, in a nudist resort, where he meets the eighteen year old Linda. The following is Tibbs' response when he sees her naked for the first time:

"She entered the room with such easy grace that Tibbs, for a reason he could not explain, was instantly reminded of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony...the girl who had entered the room was beautiful...He dared to smile at her."

Once again, at the sight of a naked, ostensibly beautiful white woman,

Tibbs evidences no sexual desire, rather an aesthetic appreciation. Thus, in the long tradition of the tom, Tibbs is desexed.

This theme of aesthetics continues throughout the novel. Tibbs has the following response to a painting of Linda: "She seemed to be...some exalted symbol of all young womanhood, from her clear-blue unafraid eyes to her firm, beautifully formed breasts." After Tibbs catches the murderer, Linda exclaims, "Virgil! ...Why can't all men be like you?" Tibbs has the following response: "In his whole lifetime no one had ever said such a thing to him before. He dropped his head as his throat went tight and dry...he had been judged as a man and had not been

found wanting...He was for those few seconds no longer a Negro..." As if in some sort of fairy tale, the magical appreciation of a white woman transcends Tibbs for a brief moment beyond the unpleasant status of his Blackness. White womanhood is "exalted," and Black manhood is, essentially, insulted, and demeaned.

While Ball takes for granted that white women are ultimately

desirable, he also makes the assumption that Black women are not. In *Death for a Playmate*, we meet three Black women. The first is Mrs. Howell: "She was a big woman, well over two hundred pounds..." The second Black woman Luella, "was about fifteen and...undeniably ripe for her age. Her features were somewhat on the aquiline side, her waist slender, her breasts conspicuously high and full." The third is Mrs. Orthcutt. She is dressed "in plain unrelieved black which surrounded her ample figure with as much grace as it could." These Black women also spring from the same constellation of Black stereotypes that Bogle has identified. The two older women are easily recognizable as "the mammy" who is female, and obese. Luella, on the other hand, is easily recognizable as one of the mulatto character offshoots that Bogle describes,

the "sexy black woman" who is "a 'cinamon-colored gal' with Caucasian features." While the gaze of the book portrays the naked Linda as an "exalted symbol of all young womanhood," the fully clothed young Black woman is called "ripe," and she is appraised, physically dissected, and ultimately, sexually objectified. The two older women, on the other hand, are presented as typical mummies, "desexed, overweight, dowdy." As with his protagonist, Ball is unable to find an authentic Black female voice, instead he settles for age-old stereotypes.

Unlike Virgil Tibbs, John Shaft's overtures to both white and Black women are, for the most part, overtly sexual. There is, however, a great discrepancy between white and Black women, both in Tidyman's descriptions of them, and Shaft's interactions with them. "He [Shaft] tried to recall...Negro girls who had caught his attention. He remembered too many. They were all over the place...He had tried a taste...Who could remember the faces and the bodies, let alone the names?"

The central romantic interest of *Shaft's Big Score* is a Black woman. In one scene, "Arma Asby was pressing up against him...Her small, high breasts were flattened like raisin-dotted muffins against him." Tidyman's description "raisin-dotted muffins" is not particularly erotic, but it is especially lacking when compared to descriptions of white women's bodies. In *Shaft Among the Jews*, we meet Amy: "Her breasts were small, but perfect, firm cones...Her body was lean...Gauzy, clinging nylon went smoothly, silently down long columns of legs...A truly incredible ass..." We meet Cara, who has a "glowing young body...Her nipples were buds of dusty rose...her body radiated the warmth of life—life and promise..." Such descriptions are luxurious and intricate, but they are reserved, apparently, for white women.

In the second Shaft book, there is another Black woman, Rita: "She had a very elegant body, the soft beige of clean sand, the pubic triangle black and flossy between slender, sloping hips." While the description is not quite as luxurious, it manages to be complimentary. Shaft's sexual interaction with her is, however,



decidedly negative. "She was a performer in the circus of the bedroom...He really felt unnecessary...She was a deep pit that could never be filled..." Rita, like Luella in Ball's *Death for a Playmate*, is a sexually exaggerated mulatto stereotype. This is in direct contrast with his sexual interaction with Ellie, a white woman. She and Shaft have intercourse for "...an hour. Two hours. The time drifted away as gently as old fog." With Rita, however, there is no such tenderness. As Shaft is leaving the sexual encounter, she asks him for a kiss goodbye, but he refuses. One might suggest that this is merely part of Shaft's playboy persona, but at the end of *Shaft Among the Jews*, as Cara, a white woman, is preparing to leave the country, Shaft has the following response: "He reached over and held onto her hand...He had thought of a million things to do with her and now they wouldn't do any of them." In these passages, Shaft reflects the assumption that white women are, as Bogle says, "the ultimate in female desirability," relegating Black women to the role of second-rate sex objects.

The only Black woman of whom Shaft approves is Helen: "She was the least black Negro he knew, possibly the most attractive, possibly the most feminine and womanly as well." Helen has "hazel eyes," and is "a Negro girl two or three generations removed from the blackness of skin..." Clearly Helen is considered attractive and acceptable because she most closely approximates white women. In this way, Tidyman, like Ball, presents a Eurocentric standard of beauty, and exalts white womanhood at the expense of Black women.

While the Tibbs and Shaft series both reflect a prejudice toward white beauty standards, it would seem that a major difference between the two of them is that Shaft asserts himself sexually with white women. Even this, however, is questionable. In *Shaft Among the Jews*, Tidyman would have us think differently. Shaft concedes that in his relationship with Amy, "she was in charge and had been right from the first." This theme continues throughout the book: Cara tells him "'Finish your coffee before it gets cold.'... A very strong-willed woman who was used to taking over...well, to hell with that jive...He

wasn't about to be managed by anyone. He made up his mind to that even as he drank his coffee before it got cold." Although Shaft sexually crosses color lines, the power relationship stays intact. It is decidedly white over Black.

Another area in which Ball and Tidyman seem to concur, is with regard to their characterizations of the militant Black political movements of the time in which they wrote. In fact, their approaches are strikingly similar. They each present a fictional Black militant character and use their Black protagonist to insult and discredit him. In the end, there is some sort of confrontation between the detective protagonist and the Black militant. Predictably, the protagonist wins each time. In *Death for a Playmate*, John Ball even goes as far as using the Tibbs character to insult non-fictional Black militants, as well as the one he creates:

"Stokely Carmichael...in Tibbs's opinion, had set the Negro cause back by a generation. Then there had been Rap Brown with his fiery demands for violence and his gospel of hate...It would be hard for anyone to top that...but Miles Orthcutt [Ball's fictional character] had risen to the challenge...he had carried hate-white fervor to new heights of intensity."

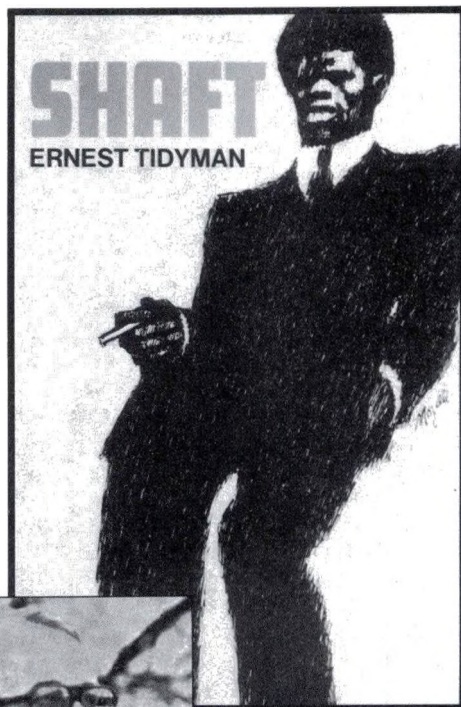
Orthcutt's mother has the following to say about her son: "We aren't proud of him," she says, "he's disgraced us."

During a rally, Ball implicitly compares Orthcutt to Hitler. "He was in complete command of his audience, controlling the emotional level [of the crowd]." Tibbs fears that if the whole scene is "not brought swiftly under control, a holocaust could follow." Like all good toms, Tibbs is more worried about the possible danger to whites than any potential among the militants for his own liberation.

The first confrontation between Tibbs

and Orthcutt takes place during the rally. Tibbs takes the microphone from Orthcutt and wins the crowd over with his own personal success story: "I came out of a shack in the Deep South...and I fought for the chance to go to school. Because...it was the only chance I had in a white man's world.'...He felt it—he had them with him now...In his [Orthcutt's] place Virgil Tibbs took command. 'OK,' he announced. 'The party's over.'"

I would suggest that this scene is historically improbable. Given the volatile



ERNEST TIDYMAN,  
1928-1984



KURT GINZHER

mood of the Los Angeles African-American community in the late 1960s, a Black police officer taking over the microphone at a militant rally would be unlikely to win the crowd over. More probable, I suspect, is that he would be dismissed as an "Uncle Tom," and run the risk of physical assault. In Ball's scenario, however, history is revised, and the masses of people respond to the tom instead of the militant.

The final confrontation, however, takes place at the end of the book. "I know more about being a Negro than



you ever will.'...He looked toward Orthcutt and withered him...'I'm Virgil Tibbs...Now who the hell are you!'"

In *Shaft*, we meet Ben Buford, who is referred to as a "nationalist leader." Instead of being characterized as dangerous, Buford is repeatedly ridiculed. "Shaft thought he looked...like a praying mantis that had been trained to wear



a turtleneck." In a confrontation, Shaft tells Buford, "Revolution, my ass. You just found a new way to chase pussy." Near the end of the book, Shaft tells Buford: "Why don't you go up on the roof and shoot some little old lady in the head while she's walking with the dog. That's your style, man." Shaft's triumph over Buford comes at the end of a long argument: "'Shut up,' Shaft ordered. There was finality in it...Buford's mouth opened slightly, then closed." In both of these cases, the authors use their Black protagonists to confront and triumph over Black militant caricatures that they create. Ball presents the militant as violent and dangerous; Tidyman characterizes his nationalist leader as pathetic, but the effect is the same. In the confrontations, white authors speak through the mouths of their Black protagonists to discredit and disregard Black militants.

Virgil Tibbs and John Shaft are not Black heroes. Creating a man and coloring him brown does not make him a Black man; putting a badge or a private detective's license into his hand does not make him a hero. Due to each author's inability to provide his protagonist with an authentic Black consciousness, Tibbs and Shaft are consigned to be Black stereotypes in the white mind, and the narrative voice and gaze of the books remains white.

For both Tibbs and Shaft, their

authors undermine them in too many ways throughout these books for them to be genuinely heroic. Each detective implicitly or explicitly rejects Black culture, the Black community and Black women. Each accepts and internalizes a negative view of Blackness and, ultimately, each detective rejects himself. Instead of speaking for themselves, they become mouthpieces for their creators' white perspectives. Instead of representing Black people, Tibbs and Shaft represent the authors' stereotypes of how Black people are, or their fantasies of how they wish Black people would be.

Without any genuine understanding or appreciation of Black people, Ball and Tidyman revert to familiar racial stereotypes that have been somewhat revised for the 60s and 70s.

One reason Virgil Tibbs and John Shaft were able to attain some degree of heroism within film was due to the contributions of Black actors and other Black artists to the collaborative process of filmmaking. Yet the films, like the books, were deeply limited. Certainly the film industry has its own work to do in transcending Black stereotypes.

I am not suggesting here that white authors cannot or should not create Black characters. I am suggesting that white authors cannot create Black heroes unless they are prepared to affirm Black heroism. Unfortunately, John Ball and Ernest Tidyman just were not prepared.

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JOYCE DAVID

# Detour: The Column

By

MICHELE SLUNG

USUALLY IN THE WORLD OF MYSTERY, IT'S THE CORPSES WHO DANGLE. LATELY, HOWEVER, IT'S BEEN A GROUP OF UNFORTUNATE AUTHORS—VICTIMS NOT OF THROAT BUT LIST-CUTTING. ONE COULD READ THIS SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS AT VARIOUS HOUSES EITHER AS LOSS OF CONFIDENCE BY THEIR

publishers in their mystery-publishing programs or simply as a method of economic relief achieved by tossing overboard those folks who happen to be standing, by no fault of their own, nearest the edge.

Still, no matter how you look at it, it's murder.

Myself, I found it curious that these sudden pen-o-cides came on the heels of a four-page *Publishers Weekly* (March 8, 1993) article on the absolute "life & death" necessity of bookstores maintaining a serious commitment to genre backlist. All sorts of the usual vice-presidents (there's been an epidemic of title enhancement in publishing in recent years: if you can't double your salary you can at least double your LMP listing, with an "and" now being the industry equivalent of ennoblement with a "von") weighed in. They know who they are. And while

undoubtedly, they themselves are as vulnerable to the sudden whims of the number crunching types as their authors, still, the juxtaposition of these opposing sets of circumstance couldn't help but seem a bit weird.

In fact, one could even, without much of a stretch, feel sorry for the editors and marketing directors who, as a rule, operate without the benefit of a contractual safety net; the disappointed writers did have advances and got to keep them as a sort of pewter-handshake gesture.

Publishing, for most folks, is off the gold standard.

Still, I'd have to believe from all the evidence—helpless cries of pain from writers and their only slightly more stoic agents—that they'd rather have been published than bought off. Even had a bonafide book and no cash. It's just not the same, somehow, to send your aunts and uncles and grade-school teachers a Xeroxed copy of the manuscript as it is to dispatch them to the nearest shopping mall for a shiny new book. (One could, I suppose, mail them a copy of the original contract as proof, but getting through the boilerplate could prove a bit daunting.) And yet it is actually fairly problematic to build backlist without a reasonable carry-through on the front part, that is to say,

those new and nearly new authors.

When I was a book-buyer for a New York shop years ago, I used to proclaim to anyone who'd listen my certainty that publishing and the world of literature would benefit from a year's moratorium.



LOBBER/DAVIDSON

Anyone who's ever watched sales reps with bulging briefcases descend seasonally and had to find shelf space for new titles in limited quarters, not to mention pack up reproachful-looking cartons of returns, might easily agree with me—in principle. After all, it would be great if, in this un-best of all possible worlds in which we dwell, someone had carte blanche simply to repackage and repromote all the wonderful books of even two or three years ago, not to mention two or three decades, and not be distracted at the same time by vast streams of the distracting New.

But in truth, my utopian dream is probably known as a "secondhand book dealer." However, few of them have advertising and promotion budgets. Dead authors don't tour (supply your own punchline here). Yet what was most fascinating to me about the *PW* piece was how the mystery backlist of my own early days, which once seemed to me so classic and truly immutable (the *Queen's Quorum* kind of absolutes), hardly figures at all. Chandler, Hammett, Cain, Stout, Gardner and John D. Macdonald each make brief appearances, but instead of Conan Doyle one gets loony mention of "the ever-prolific Steve Allen," for example.

Basically, my moratorium scheme

would only be fair to those living writers who'd already managed the tricky feat of publication. Many of them, under-reviewed and under-sold, might thank me. The others, still waiting on the sidelines, would not. The problem is that keeping the widest range of books available, everything from little-seen but highly desirable curiosities to the best of, say, Michael Innes or Craig Rice, to all of Agatha Christie and Dick Francis and Elizabeth George, along with, your college roommate's couple of out-of-print p.i. novels, is not a juggling act anyone's yet mastered.

We all know this. It's just that those of us who care a lot wish it weren't so. And whatever the currently fashionable strategy may be—frontlist at the expense of backlist or vice-versa—a satisfying balance always proves frustratingly elusive. My whining, really, is pretty predictable, then, and it may just be that I haven't adjusted to a world where a *PW* article on mystery backlist reminds me that nothing is, at least in the short run, forever, not even Dr. Thorndyke ■



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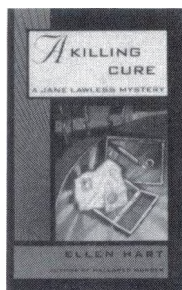
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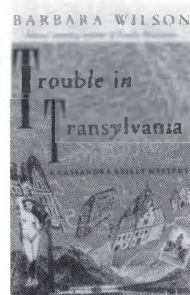
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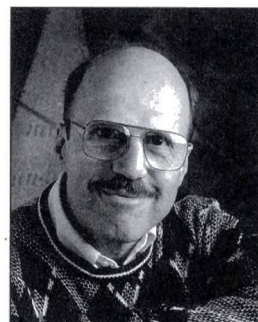


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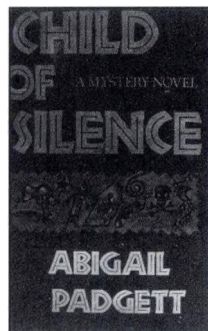
BY MARVIN LACHMAN

There have long been sleuths in mystery fiction with impairments, ranging from those who lost limbs to Nero Wolfe and his agoraphobia. Someone, searching for a rhyme, ungenerously referred to them as "The Defective Detectives." They are actually some of the more interesting series characters in our field, and they are certainly not disabled from solving mysteries. A welcome addition to this group is Barbara "Bo" Bradley in Abigail Padgett's first novel **Child of Silence** (1993, Mysterious Press, \$17.95), who is a manic-depressive. She is also a courageous social worker who, despite personal danger, determines to solve the mystery of why someone wants to kill a deaf child who, though bright, has never even been taught to sign.

Padgett's heroine has a condition which, as far as I know, is unique in mystery fiction. However, some of the other plot devices are familiar, including incest, child abuse, and political corruption. There is also a villain who is scarcely human and a major unanswered question in the resolution of the book's plot. Yet, I recommend this book highly, suggesting you suspend disbelief and go with Padgett's exciting narrative flow. She tells such a powerful, heartbreaking story that it is the rare mystery reader who will be able to put this book down. Bradley's viewpoint is one alien to the reader fortunate enough not to be afflicted with severe mood swings, but Padgett shows the talent of a more experienced writer by enabling us to identify with her.

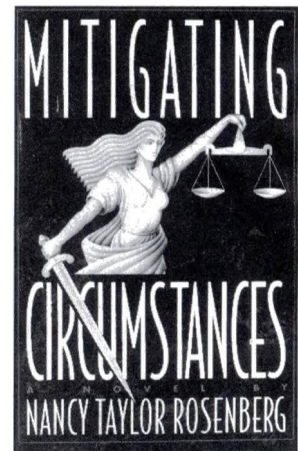
Because there is a certain amount of detective work inherent in genealogy, it is a good device for Graham Landrum's first mystery, **The Famous D.A.R. Murder Mystery** (1992, St. Martin's Press, \$17.95). A body is found in an

old Virginia cemetery by four Daughters of the American Revolution members who went there to investigate the grave site of a Revolutionary War hero. They alternate as narrators, and they are joined by two others, making for a surfeit of story tellers—and detectives. There is a funny scene in which one of the women (age 86!) tracks down clues in a male striptease joint. It is not the detective work that makes this low-key book pleasant reading. The characters are decent, and their sincere dedication to the D.A.R. is touching. Unfortunately, my memory is long enough to recall what Landrum totally ignores in this paean: the D.A.R.'s shameful treatment of the late Marian Anderson. Since Landrum's book is the first (in my memory) to deal with the Daughters of the American Revolution in a mystery, a more balanced picture (warts and all) would have been better.



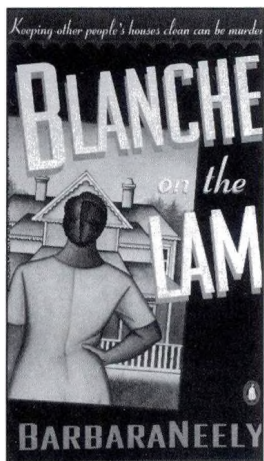
Back in print in 1993 is Harry Kemelman's first novel, **Friday the Rabbi Slept Late** (1964, Fawcett Crest, \$4.99). All of the elements which made this a very successful series were present here, including the synagogue politics which cause Rabbi David Small to have so little security. (In one book later in the series, he even is asked to write his own job description.) There is much general background on religion, especially in the ecumenical discussions between Small and the policeman who starts by suspecting him of murder but later becomes a friend and collaborator, Chief Hugh Lanigan. What sets *Friday* apart from the rest of the series is its stronger mystery plot, and that makes it worth reading, if there has been a gap in your mystery education, or rereading. The detective work in this story of a murder on synagogue grounds is up to the standard of Kemelman's Nicky

Welt short stories, and that is compliment indeed. The solution, along with Kemelman's evocation of suburban New England life (his "Barnard's Crossing" is based on his own town of Marblehead, Mass.) make this a book which deserved its many weeks on the bestseller list.



Assistant District Attorney Lily Forrester in Nancy Taylor Rosenberg's **Mitigating Circumstances** (1993, Dutton, \$21.00) is overworked at the office and underappreciated at home. Her teenage daughter is spoiled by her husband who seems to be a jerk, and that is giving him the benefit of the doubt. Things go from bad to worse when she and her daughter are victimized by a criminal pervert. (The dust jacket calls it an "unspeakable crime," so I won't speak about it.) Most of the book is then taken up by her revenge and the emotions it engenders, with not enough rational discussion of the subject of vigilantism.

I realize that when one is the victim of a crime, one cannot act rationally. Look what happened to Michael Dukakis when he tried to answer that hypothetical question about the rape of his wife in a nonemotional manner during the 1988 Presidential debates. Yet, this book's 363



pages of emotion and violence seem a bit much. Even the dialogue is overheated, as when a police detective says, "I'm the one who has to inhale the rotting flesh of the society we live in." Lily was the incest victim of her grandfather, and there is an overly graphic description of her extramarital sexual affair. I'm sure someone can rationalize these elements as important to the plot, but to me they seemed contrived and gratuitous. *Mitigating Circumstances* will remind you of one of the television movies of the week, and, unfortunately, I use that comparison in the pejorative sense.

One's domestic help can be very important, as President Clinton and two of his nominees for Attorney General found out. Even before a national spotlight was placed in this area, I reported a trend. In 1992 Kathy Hogan Trocheck used an Atlanta cleaning service to solve a mystery, and Alison Glen's amateur detective pretended to be a cleaning woman in order to gather clues. Now

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published in paperback in 1993 is the reprint of Barbara Neely's first mystery, **Blanche on the Lam** (1992, Penguin, \$4.95). This mystery starts with Blanche White, a North Carolina black woman facing a thirty day prison sentence because she cashed a relatively small check without having sufficient funds. Her subsequent adventures lead her to a position as a domestic with a strange family and to investigate murder. Blanche starts out as an interesting, unconventional character with a detective's curiosity, but she ends up as a bit of a bore. She constantly dwells on her region's racial attitudes but practices considerable reverse discrimination herself, with frequent references to "crackers" and "whitemales" (one word), always in a derogatory manner. There is too little plot and movement, with most of the "action" occurring in Blanche's mind. The book is padded with descriptions of the meals Blanche prepares. Finally, a scarcely believable confession by the killer ends a disappointing start to a series which may get better if the author doesn't try to exact reparations from readers of escape fiction for past injustices against blacks.

Neely is certainly a livelier and more realistic writer than Emily Brightwell (possibly a pseudonym, since the book is copyright in the name of the publisher, Berkley, of this 1993 paperback original) (\$3.99). **The Inspector and Mrs. Jeffries**. We are asked to believe that Gerald Witherspoon has risen to the rank of Scotland Yard Inspector, despite his complete ineptitude, because of the detective ability of his housekeeper, Mrs. Hepzibah Jeffries. It might be fun to accept that premise if this book conveyed its setting (Victorian London), had dialogue that wasn't wooden, and had a more interesting plot. Mrs. J never begins to compensate for Witherspoon, a sort of terminally bland edition of Joyce Porter's Inspector Dover.

Many mystery readers like books which delve deeply into a particular subject, and often a new writer with a special interest is only too happy to oblige them. Take J.S. Borthwick's **The Case of the Hookbilled Kites** (originally published by St. Martin's Press in 1982; reprinted by them in paperback, \$4.50). It is probably the most knowledgeable (and best) mystery

about birding, or bird watching, as the uninitiated call it. Borthwick sets her mystery in one of the true birding hot spots in the U.S., the Rio Grande valley of southeast Texas, and she does an excellent job of depicting that state. She presents a large cast of birders, most of whom are subjects in two murders in a wildlife refuge but, for a new writer, she is unusually adept at making each of them rather distinctive. Despite four detectives working on the case, two of whom (Sarah Deane and Dr. Alex McKenzie) later became Borthwick's series sleuths, this book works better as a thriller than as a traditional puzzle. It ends with an exciting chase in Big Bend National Park, but many of the clues leading to the solution are brought in from "off-stage" at the end, never having been presented to the reader.

Many years ago, there was a hit Broadway play, *Abie's Irish Rose*, based on the idea that audiences would be amused by playing Irish and Jewish cultures off against each other. Mysteries, especially those set in the San Francisco-Berkeley area have occasionally featured multi-cultural characters, like Poul Anderson's Trygve Yamamura, Reginald Bretnor's Errol Vasquez Munrooney, and Dorothy Bryant's Jessie Posey, who describes her background as Polish, Mexican, Japanese and black. The private eye in Sandra West Prowell's first mystery, **By Evil Means** (1993, Walker, \$19.95) is Phoebe Siegal, described on page two as the product of a Jewish-Irish marriage, though that is not relevant to the plot.

Phoebe, like Padgett's Bo Bradley, has psychological problems, tied to the fact that a series of disasters has befallen her in the month of March. She is independently wealthy (another recent trend: the revival of the rich detective), so she can afford to close her office every March. However, this March a case presents itself which involves the suicide three years ago of one of Phoebe's brothers. In trying to find the truth, she is menaced by assorted human beings, as well as a horse and a killer dog. (She also has an annoyingly neurotic cat, a fact I mention with considerable trepidation, considering what happened the last time I criticized a cat in this column.)

Prowell's Billings, Montana setting is



fresh, but some plot elements, such as child abuse, are becoming clichéd, as is some of the writing. Phoebe passes out into that famous “black, bottomless pit,” and Prowell creates a killer who, in a convenient confession, complains, “I didn’t have any choice.” I did and stayed with *By Evil Means* and found it, on balance, a pretty decent, if flawed, first mystery.

W.L. Ripley’s *Dreamsicle* (1993, Little, Brown & Co., \$19.95) may well prove to be the *Red Harvest* of the 1990’s. Its fictional Missouri town, Paradise, is every bit as bloody and corrupt as Hammett’s Poisonville. Paradise is dying, though more because of shopping malls on its outskirts than from the labor wars and mine pollution of Hammett’s Montana town. Ripley’s hero is Wyatt Storme who quit the Dallas Cowboy’s without giving any explanation and now tries to right society’s wrongs, while enjoying his retirement in Travis McGee fashion.

*Dreamsicle* reads as if it were written as a pilot for a television show, with younger editions of Robert Redford and James Garner destined to play Storme and his buddy Chuck Easton. Actually, the roles are interchangeable, since they “sound” alike, with their seemingly endless comedy routine of wisecracks borrowed from Philip Marlowe, by way of Spenser. Each is still haunted by his service in Vietnam. They don’t get a very difficult mystery to solve, since, though the book has many villains, there is very little question regarding their identity. They are involved in the drug trade, with the tide referring to yet another new drug “more powerful than crack.” Where Ripley shines is in his ability to write action scenes, including as bloody (and exciting) an ending as I’ve read recently. ■



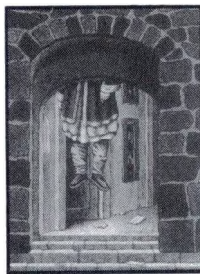
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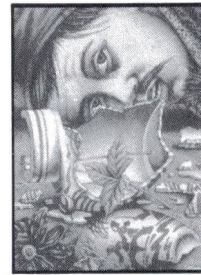


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A LITTLE CLASS *on* MURDER:

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*An Interview with* CAROLYN G. HART

BY CHARLES L.P. SILET

Although she is the author of more than twenty mystery and suspense novels, Carolyn G. Hart is best known for her award-winning *Death on Demand* series which features crime bookstore owner, Annie Laurance, and her lawyer/private detective husband, Max Darling. Set on a resort island off the coast of South Carolina, these novels offer a delightful mix of old Southern charm, eccentric island characters, and crime fiction esoterica.

Now Ms. Hart is launching a new series with *Dead Man's Island* which stars Henrie O, a retired newspaper woman, and which will be harder-edged, first-person novels written from a more mature point of view than the Annie Laurance books.

Carolyn G. Hart has been active in a number of crime writer's organizations. She has served on the Board of Directors of the Southwest chapter and

on the National Board of the Mystery Writers of America, and she has been both vice-president and president of the organization of mystery writers and readers, Sisters in Crime.

**TAD:** Let me begin this interview by asking how you got started writing in the first place?

**HART:** I'm not sure you really want

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Charles L.P. Silet, teaches contemporary fiction and film at Iowa State University. He is currently putting together a book of his interviews with crime writers and editing a collection of essays on Alfred Hitchcock's classic film *Psycho*.



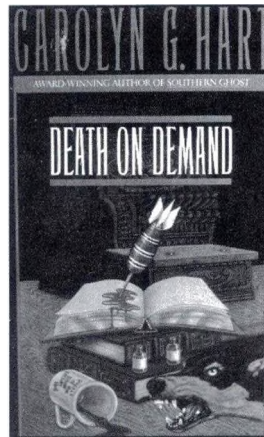
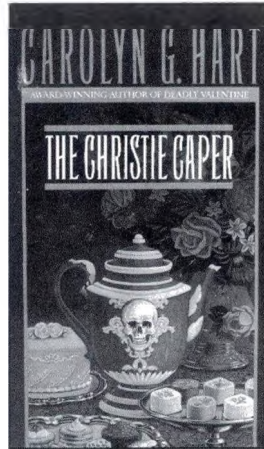
the whole story. My first book was a juvenile mystery that was published the year my daughter was born, and that was 1964. So, I've been writing for a long, long time. I trained to be a newspaper reporter. That's what I intended to do, then I met a young law student and instead married him. I worked on a newspaper while he was in law school. We moved to Washington, D. C. and he was with a firm there for a while and our son was born. That was back in the days before young women were expected to have MBAs, and climb the Matterhorn, and raise three kids and bowl twice a week, all at the same time! So I was staying at home with Philip and I didn't want to go back to work on a newspaper because it is enormously exhausting work.

But I was unhappy when I wasn't writing. I had never thought a lot about writing fiction. I had always focused on being a reporter, but I've always been a mystery reader. I saw an ad in back of *The Writer* listing a contest that Dodd, Mead and *Calling All Girls* magazine were sponsoring for an 8-12 year old mystery for girls. So I wrote *The Secret of the Cellars* and it won. It was published in 1964. I wrote another 8-12 year old mystery and three young adult suspense novels and in '76 my first adult suspense novel, *Flee From The Past*, was published in Bantam paperback. I continued to write romantic suspense and mysteries, and I continued erratically to sell them, but I'd never hear from that publishing house again and I'd write another book and sell it.

**TAD:** How did you finally make a breakthrough in your writing?

**HART:** I had been teaching writing in the journalism school at the Univ. of Oklahoma. I was terribly discouraged because I had about seven manuscripts in New York and nobody was interested in buying them. This was in about '84 or '85. I thought, this is really dumb. I had about 13 books published, and nothing very exciting happened with any of them. I thought—I'm going to write one more book and then I'm going to quit. Of course, I'd threatened this a lot and my family never believed me.

I had been invited to speak at a day-long MWA seminar in Houston. I sort of slunk down there because I felt like this enormous failure. I was very depressed, but the real upshot of that meeting was that I realized how much I love mysteries. Always before, I had tried, and this is



a mistake so many writers make, I had tried to figure out what the market was looking for. The agent I had at that point said nobody is buying mysteries, you might as well forget it. I had had five mysteries sell in England and four of them have never sold in the U.S. That agent said you know, you've got to write romances, that's all anybody's buying today. I did disguise one mystery as a romance and I sold it to Harlequin as a Gothic, but that was not much fun. After this day-long talk about mysteries, I thought—I am going to write the mystery I have always wanted to write and if

it doesn't go then I'm just going to quit—and I wrote *Death on Demand*. I got a new agent who sent it to Kate Miciak at Bantam. She was looking for a Tommy-Tuppence kind of mystery.

**TAD:** At what point did you realize that you had a series?

**HART:** Well, actually, that was the basis upon which it was sold. Kate said she wanted three more with the same characters. She's very, very strong on series. She does a few single titles, but most of her authors do series. I was perfectly agreeable. At that point in my career, the idea that anybody would even buy a book was thrilling, and so I thought that sure, of course, I can do a series.

**TAD:** It's wonderful the way you build from that first book when we're introduced to Annie and to Max and then you follow with the courtship book and the book when they get married.

**HART:** Well, I have to admit Max gets a little bit of a short shrift in *The Christie Caper* because he's offstage quite a bit. I couldn't handle him and the implications of the story at the same time so he does not have a very strong role in that novel. In the next, *Southern Ghost*, he has a major role.

**TAD:** Where did the idea of the bookstore come from?

**HART:** I don't know why I made it a mystery bookstore—I guess just for fun. I decided if I was going to stick with writing, I was going to have a lot of fun with it. I changed my idea about who the heroine was going to be and I moved the bookstore from California to South Carolina.

**TAD:** Why South Carolina? Why an island?

**HART:** Because at this mystery meeting I went to in Houston, Ruth Cavin was speaking—she was then an editor at Walker—and as just a sort of throw-away line in her discussion, she mentioned that 50% of all manuscripts she received were set in California. I had

originally intended to set the bookstore in Carmel. I'm not completely stupid, I didn't want to set a book where 50% of all books in the mystery world are set. I only knew one other vacation area and that was Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, because we have vacationed there since the mid-1970s, and I wanted a resort background.

**TAD:** Why did you decide to have your central character, Annie, get married?

**HART:** That's a very perceptive question. Because I was making a very deliberate statement. I truly believe that happy marriages are quite possible. I have been married for 35 years and I think marriage is a wonderful institution but I know that there are a great many women who have had difficult lives—they are estranged from people, they are divorced, they are unhappy. But you *can* have a good marriage, it really can exist, and that was what I wanted to celebrate with Max and Annie.

**TAD:** There is a domestic quality not only to Max and Annie but their whole world.

**HART:** I try to deal with the same thing that Agatha Christie did in her books: life in a very realistic fashion, with the kind of people that you go to work with, that you go to school with. What Christie did was write parables. The traditional mystery, in my view, is a parable of life; I think it has a reality which the hard-boiled private detective books don't. They, oddly enough, are the more truly romantic books because they are about the white knight on a quest. The private detective is trying to remain incorruptible in a corrupt world, and this is truly a romantic vision. In my view, what I write touches much more directly on reality.

**TAD:** How do you go about thinking about the next book?

**HART:** It's always hard. If it were easy, I guess everybody would be writing. I'm not really sure exactly what I'm going to do until I really get into it. I do have a

A  
CAROLYN G. HART  
*Reading List*

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*The "Death on Demand" Mysteries*

DEATH ON DEMAND (1987)  
DESIGN FOR MURDER (1988)  
SOMETHING WICKED (1988)  
HONEYMOON WITH MURDER (1989)  
A LITTLE CLASS ON MURDER (1989)  
DEADLY VALENTINE (1990)  
THE CHRISTIE CAPER (1991)  
SOUTHERN GHOST (1992)

~

*The Henrie O Mysteries*

DEAD MAN'S ISLAND (1993)  
SCANDAL IN FAIR HAVEN  
(FORTHCOMING, 1994)

~

*Other Mystery Novels*

FLEE FROM THE PAST (1975)  
A SETTLING OF ACCOUNTS (1976)  
THE RICH DIE YOUNG  
(UK, 1983)  
DEATH BY SURPRISE (UK, 1983)  
CASTLE ROCK (UK, 1983)  
SKULDUGGERY (UK, 1984)

theme I'm thinking about when I'm writing a book. In *Deadly Valentine*, for example, I was demonstrating how totally screwed up everyone's life gets if nobody loves them. Of course, in *The Christie Caper*, it had to do with how sensitive authors are to critics. I sometimes don't really know exactly what it is that I'm doing until I have finished the book, and then I can look back and I can see more clearly. *Southern Ghost* is a story of a family where the lack of love has twisted everyone's relationship in this family. I didn't really discover that until I got about halfway through it.

**TAD:** Do you find the series limiting?

**HART:** Only with Annie's age. Otherwise, it's wonderful because a

series gives you a chance to get to know your characters much better than you ever would if you just did one book with them. It's just like knowing people well or knowing them only slightly in life, if you spend more time with someone, you're going to get more from them. No, I really don't feel a series is limiting. But I am excited about doing two series rather than just one.

**TAD:** Aside from Agatha Christie, who influenced you most? Other mystery writers?

**HART:** Well, two other writers in particular, Phoebe Atwood Taylor and Mary Roberts Rinehart. Those two along with Agatha Christie, have had the greatest influence on me as a writer and possibly Phoebe Atwood Taylor most of all. I don't know why because I don't write a zany mystery as she did with her Leonidas Witherall and I certainly don't do homespun mysteries as she did with Asey Mayo but she was always into a lot of fun with language and that's one thing I feel that I do. The thing about Christie that's so impressive is what she could accomplish with such an economy of words. People who don't understand how difficult it is to do a hard thing simply will look at Christie and say this is simplistic, this is shallow, and yet I believe Christie's brilliance is that she could evoke a character so clearly in your mind with five or six words or one or two sentences. P.D. James, who is one of Christie's great detractors, can take 15 pages to describe a character. Which takes genius?

**TAD:** Who do you read?

**HART:** Most of what I have read lately has been by women because I know so many women mystery writers. Nancy Pickard is one of my favorites because on the surface Nancy writes a traditional mystery but there's always an unusual twist in every book that she does. She's a fascinating writer to read. Susan Dunlap's *Rogue Wave* is wonderful. If you haven't read it, you really should. It is just absolutely perfect for that kind of book. I enjoy Joan Hess. She's so funny. I guess you're familiar with Carl Hiaasen, probably, because he's distrib-

uted mass market across the world. But Joan is the female Carl Hiaasen of America. She writes a raucously funny series, the *Maggody* series set in a little village in Arkansas. Sharyn McCrumb has a wonderful style. I mean there are many good writers. P.M. Carlson, Marilyn Wallace, Margaret Maron, and so many more. As I said, I enjoy Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky. They're wonderful writers even though P.I. books aren't my favorite to read.

**TAD:** You've been very active in Sisters in Crime.

**HART:** Yes, and I served as president from October 1991 to October 1992.

**TAD:** Do you think that Sisters in Crime has really made an impact?

**HART:** Oh, yes. There's no doubt about it. We started off with five members in 1987; we now have 2200 members in the U.S. and eleven foreign countries.

**TAD:** Are these members all writers?

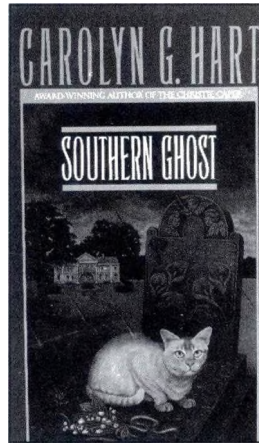
**HART:** They are writers and readers, booksellers and librarians. In a sense, it is more important to have the readers and librarians and booksellers than the writers because they are the ones who carry the word forth about the authors. I'm convinced that we've made a big difference.

**TAD:** Why don't you tell me something about what the organization does?

**HART:** One of the first things that members of Sisters in Crime discovered was that the perception we have that men's books are reviewed in greater numbers than women's was really true. We compared a number of newspapers; initially, the *New York Times* in 1987, and of all the mysteries reviewed in the *Times* 17% were by women. At that point, at least 35% of the mysteries written and published in hardcover were written by women. No one thinks that this was deliberate. Most reviewers truly admire the hard-boiled mystery; it's their perception of the American mystery. Therefore since most women's mysteries deal with personal relationships rather

than with social evil, we just didn't qualify as "real" mystery writers. Sisters in Crime has continued its surveys and shared the results with newspapers. The effect has been very positive. In 1992, the percentage of reviews of mysteries by women rose to 30 percent at *The New York Times*. In 1992, 40 percent of all mysteries were written by women.

**TAD:** Where do you think the group is going to go now? Are you going to publish a magazine?



**HART:** No. We will continue to do our *Books in Print* which has been enormously successful for us, and to sell a map that shows the location of many women sleuths across the country. Our greatest hope is to continue to increase the visibility of women's mysteries.

**TAD:** By way of wrapping this up, let's talk a little bit about your latest novel and what what you've got coming up next.

**HART:** In *Southern Ghost*, I made it up to Max since he didn't get to be quite as much on stage in most of *The Christie Caper*. It's through the Confidential Commissions connection that he becomes involved in an inquiry in Chastain about two deaths that occurred on the same day, father and son, twenty years before. There's a great deal about the background of this family, the Tarrants, and their house, which is an old Southern mansion, and they have just a wonderful Southern

Gothic time of it.

**TAD:** What about the future? Are Annie and Max going on together?

**HART:** They do in *Southern Ghost*; but the current book *Dead Man's Island* will inaugurate a new series. I've done three short stories with a character named Henrietta O'Dwyer Collins. She's a retired newspaperwoman, and she's teaching journalism at a small liberal arts college in Missouri. I like Henrietta. She has a very strong personality. Her nickname is Henrie O, and it was given to her by her late husband, Richard, who said she could pack more surprises into a single day than O'Henry ever did into a short story.

I hope to alternate a Henrie O and an Annie and Max. With Henrie O, who is a much more cynical and jaded character than Annie, it will be refreshing for me to have a different voice.

**TAD:** Other than just being from a different perspective, are you trying to do something new here?

**HART:** Well, yes, I'm also doing something new in the sense that these are a much more harder-edged kind of book than the *Death on Demand* series. I certainly wouldn't call these *Mean Streets* or tough, but there is much less levity involved in these books. The Henrie O books celebrate age and experience. So, you know, I'll just have to see if people like them. I hope they do.

**TAD:** When can we look forward to getting the next Annie and Max book?

**HART:** Well, let's see. The first Henrie O is summer in '93; the second Henrie O will be in '94; I guess the next Annie and Max will be in '95.

**TAD:** And the next Henrie O book?

**HART:** Well, *Scandal in Fair Haven* is the story of small town scandal and it is set in a wealthy suburb of Nashville, Tennessee. So it's an exploration of pride and how people think that their relationships in a small society are more important than anything else in the world. ■



# Murderous Affairs

BY

JANET A. RUDOLPH

ALTHOUGH MANY MYSTERY READERS CONFINE THEIR INTEREST IN MYSTERIES TO READING BY THEMSELVES IN THE PRIVACY OF THEIR OWN LIVING ROOM, THERE ARE OTHERS WHO ENJOY THE CAMARADERIE, THE EXCITEMENT AND THE STIMULATION OF GATHERING WITH OTHER READERS, WRITERS, AND FANS AT MYSTERY CONVENTIONS.

There are many reasons fans and writers choose to attend conventions. Some fans get together to talk about books and socialize, some want to find good books, others want to take a vacation (a convention offers a great opportunity especially if it's held in an interesting city). Many fans and readers want to meet

with writers and hear about their new books. And many writers want to meet with other writers to hear about their successes and failures both in writing and getting published. Pre-published writers often go to conventions to sell a book. Agents and editors attend conventions, and even if they don't want to meet you at this time (after all, they're fans, too), at least you have a chance to listen to them and find out what they're looking for. And, you can meet other pre-published and published writers who can give pointers based on their experiences.

A major part of any mystery convention is the bookroom. Dealers from all over the world bring their specialty books and the books of the attending authors. This is important to fans and writers alike. I've met people at conventions who only visit the bookroom. They never attend panels. To each his own.

Whatever your reasons for attending, there are many conventions to attend. Since this is a column for fans, I thought I'd mention a few fan conventions. Mystery conventions take many forms. **Bouchercon**, the world mystery convention, is the largest convention. First held in 1969, it was composed of fans who got together to discuss mysteries and honor the memory of Anthony Boucher, writer, reviewer and fan. What was originally a gathering of 100 fans has now grown into a huge convention of 1800 fans, writers, editors, and publishers. There is triple-track programming (three panels offered at the same time throughout the convention), a film program, a huge dealer's room, a banquet, other social functions, author signings, readings and more. Panel topics can include anything from "Murder on the Menu: Culinary Crimes" to "Breaking into the Mystery World." Topics are only limited by the committee's or participants' imaginations. Most panels are composed of a good mixture of fans, writers, and editors. Most mystery conventions have a Guest of Honor, and Bouchercon is no exception. Past Guests of Honor at B'Con have included P.D. James, Ed Hoch, Charlotte MacLeod, Lawrence Sanders, and Donald Westlake among others. (In 1993 the Guest of Honor will be Ed McBain.) Since the Bouchercon is a fan convention (orga-

nized and produced by fans) there is usually a fan guest of honor. Past Fan Guests of Honor have included John Nieminski, Marvin Lachman, Len and June Moffatt, Bob Adey, Linda Toole and William F. Deeck.

Many conventions also include awards. The Bouchercon has the Anthony awards. These are best novel, short story, first novel, etc. awards nominated by and voted on by membership. Awards are a whole other topic, but it should be noted that awards are a very important part of Bouchercon and some of the other conventions. And as if panels, banquets, bookrooms, and the bar social scene isn't enough activity, many mystery

## Mystery Readers International Announces Macavity Awards

Members of Mystery Readers International  
nominate and vote in each category.

\*—Winner

### Best Mystery Novel

- \* *The Bootlegger's Daughter*  
by Margaret Maron (Mysterious)
- The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*  
by Sharyn McCrumb (Scribner's)
- White Butterfly*  
by Walter Mosley (Norton)
- Booked to Die*  
by John Dunning (Scribner's)

### Best First Mystery Novel

- Aunt Dimity's Death*  
by Nancy Atherton (Viking)
- \* *Blanche on the Lam*  
by Barbara Neely (St. Martin's)
- Every Crooked Nanny*  
by Kathy Trochek (Harper/Collins)

### Best Non-Fiction/Critical

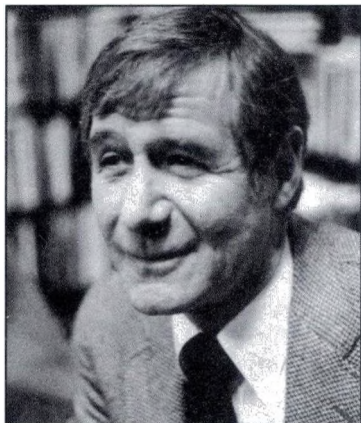
- Alias S.S. Van Dine*  
by John Loughery (Scribner's)
- \* *Doubleday Crime Club Compendium*  
by Ellen Nehr (Offspring Press)

### Best Short Story

- \* "Henri O's Holiday" by Carolyn Hart  
in *Malice Domestic* (Pocket)
- "The Last to Know" by Joan Hess  
in *Malice Domestic* (Pocket)
- "The Hand of Carlos" by Charles McCarr  
in TAD, Vol. 25:4, Fall 1992

groups, both professional and fan, such as Sisters in Crime, Mystery Readers International, Private Eye Writers of America, International Association of Crime Writers, and the American Crime Writers hold functions at Bouchercon since so many of their members are in attendance. The Bouchercon convenes in the Fall with the site rotating from east to midwest to west in the US and with Canada and England taking the Eastern slot a few times.

Bouchercon is organized by fans, and as the location changes every year, so does the committee. In 1993 Bouchercon will take place October 1-3 in Omaha, NE. For more information and registration, write to PO Box 540516, Omaha, NE 68154. In 1994, Bouchercon will convene in Seattle, WA October 6-9. PO Box 1095,



**ED MCBAIN, THE 1993 GUEST OF HONOR AT BOUCHERCON.**

Renton, WA 98057-1095. And in 1995, Bouchercon will be held in Nottingham, England, September 28-October 1. Write to Bouchercon 26, Broadway, 14 Broad Street, Nottingham, England NG1 3AL.

There are also several regional conventions. The original intent of regional conventions was to accommodate local writers and fans who couldn't travel to Bouchercon or to emphasize the uniqueness of the region, but many of the same writers and fans attend regional conventions outside their own region. There are various reasons for this. First, many writers and fans are just not content with gathering together only

## Private Eye Writers of America announces the Nominees for the 1993 Shamus Awards

Winners will be announced in Omaha, Nebraska during Bouchercon, October 1-3. All works nominated were published in 1992.

### Best P.I. Novel

*The Man Who Was Taller Than God*  
by Harold Adams (Walker)  
*Cassandra In Red*  
by Michael Collins (Donald I. Fine)  
*Lullaby Town* by Robert Crais (Bantam)  
*Shallow Graves*  
by Jeremiah Healy (Pocket Books)  
*Special Delivery*  
by Jerry Kennealy (St. Martin's Press)

### Best P.I. Paperback Original

*Lay It On The Line*  
by Catherine Dain (Jove)  
*Dirty Money*  
by Mark Davis (Dell)  
*Last Tango of Dolores Delgado*  
by Mariele Day (Allen & Unwin)  
*The Brutal Ballet*  
by Wayne Dundee (Dell)

### Best First P.I. Novel

*Return Trip Ticket*  
by David C. Hall (St. Martin's Press)  
*Switching The Odds*  
by Phyllis Knight (St. Martin's Press)  
*The Long-Legged Fly*  
by James Sallis (Carroll & Graf)  
*The Woman Who Married A Bear*  
by John Straley (Soho)

### Best P.I. Short Story

"The Messenger" by Jacklyn Butler  
in *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*  
"Safe House" by Loren D. Estleman  
in *Deadly Allies*  
(Doubleday Perfect Crime)  
"A Little Missionary Work"  
by Sue Grafton in *Deadly Allies*  
(Doubleday Perfect Crime)  
"Rest Stop" by Jeremiah Healy  
in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*  
"Mary, Mary Shut The Door"  
by Benjamin Schutz in *Deadly Allies*  
(Doubleday Perfect Crime)

once a year. Another reason is that a convention is always a good place to promote a book.

**Left Coast Crime** is the annual West Coast convention held President's Day Weekend (3 days of events). This convention is limited to 400 attendees, a third of whom are writers. Besides dual track paneling, this convention has added "fireside" chats, police lab visits and forensic lectures. The small nature of this convention creates a relaxed atmosphere which gives fans ample time to get together and chat about favorite books, meet new friends and visit with old ones. Next Left Coast Crime: February 11-13, 1994. Anaheim, CA. Write to PO Box 20602, Riverside, CA 92512-0602.

**The Midwest Mystery and Suspense Convention** is usually held in Omaha on Memorial Day Weekend. This convention has also been known as **The Southwest Mystery and Suspense Convention** (in 1993, when it was held in Austin). This is another small convention but it packs a wallop. It seems to emphasize the hard-boiled

mystery, but all are welcome. The Private Eye Writers of America have an annual meeting at this time where they nominate the Shamus awards. The number of fans who attend and the focus on fans as well as writers is in the true spirit of conventions. (At the time of this writing, I do not have information on '94).

**The Mid Atlantic Mystery Book Fair and Convention** is held in Philadelphia in November. Centrally located, this convention draws people from all over the Eastern Seaboard. Organized by Deen and Jay Kogan, co-chairs of a former Bouchercon, this convention has an excellent reputation. Book room, panels and more: Write to: Detecto Mysterioso Books, Society Hill Playhouse, 507 South 8th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19147 (215) 923-0211

There are also conventions which focus on a particular theme or single author or have grown out of the interest of a particular group. **Malice Domestic** is an annual convention dedicated to "cozy" crime. It is held the

last weekend in April in Bethesda, MD. Since it's limited to 450 participants, there's plenty of time to meet other fans/writers in this very well run convention. Requirement: You must enjoy "comfortable domestic crime." One of the truly nice things about Malice Domestic is that since its held in the same location every year, it's like coming home. Besides panels, a bookroom, and a banquet, there is a high tea held on the final day. Malice Domestic members nominate and vote on the Agatha Awards. Next Malice Domestic, April 22-24, 1994. PO Box 31137, Bethesda, MD 20824-1137.

The Dorothy L. Sayers Society holds an annual convention in England every summer. Speakers, bell ringing, dinner, and services are often part of the program. A Dorothy L. Sayers Centennial Celebration is slated for the U.S. (Madison, WI) in September 1993. Write to Booked for Murder, 2701 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53705 for more information.

There are, of course, many Sherlock Holmes conventions, too numerous to mention here.

Every Spring **Shots on the Page** runs in conjunction with **Shots in the Dark**, an international film, television and arts festival with a crime and mystery theme. Shots on the Page, Broadway, 14 Broad St, Nottingham, England NG1 3AL.

**Semana Negra** is another international film and writers convention which is open to the public. It is held during the summer and consists of a week of meetings, talks, and films.

In addition, there are many libraries and universities which sponsor small conventions and conferences. Please send me any information you have on these conferences, so that I can include them in this column.

This is a very brief summary of some of the conventions in the mystery world. Two more things about mystery conventions need to be mentioned. First, most of these conventions are

organized by fans. Often there is a different committee each year. The committees organize these conventions at great expense of time and energy and with no monetary gain. Consequently, each convention is run differently and some are run better than others. The second thing to consider is how to find out about these conventions and how to sign up. Since the committees which handle these conventions are volunteer and always changing, there is no standard place to write for information.

place to meet other fans, learn about new writers and books, and begin lifetime friendships with other mystery readers. Remember that the worst thing that could happen if you attend a convention is that you could meet a bunch of people who like mysteries and the best thing is that you will have a great time.

**More mystery periodicals and fanzines:**

**Deadly Pleasures** is a wonderful new publication in the mystery field.

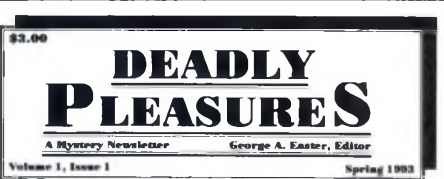
Edited by George Easter, this publication has reviews by some of the best known mystery reader/fans such as Don Sandstrom, Sue Feder, Allen J. Hubin, George Easter, Maryell Cleary, and Bill Deeck. With the demise of **The Mystery Fancier**, this is a welcome new addition. Sample issue \$3. One year/\$12 (\$22/overseas). Checks payable to George Easter, Deadly Pleasures, PO Box 839, Farmington, UT 84025-0839.

Elly-Ann & Fiske Miles have premiered **Murder & Mayhem**, a Mystery Fiction Newsletter. This newsletter is in a 4'x 8' format which makes it easy to stuff into your pocket when you go to the bookstore or library. The first issue had articles on Mystery Writers of America, the Edgars, and some in-depth reviews of

new mysteries. The final page is a checklist of books listed in **Murder & Mayhem**. Sample issue cost \$2.50. To subscribe \$14/8 issues. PO Box 415024, Kansas City, MO 64141.

Cherie Jung, founder of **Over My Dead Body!** The Bulletin Board, has premiered **Over My Dead Body! The Mystery Magazine**. This periodical is a nice mix of new, exciting, short stories from recognized writers and talented new writers. There are also author profiles and reviews. In the future, Cherie plans to include information from various experts—law enforcement, forensics, etc. The first issue which I saw was dedicated to the "crossover" mystery. \$12/4 issues. PO Box 1778, Auburn, WA 98071-1778.

Not new, but for your information,



**BUCKET NUT**  
by Lisa Cody

*Bucket Nut* is a departure of sorts for Lisa Cody. To date, her writing has been compressed into one about West London private investigator Anna Lee, one that tells the story of a hazardous African journey, and a few short stories, the best of which is the Anthony Award-winning "Lucky Dip," which may have given Lisa the idea for *Bucket Nut*. Both are set among the low classes of London. All of Cody's output has been very well written, but pretty standard stuff, although one might argue that the idea of the first is to create a strong

character in this gallop of a London Sibute. She has learned at a very early age, as a runaway from foster care, that one can only rely on herself for help. She may not appear to others as a very likable person, but as the story progresses and little insights are revealed as to why she is who she is, she evokes a compassion and sympathy are evoked. Each day is a struggle to keep her head above water by doing odd jobs here and there. During the course of these jobs she inadvertently becomes a part in a battle of two ethnic London crime bosses. Most of the story is straightforward with the reader wondering why certain things are happening and how. Eve is going to extract herself from some of the tight situations she gets herself into. There is not much by way of traditional mystery elements (clues, clues, red herrings) in the story line. *Bucket Nut* is more a novel of suspense and a moving character study, and as such it works very well in an age of a lot of Chinese food mystery fiction (let alone when you're hungry again and you can't remember what you ate!). I am grateful for Eva White, who is truly unforgettable.

**B u c k e t**  
Nut was the prize-winning Silver Dagger Award by the Crime Writers Association (England), which means it came in second place in the voting for the best crime novel of the year in the United Kingdom. But, but if I had only one word to describe her, it would be "woman." She is an



Lisa Cody



**In This Issue**  
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One place to find out about conventions is in mystery magazines or fanzines. *The Mystery Readers Journal*, *Drood Review of Mystery*, *Mystery and Detective Monthly*, *Mystery News*, *Mystery Scene*, and, of course, TAD itself all have listings of upcoming mystery conventions. In addition, many of the mystery bookstores list mystery happenings (many of the bookstores have their own newsletters, as well). Local libraries, teachers associations, literary associations, and university literature departments often have listings of or flyers for mystery conventions.

One thing is certain, if you like getting together with other people who enjoy what you enjoy—mysteries—you'll love these conventions. Mystery conventions are a terrific

# MYSTERY READERS JOURNAL

THE JOURNAL OF MYSTERY READERS INTERNATIONAL®

Volume 9, No. 2

Summer 1993

## HISTORY MYSTERY-PART I



The *Mystery Readers Journal* has changed its intended focus of one of the issues for 1993. There were an overwhelming number of articles on historical mysteries, so volume 9, No. 2 & No. 3 will both be devoted to Historical Mysteries. Volume 9, No. 1 focused on Sports Mysteries, and Volume 9, No. 4 will focus on The Gay Detective. Volume 10 (1994), No. 1 will cover Bibliomysteries. *The Mystery Readers Journal* is the official publication of Mystery Readers International, the largest mystery reader organization. A quarterly, each issue of MRJ contains articles, reviews, and author essays on a specific theme, as well as special columns, a calendar of events, and other mystery related material. \$22.50/year (\$35/overseas airmail). Janet A. Rudolph, Editor. MRI, PO Box 8116, Berkeley, CA 94707.

**Scandinavian Mystery News** is just out. It is an English summary of **Pinkerton, the Danish Mystery Magazine**. This is very handy for me, since I don't read Danish. I love Pinkerton—it has great pictures, and I make a stab at understanding the articles. **Scandinavian Mystery News** also tells you a little about what is going on in Scandinavia. The Crime Writers of Scandinavia, the Scandinavian branch of AIEP, are planning to publish the first issue of an English newsletter called

**Mysterious Scandinavia** which will come on an irregular basis (but at least twice a year). For your information, The Crime Writers of Scandinavia (CWS) hold a seminar every summer in collaboration with Nordic Summer University (another conference not noted above). The theme in 1993 is the Scandinavian Mystery with emphasis on the relations between the Scandinavian and other traditions, e.g. English, the American, the French. Too late for this year, but write for information on future years to: Nordic Summer University, Langagervej 6, DK-9220 Aalborg Oest, Denmark. And, Scandinavian Mystery

fans have entered the electronic age. Pinkerton and NSU have established a BBS—the first one in Europe—with mystery and crime fiction material. Call KRIMNET with a PC, a modem

and a telephone line. +45 9815 1672 or write to Jan B. Steffensen at Furrebyvej 17, DK 9220 Aalborg Oest, Denmark.

Next time: An update to mystery organizations, periodicals, mail order-catalogues, and other general mystery "stuff." Please send me, Janet A. Rudolph, any information which you would like to see included in this column. PO Box 8116, Berkeley, CA 94707. ■

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by Marlys Millhiser



# Of Malice Cucumber Sandwiches

One Writer's Take on the Malice Domestic Mystery Convention





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MALICE GUEST OF HONOR ANN PERRY WAS ALSO A BEST NOVEL NOMINEE FOR *DEFEND AND BETRAY*. THE BOOKDEALER'S ROOM DID A BOOMING BUSINESS AS USUAL, PICTURED HERE ARE JOHN AND ANTOINETTE OF FOUL PLAY BOOKSTORE OF COLUMBUS, OHIO. MARGARET MARON WON THE AGATHA AWARD FOR BEST NOVEL WITH *THE BOOTLEGGERS DAUGHTER*.

ALL PHOTOS © 1993 LOLA TRACY FIUR

Last year, on the plane from Boulder to National Airport in Washington DC and the Malice Domestic Mystery Convention, I sat next to a married couple—retired sociologists from Huntington Beach, California. He was black and she was white and they both loved mysteries. She was reading a P.D. James. We watched her turn pages for awhile and then he grinned at me.

"Looks like I'm going to have another book to read." He explained that if his wife found a book to be what she knew he liked, he read it. "We read mostly British authors because we don't like the brutality and gore. If it gets bad she puts it down and neither of us pick it up again."

I told him I wrote mysteries and he wanted to know why American writers didn't emulate their British counterparts. There weren't enough good mysteries to satisfy this couple's addiction

and it would be fun to read about American settings. "All American women write are romances. You're missing a great market."

These people were avid readers. They lived in California. They'd never even heard of the Sues Grafton or Dunlap!

I explained about Malice Domestic and Sisters in Crime. I couldn't explain why supermarket paperback racks sported little but glitz and romance or westerns by Louis L'Amour. I suggested bookstores instead. They suggested bookstores didn't handle enough titles in the book drug of their choice. I explained about mystery bookstores and bookclubs.

What a difference a year makes.

This year on the plane to Malice Domestic, I sat next to a charming aspiring actor from L.A. It was held the same weekend as the Gay Rights March on the nation's capitol. I had the feeling I was the only straight on the plane, but I was wearing my Sisters in Crime sweatshirt

and everybody assumed I was making some sort of statement. (Other sweat and T-shirts were proudly emblazoned with "Dyke" so I didn't exactly stand out.)

When I told the young actor I wrote mysteries (hey, I wait till they ask—okay?), I found out he too was a fan and frequented the Mysterious Bookshop in Los Angeles run by Shelley MacArthur. He had heard of and read the California Sues and enjoyed all sorts of mysteries but wished there were more featuring gay/lesbian protagonists. Since my female amateur detective has a gay assistant (secretary), I told him about my Charlie Greene series and of course gave him a brochure.

The cab ride to the Hyatt Regency in Bethesda had gone up twelve bucks since the year before, but the cabbie still didn't speak English so I don't know whether he read mysteries or not.

Malice Domestic is the only mystery convention I know of where literary

**Marlys Millhiser** has published six novels and has twice won the Colorado Authors League Top Hand Award. Her latest book, *Death of The Office Witch* (Otto Penzler Books), will be published in November 1993.



**"MISS MALICE DOMESTIC?  
NOT ON YOUR LIFE..."**

agents come out of the closet. Partly I should think because it's held so close to New York and they can all afford to attend and partly because this subgenre is going ballistic.

As an example: I recently sat at a card table at a dreaded mall signing and a woman stopped to tell me she didn't read mysteries. But she picked up a brochure I had sitting out in front of my books. (Brochures are free, don't you know.) Minutes later, she was back to buy a book. On the brochure was a blurb from Barbara Michaels/Elizabeth Peters whom she *did* read. (There was also a good *Kirkus*, to which she paid no attention.) She explained she didn't read the "other kind" of mystery.

As at most fan cons, at Malice Domestic half the non-writers attending are aspiring to be. There are librarians and teachers and reviewers and scholars and booksellers and collectors and that blessed endangered species—readers who simply like a good story and are curious about those who write them. And, as at most cons, the majority of attendees are women. As a writer, I do not find Malice Domestic as laid back as most regional conventions. The pressure of business is as intense as at Bouchercon, yet more organized because it's only a third the size.

But at Malice, there's the suite hosted by the Arsenic and Oolong people, a group led mostly by fans from Indianapolis, where writers can kick

back and be coddled. (If you call being offered chocolate skulls and handguns coddling.) The local Sisters in Crime chapter hosts another suite also where anyone can kick back and enjoy naughty nibbles.

So what does a writer do at one of these? I attended only four panels out of maybe thirty: the one on which I spoke, the one on which the Editor-in-Chief at my publisher's spoke, and two others—which is a record for me. I actually start off to attend more but get sideswiped by fans or business (both of which I love to be sideswiped by) and end up in the bar or the coffee shop, depending on the time of day, instead.

Besides the usual banquet, (the Hyatt Bethesda does manage to cook stuffed

Collins no less. And, though we all agreed the romantic formula gothic could stay blessedly buried, we also agreed the purists were vastly outnumbered by readers pleading for more of the things that go bump in the night in their murder mysteries. The audience agreed heartily.

Two: The long-term value of backlists and of holding out for hard cover publication. I signed, as always, as many ancient hard cover copies of my out-of-print titles as I did of my one current in-print. All those old titles had been reprinted in paper but fewer and fewer survive. This was the first con in which I signed no paperbacks.

Three: The market is once again expanding for the short story after sev-

Malice Domestic is the only  
mystery convention I know  
of where literary agents  
come out of the closet.

chicken breasts all the way through while leaving the fresh asparagus spears properly *al dente*—more than can be said of the Sheraton in New York which hosts the Edgars) there is also a tea and I'm a sucker for cucumber sandwiches.

There're the usual guests and speakers and honorees and awards. But at Malice V one of the guests was ninety-year-old Phyllis Whitney with whom I've had an on-again/off-again correspondence since 1972 but whom I'd never met. I had the pleasure of being on a panel with her and she hosted a private luncheon afterward. That and the dinner with my new editors was the highlight of my trip.

Didn't I come away with any nuggets of knowledge for all that time and expense? Well, yes, three as a matter of fact.

One: The panel mentioned above was on mixing the paranormal with the mystery. And the panel agreed that after years of purists attempting to purge the genre of all such aspects and shunt them off into the totally inappropriate and alien genre of horror, things were looking up for this subgenre with roots that go back to Edgar Allen Poe and Wilke

eral decades of decline because of new magazine outlets and a good number of anthologies. But the anthologists are filled mostly by invitation and it's recognized book authors who are being invited. So there's less relief for the unemployed mystery short story writer than it would seem. And current mystery anthologies tend to be written around a central theme with contributions coming from a variety of authors. The anthologized works of one writer are blood rare.

As with most of life's special events, location is everything and the Hyatt in Bethesda is perfect for a con with its large lobby/bar/atrium where you can peek over the balcony outside your room to line up those you want to meet/greet/avoid below. And if you're not sure, you can always check them out again as you descend on the glass elevators.

One of the more enjoyable things about mystery cons in general and Malice in particular are the PBP and Dead Dog parties. The PBP is the Party Before the Party the night before the conventions begins when jet-lagged writers and book people converge for large round-table

dinners to talk about those who won't arrive until the next day.

The Dead Dog parties are held on Sunday nights after everything is over, attended by those whose planes do not leave until the next day as well as exhausted organizers with comp suites, to kick around what went on at the con and the people dumb enough to leave early.

At this particular Malice, I was invited to join the volunteers. As I sat washing down leftover cucumber sandwiches with the appropriate libation, I ruminated that although there is probably a lot wrong with the genre, the strength of the mystery is in its diversity. Genre fiction by its nature tends to calcify—all the better to package and sell like widgets. But for some reason, the mystery manages to squirm and wiggle its way free of the purists and others who would discipline it and to remain fresh and surprising in spite of their efforts. Perhaps because of gatherings such as this where readers have their say in person and authors, critics, booksellers, and even editors, must listen. ■



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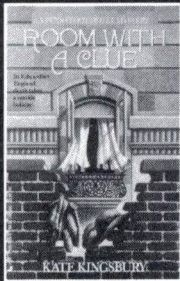


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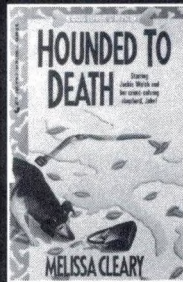
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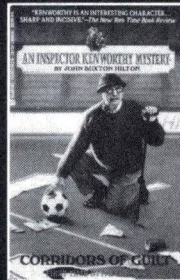
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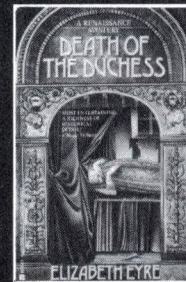
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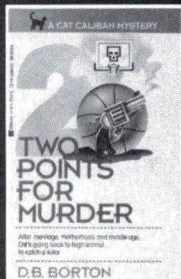
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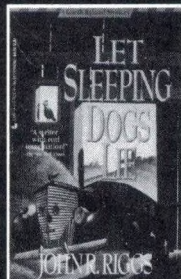
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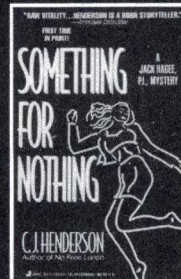
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Emily Brightwell

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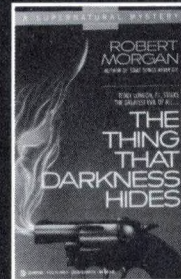
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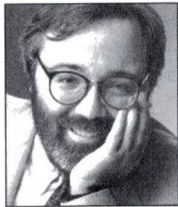
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**THE THING THAT DARKNESS HIDES**  
Robert Morgan

A wealthy eccentric claims he's sold his soul to the devil—but now he wants it back, offering ten million dollars to any detective who takes the case. For that kind of money, Teddy London's willing to go to the ends of the earth—and beyond....

Diamond November



# THE CRIME SCREEN

BY RIC MEYERS

You wouldn't think that after more than a decade this column could be improved, would you? (Stop coughing back there!) Well, ever since I took over *TAD Goes to the Movies*, something has been gnawing at me (besides the various editors chewing me out). My reviews would be hard-hitting, relevant, and topical...then appear six months after they were written. Although you'd think that would be perfect timing for a video release, it's not always true. Besides, you may have noticed that I've become decidedly testy, even—dare I say it—brusque, after having to review the latest crop of dreck out of Hollywood column after column.

So here's an idea: theme columns covering mystery videos, laserdiscs, television shows, movies, and even CD-ROM. Naturally they'll be some topical critiques to illustrate some pressing points of the day, but there will also be something you can take with you to your couch or video store. Fittingly, the first theme is scary mysteries, designed just in time for Halloween.

## Video

Funny that holiday should be mentioned, because it is also the title of one of the greatest unknowing and unsolved mysteries on cable and tape, **Halloween** (1978), by John Carpenter. Curiously, although the writer/director seems to be totally unaware of it, he has fashioned a valid play-fair mystery amongst the now standard psycho-killing-teenagers plot.

Ignore the extended stalking sequences. Ignore the violent murders. Ignore even the also-now-standard boogeyman "The End?" finale. Concentrate, instead, on the clues right there up on the screen to explain how this masked killer could be "unkillable." Come on, all you sofa Sherlocks, easy chair Ellerys, and love seat Lord Peters, take a stab at it (if you'll excuse the expression).

*Halloween* is not that gruesome by today's standards and works well as an exercise in both style and logic. If you need a suitably scary sleuthing pastime between trick-or-treaters, give it a try. Write in with your solutions. I'll share the best next time and give you my answer as well.

Sadly, this movie, and others like *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*, sounded the death knell for civilized scary mysteries. *Psycho* appears positively benign in its violence content compared with them. The classics created an ominous mood while the moderns go for the jugular both literally and figuratively.

I'd love to recommend civilized, old-fashioned horror-mysteries, but I don't think there are any in the last three decades. Instead, I'm left with some stylish, but savage, new whodunits to suggest. Please understand that this new brand of mystery movies are not for the faint-hearted. They are truly more terrifying than frightening.

That said, for truly creepy mystery movies, you need go no further than Dario Argento. Although this Italian filmmaker now specializes in fever-dreams of horror, he started with evocatively violent murder mysteries, such as **Bird With the Crystal Plumage** (1970) and **Deep Red** (also known as **The Hatchet Murders**, 1975).

If you can take his brand of heightened suspense, atmosphere of impending danger, and sudden explosions of brutality, these two films are unforgettable experiences.

The former is the more traditional Hitchcockian experience as an American writer (Tony Musante) stumbles onto an attack at an art gallery. Caught between two unbreakable windows, he's forced to witness the assault until police arrive and take the wounded victim away. Again and again director Argento will return to the subtext of voyeurism, placing his audience and



NICK CASTLE STARS IN JOHN CARPENTER'S *HALLOWEEN* (1978).

leading character in a position of being forced to watch the terrible (a subtext he would later explode open in *Opera*—known in an edited U.S. version as *Terror at the Opera*—where the violence and voyeurism is presented at a gruesome pitch).

Kept in Italy as a material witness, the writer seeks freedom by finding the killer himself, following a twisting trail of primitive art and homicidal insanity which puts himself, his friends, and his loved ones at risk. Argento handles the film with eene excellence, but turns up the pressure a couple of notches higher for his subsequent masterpiece of violence, voyeurism, mood and mystery, *Deep Red*.

This time David Hemmings plays a British musician stuck in much the same circumstance as Musante's writer: a reluctant witness to a horrible murder. Like the killer in the previous picture, this one stalks his victims in a slick black raincoat and hat while the key clue dances just out of reach of the musician's mind.

Argento's mastery of mood is at its height here, filling the movie with unsettling, suspenseful images, occasion-

ally interrupted by a scene of cunningly designed brutality (one clue is written on the black tile of a bathroom by a poor victim as she is being drowned in a steaming hot tub).

*Warning:* the finale is baroque in the extreme, but if you have the guts, *Deep Red* is well worth watching. If you've managed to make it through that, try **Alice Sweet Alice** (1977), an inexpensive but excellent example of squirming cinema. The setting is a rural factory town and the subject is

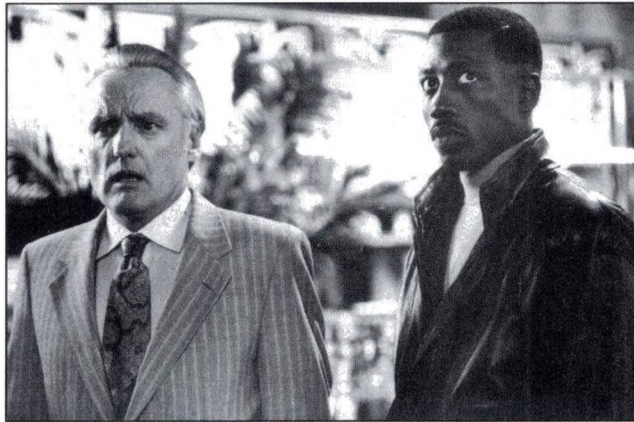
religious guilt. Someone is killing the flock of a well-meaning young priest in and around a certain rooming house and the church.

The film, also known as *Holy Terror*, was initially famous for the participation of a very young Brooke Shields in her motion picture debut as one of the first victims, but with the passage of time it has held its own as one of the more disconcerting mysteries ever made. The deaths are not presented lightly or cleanly. There's an element of punishment befitting the theme, and each killing is designed to be powerfully and painfully creepy. In that, the film succeeds. Add to that the fact that the main suspect, and, at times, the main detective is a twelve year old girl, and you have the makings of a memorably unsettling viewing experience.

### Television

If there's one thing a visit to the local video store can prove, is that we live in an atmosphere of rarefied violence. That is also the message of **Wild Palms**, a futuristic mystery miniseries in the spirit of science-fiction authors William Gibson and Philip K. Dick. The show's power, or lack of it, can be seen in executive producer Oliver Stone's own cameo—as a guest on a talk show in the year 2007 who is asked: "The JFK conspiracy. You were right. Are you bitter?"

*Wild Palms* hides its message in flip, glib, self-conscious hipness, which is, in itself, not bad, because this is a TV show



DENNIS HOPPER AND WESLEY SNIPES STAR IN *BOILING POINT* ADAPTED FROM GERALD PETIEVICH'S NOVEL *MONEY MEN*.

2+2=4 television storytelling that is alternately refreshing and annoying.

There are fantasies, dream sequences, emotional outbursts, and violence galore, all held together by the somewhat less-than-exhilarating presence of Jim Belushi, who plays a lawyer who has unknowingly had the Go Chip installed in his hand. Belushi is in there plugging, but he is, as always, something of a log. The effort is not helped by a supporting cast which is alternately funereal and hysterical. Of Robert Loggia,

condemning TV. Given that reality, it's better to try a sneak punch rather than a frontal attack. Although exaggerated, what rings truest in the show is the audience's indifference to the information and images that 2007's holographic television trots out—an indifference which has extended into reality.

In a way, it's a shame the creators put all sorts of technical pretension into the editing and filming because it only distracts from the point: that the line between TV news and TV entertainment has become so blurred that it's hard to distinguish between the two. In the world of *Wild Palms*, it has become impossible. Television personalities appear in your living room like friends, a battle between different revolutionary sects is completely ignored by whoever is not directly involved, corruption is standard, and the drugs are, as ever, enslaving.

The title, *Wild Palms*, refers to a group of political power mongers. Their McGuffin is the "Go Chip," a new technology which can make holograms interactive. In other words, it will allow you to touch and feel television characters and, with the help of a new drug, make them responsive to you. Onto that linchpin the writer and directors have ladled decadent histrionics that could try the patience of the most dedicated viewer. They try to lengthen the audience's supposedly short attention span by snapping from scene to scene and incident to incident with a wild abandon and nearly total disregard for standard

Angie Dickenson, Kim Cattrall, and David Warner, among others, only Ernie Hudson and Dana Delaney show any sign of recognizable human emotions and reactions.

For what it's worth, *Wild Palms* is strident but wraps up in a fairly traditional, formalistic way. All ends relatively happily, with Belushi driving off into the sunset with his nuclear family, vowing to fight the drug culture and voodoo entertainment to recreate a world where reality and dreams are kept separate.

See? Now you don't have to watch it, which is what I think the creators were planning all along. The producers have pulled off a cunning deception to get people away from television, they have created a series which just might push some borderline TV watchers over the edge.

### Movies

James B. Harris must love the hard-boiled crime novel. He adapted James Ellroy's *Blood on the Moon* to the screen as *Cop* (1987) and is reportedly now working on the film adaptation of Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia*. Between these two projects he wrote the screenplay and directed **Boiling Point**, adapted from the novel *Money Men* by Gerald Petievich.

Warner Brothers promoted the finished product as a sizzling action film. Don't be fooled. *Boiling Point* is a tepid, talky drama that is produced so cheaply that Harris didn't even have the money to hire stuntmen—or even

an extra actor to play the hero's partner. The film's failure is not attributable to only the budget, however. Just when the film should have been picking up energy and urgency, Harris slows things to a crawl.

It's a shame, because he had the makings of a fine entertainment. Dennis Hopper plays a small time con man and two time loser who teams up with a young sociopath to pull a series of scams which will allow him to pay off a loan shark debt. One of the killer kid's first victims is T-man Wesley Snipes' undercover partner (who appears only as a voice on the walky-talky and a corpse, so the production wouldn't have to pay a "real" actor).

For awhile there Harris shows some signs of audacious style, especially in the scene where he intercuts the three antagonists talking to their girl friends and ex-wives, having one character answering the question of another's woman, so it's clear that these three are cut from the same cloth. He even has Snipes and Hopper unknowingly sharing the same hotel's men's room.

Once that promise is established, however, Harris reneges on the deal by hav-

ing each successive scene become more plodding than the last. Instead of adding verve and originality, *Boiling Point* soon settles into a steadily slowing rhythm, like a LP that had the plug pulled out.

The parties finally confront each other at a big band ballroom, where the only action takes place, but even that is undercut by the production's unwillingness or inability to hire the aforementioned stuntman. In one shot Hopper jumps off the balcony. In the next he lands on the floor below. The omission of a shot between showing the fall is obvious. The final indignity is the end card that informs the audience that Snipes and his hooker girlfriend moved to Florida and lived happily ever after (despite a previous scene where the prostitute breaks up with him).

If Warner and/or Harris didn't try to have it both ways, there was a great little picture buried in this mess. Had Hopper and Snipes become increasingly desperate and talked faster and faster to convince those around them to go along with their wilder and wilder schemes, the film could have been called *Fever Pitch*, and it could have been good. Cable or video watcher beware. ■

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# MURDER AND OTHER ACTS OF HIGH SOCIETY



Thorne Smith's *Did She Fall?*



by Gary Hoppenstand



# BEST KNOWN FOR HIS CHARMINGLY WHIMSICAL TOPPER NOVELS, THIS POPULAR JAZZ AGE HUMORIST MOVED ON TO SATIRIZE THE UPPER-CRUST IN HIS ONLY MYSTERY NOVEL.

If F. Scott Fitzgerald had written a detective novel, it might have resembled Thorne Smith's *Did She Fall?* Like Fitzgerald, Smith truly evokes the period in which he wrote. And though *Did She Fall?* was published in 1930 near the start of America's Great Depression, it is more reflective of Jay Gatsby's world—the 1920s era of flappers and rebellious youth and liberated sexuality and perceived moral isolation. Smith attempts to show the reader the effects that a vicious social climber has upon a moneyed, upper-crust and socially remote family, a family that is perhaps as reprehensible as the social climber. The murder mystery for Smith, it turns out, is merely a device in which is revealed the evils of "high society," much as Fitzgerald does in *The Great Gatsby*. After all, at the basis of Fitzgerald's novel is another type of crime melodrama: the gangster story.

*Did She Fall?* is an unusual narrative vehicle for Smith, since he wasn't regarded as either a mystery writer or a serious social critic. Thorne Smith was known, however, as someone who liked to gently poke fun at society. Along with Ring Lardner, Damon Runyon and James Thurber, Smith was one of America's most popular humorists before the Second World War. Lardner, Runyon and Thurber primarily worked with shorter prose, such as essays and short stories, while Smith wrote novels. Despite the fact that Smith's work rarely became best-sellers, it sold consistently well over time. His books often went through many printings in both hardcover and paperback.

Thorne Smith began his literary



career writing military comedy. His first two books, entitled *Biltmore Oswald: The Diary of a Hapless Recruit* (1918) and *Out of Luck: Biltmore Oswald Very Much at Sea* (1919), were collections of short stories that originally appeared in *The Broadside* (published by the Naval Reserve) featuring a Sad Sack version of a sailor named Biltmore Oswald. The Oswald books were so popular, they sold some 70,000 copies, no small publishing feat for the time.

No doubt Smith had plenty of humorous material on hand about the Navy, since his father, James Thorne Smith, was a Commodore in the service. James was the port supervisor of New York during World War One. Thorne himself was born in 1893 (several sources site 1892) at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. He later was a student at Dartmouth College. At the outbreak of the First World War, Thorne Smith left his advertising job to enlist in the Navy. He became a boatswain's mate, and worked as an editor on *The Broadside*, which at that time published his Oswald stories.

Smith's particular specialty was the novel featuring light, frothy romantic comedy, fiction that also had a touch of the fantastic thrown in to provide the catalyst for farcical situations. For exam-

ple, *The Night Life of the Gods* (1931) chronicles the escapades of a wacky (but lovable) scientist named Hunter Hawk who, with him impishly beautiful companion Megaera (a magical 900-year-old American descendent of the ancient "Little People"), conspire to animate the marble statues of Olympic gods and goddesses at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. These reincarnated Olympians, true party animals like Bacchus, Neptune, Diana and Venus, then proceed to take Broadway by storm with their antics. *Turnabout* (1931) is a screwball comedy showing what happens when a statue that harbors the incarnation of an Egyptian household deity named Mr. Ram forces a young, quarreling husband and wife, Tim and Sally Willows, to switch personalities with each other's bodies. *Skin and Bones* (1933) details the misadventures of Mr. Quintus Bland who becomes a living skeleton, while *The Glorious Pool* (1934) illustrates the hilarious consequences when Rex Pebble and his mistress take a dip in a swimming pool which also happens to be the mythical fountain of youth. Several of Thorne Smith's novels made the transition into motion pictures, including the Hal Roach film, *Turnabout* (1940), and the movie, *I Married a Witch* (1942), starring Fredric March and Veronica Lake. The latter was based on Smith's unfinished last novel, *The Passionate Witch* (completed by Norman Matson for publication in 1941). Thorne Smith's other principal works include *Haunts and By-Paths* (1919), his collection of poetry: *Dream's End* (1927), his overtly somber novel; *The Stray Lamb* (1929), his story of Mr. T. Lawrence

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Lamb's wacky transformations into an assortment of animals; *Lazy Bear Lane* (1931, his children's novel); *The Bishop's Jaegers* (1932), his metaphoric tale of people and their underwear; and *Rain in the Doorway* (1933), his story of Mr. Hector Owen's discovery of a magical doorway that exits the drab New York City Streets and enters a bewitching fantasy world—each of these adventures involves some blend of humor, pathos, and wild imagination. Indeed, Smith can be said to have been the father of the supernatural sit-com, and his writing is the inspiration for such popular movies as *Splash* (1984), *Weird Science* (1985) and *Beetlejuice* (1988), to name just a few.

Thorne Smith is most famous for his two "Topper" adventures: *Topper* (1926) and *Topper Takes a Trip* (1932). The Topper movies focus on the relationship between a bored (and boring), stolid upper-middle class couple, the Toppers, and a zany, fun-loving pair of ghosts, George and Marion Kirby. The Topper series is intimately part of the "Roaring Twenties" flapper era, when American sexuality tossed off its Victorian cover and reveled in a newly acquired liberation. Even for its time, Smith's fiction was racy stuff, full of lusty suggestiveness and sexually charged comic situations. In Smith's first Topper novel, Cosmo Topper's marriage to his wife is described most critically. Mrs. Topper is narrow-minded, possessive, stupid and worst of all—nagging. In other words, she represents what Thorne Smith identified as the negatively perceived female sexual standards of a generation earlier. Before his introduction to the supernatural, Mr.



THORNE SMITH, 1893(?)—1934

Topper is unhappy with his depressingly comfortable lot in life. Cosmo Topper's misadventures with the flapperesque spooks, George and Marion, offered Smith ample material to lampoon the American Puritanical strain in marital relationships. *Topper* and *Topper Takes a Trip* were made into popular films in 1937 and 1939 respectively, starring Roland Young as the bedeviled Cosmo Topper, Constance Bennet as the ghost, Marion Kirby, and Cary Grant as Marion's husband, George (although Grant makes only a peripheral appearance in the second Topper movie). A hideous re-make of Topper was released in 1979 starring Kate Jackson, Andrew Stevens, Jack Warden and Rue McClanahan, and a third Topper film, *Topper Returns* (1941) was produced starring Joan Blondell as the impish ghost, but this third effort was more of a gothic

thriller than a light social comedy.

Smith moved to Hollywood in 1933 to write dialogue for MGM, a natural career move for him at the time since one of his strengths as a fiction writer was his treatment of humorous conversation. He had a wife named Celia and two daughters, Marion and June, and for a time often traveled between his New Jersey home and New York City hotels. He died of a heart attack at a relatively young age in Sarasota, Florida on June 21, 1934. Smith gave his own evaluation of his literary work in promotional material on the dust-jacket of the 1937 Sun Dial Press hardcover reprint of *Did She Fall?* With tongue planted firmly in cheek, Smith claimed that he is "one of America's greatest realists." He goes on to state: "Like life itself my stories have no point and get absolutely nowhere. And like life they are a little mad and purposeless." Of course, Smith's stories do have a point and do go somewhere; he just prefers that these things be disguised a bit so that they're easier for the reader to swallow. He sugar-coats his pills for us, as perhaps best seen in *Did She Fall?*

Certainly one of Thorne Smith's more unusual efforts is *Did She Fall?*, his single detective mystery novel. What makes this particular story different is the author's perhaps inadvertent inclusion of strong social criticism. Granted, nearly all of Smith's body of fiction has some type of satire lurking about in the plot, but for the most part, this satire is very lightweight and secondary to Smith's generous use of slapstick. In this 1930 mystery, Smith includes equal measures of satire and suspense, but his aesthetic attention centers on the consequences that perverted sexual desire and murder have upon a rich, high-brow family. Smith uses this family to satirize the upper-class: they condone murder when it is for the sake of protecting the sanctity of their set. For Smith, the crime and its solution are less important than the characters' attempt to protect their circle from what they think is the wrong type of person. Using the conventions of the mystery tale, Smith actually tells a story about the corrupting influence of wealth and status.

Early in the first chapter, Smith lets the reader know who the victim will be

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and why. The novel opens with the satiric statement: "Sometimes a well-executed murder clears the air," and later Smith develops his humorous rationale for the murder. This is a radical twist on the classical detective formula. Instead of regarding murder as an anti-social activity that threatens the social order, the central characters perceive it to be a cleansing act, a type of cathartic purging of vice and sin. Murder functions to *preserve* the social order, keeping unwanted "gate-crashers" out of the family.

The main source of vice and sin—and also subsequently the murder victim—is the *femme fatale*, Emily Jane Seabrook. Nearly everyone sees in Emily Jane a beautiful girl, graceful, elegant, a lucky catch for any guy. But appearances can be deceiving. Emily Jane is not what she seems to be; indeed, she is a vile little thing. Besides being sexually promiscuous in the worst sort of way (she actually documents her infidelities for future reference), she has a streak of cruelty that would make the Marquis de Sade blush. The most recent target of her serpentine wiles is the naive Barney Crewe, and though Barney is a member in good standing of an unusual but otherwise reputable upper-class family (and not a half-bad painter to boot), he is as guleless as a country bumpkin when it comes to feminine deceptions, especially the world-class deceptions of this dangerous termagant. All in all, Emily Jane is as nasty as they come. She has the gall to think that she can cement her social and financial position in life with a marriage, without any sort of corresponding social obligation to the circle that she desires to enter. Smith in no uncertain terms emphasizes this as being one of her greatest crimes.

On the surface, Thorne Smith pretends a sympathy for the high society characters victimized by Emily Jane. We are supposed to feel sorry for them and the terrible situation that Emily Jane places them in. Perhaps we sympathize with these characters, but their collective arrogance suggests that they are corrupt and evil as is Emily Jane. Any one of them could kill her, and for the most unsympathetic of reasons: to prevent someone they have deemed as being unfit from entering their rarefied

## BESIDES BEING WILDLY PROMISCUOUS, EMILY JANE HAS A STREAK OF CRUELTY THAT WOULD MAKE THE MARQUIS DE SADE BLUSH.

society. The key to interpreting Smith's *Did She Fall?*, then, lies in the author's superficial treatment of murder, common in cozy mysteries, which frames both the beginning and the end of the novel. Smith more than makes clear his philosophically casual attitude about murder in the first chapter, and he reinforces this attitude by having his detective protagonist *not* arrest the known murderer by the end of the story (a very uncommon occurrence in cozy mysteries). The detective hero is morally sympathetic with the same high society that Emily Jane attempts to victimize, and he thus betrays the professional obligations of his occupation in order to protect his friends and the stability of his social class. Smith implies that murder is just another interesting diversion for the wealthy in *Did She Fall?*, interrupting as it does their endless, grand party. Indeed, the image of the party swirls about the novel. Emily Jane is killed in the midst of her engagement celebration, a celebration which consumes the action of the first third of the book, and after some rough periods during the course of the story where the central characters experience moments of personal angst, the story ends just like it begins, with a party where everyone lives happily ever after.

Underneath the indictment of the evil "party pooper," *Did She Fall?* is a biting satire of the professedly amoral upper-crust, a satire of the lifestyles of the rich and infamous.

Thorne Smith offers the reader a number of high society candidates for Emily Jane's murder. For example, Barney's older, wiser brother, Daniel Crewe, is well aware of Emily Jane's shortcomings—since he himself in the past was one of her many male "victims"—and it's this heartfelt desire to see that his beloved brother does not marry Emily Jane that compels him to plot her murder. Of course, with Emily Jane's track record, she has a number of willing candidates to do her in, including Sam Stoughten, now the victim of a blackmail scheme by Emily Jane.

Along with Daniel and Sam, Emily Jane's accomplice in wickedness—the "rotter" Lane Holt—can be properly considered for the role of murderer. Perhaps he is unhappy with Emily Jane's scheme to marry Barney while simultaneously maintaining an affair with him. Planned extra-marital affairs were still heady stuff in 1930s popular literature, especially when the woman was plotting her infidelities well in advance. June Lansing is another potential murderer. June is Daniel's girlfriend, and knowing how Emily Jane torments both Daniel and Barney, she could happily oblige circumstances with a knife in the back or a push off the cliff.

A push off the cliff is exactly the means of Emily Jane's demise. As mentioned earlier, a celebration is held at the Crewe mansion on Long Island in order to announce the engagement of Barney and Emily Jane. It's a masquerade party, and the men in attendance are all disguised as dominoes which sport a concealing hood. The dominoes provide convenient cover for either the man or the woman with murder on their mind. Atop a dangerous precipice near the mansion in the dead of night, a tag-team group of willing killers, all camouflaged similarly, vie for the honor of terminating Emily Jane's life. One of them succeeds, and over the cliff she falls.

Smith has set up a classical detective scenario with his use of setting (the isolated country manor), his collection of possible suspects (each having a valid

motive) and his handling of the brilliant detective figure (the only one really able to piece the clues of the mystery puzzle together accurately). But, he then moves his narrative in a new direction, one that allows him to explore the relationship between law and personal morality.

One prominent example of this new direction is the author's use of the character, Daniel Crewe. Daniel is the moral voice of the story. The reader witnesses about half of the novel's events through his eyes (and the other half through the eyes of the detective protagonist, Scott Munson). Daniel embodies a series of conflicting emotions: rage at Emily Jane's vindictive intentions to pursue a marriage simply for social and financial gain; fear for his naive brother, Barney, and the hideous fate that awaits Barney with his marriage to Emily Jane; and angry self-incrimination as he conspires to murder Emily Jane. Initially in the story, there is no doubt about Daniel's dire intention, and the reader follows Daniel step-by-agonizing-step as he tries to establish a method and an opportunity for a killing that he perceives as necessary. Obviously not a who-dunnit, Smith's narrative more than compensates for this with Daniel's incisive probing of ethical questions, of what is right and wrong in a larger sense. However, right and wrong can become relative terms, when the upper-crust's efforts to protect its *status quo* subvert—and ultimately burlesque—the law.

For example, in the second chapter of *Did She Fall?*, entitled "Silent Watchers," Scott Munson, the detective protagonist, wants to know what is troubling his friend, Daniel. Scott asks:



"What's on your mind? What's burning you up? Hadn't you better come across with me?" This question leads to an interesting (and revealing) philosophical debate, a debate which seeks to define the distinction between a just killing and an unjust killing. Daniel asks the detective a rhetorical question: what would someone be called who arms a "small army of carriers" in Africa in order to kill a harmless animal? Scott replies: "Why don't be childish, Dan!...At worst he's nothing more than a fanatical hunter, a waster of time, money and animal life. Why?" Daniel answers his friend by drawing another metaphor, a metaphor with a hypothetical codicil:

"And suppose that some chap removes from the face of the earth a person who wrecks and strikes at one's very being—one so-called soul, a person far more deliberately cruel and dangerous to society than the most treacherous beast or reptile that lurks in the jungle, a creature who is not only evil but also one who can create evil in others—what, Scott, would you call that person?"

Of course, Scott immediately identifies the subject of Daniel's speculations, and replies accordingly, saying that one can't trifle with human life. Daniel then states that what is at issue here are "human hearts and souls," and Scott answers that

"soul-murderers or heart-murderers or mind-murderers" largely go unpunished in life. Scott Munson by implication tells his friend that they reside in the *real* world, not a theoretical one. Because of their good breeding, they choose to drop the subject for the time being.

And good breeding is exactly one of Thorne Smith's important thematic points as well. Daniel Crewe sees murder—and by implication, the legal system itself that through indifference harbors socio-pathic monsters like Emily Jane—as being relatively unimportant when compared to the larger, more correct issue of justice. Justice is violated when the upper-class' code of social conduct is breached. What's being parodied in Smith's novel are the rules of the privileged. Emily Jane is the worst sort of social climber because she just doesn't have the *right stuff*, she's just simply not part of the "in" crowd. *Did She Fall?* is politically conservative, and indeed somewhat reactionary, as I suppose most detective stories of the time are, but it is reactionary in a way that is distinct from other classical detective stories.

Daniel's sense of justice is predicated by self-serving interests; he doesn't want to see his brother's happiness exploited by Emily Jane's ambitions. But, Emily Jane is not just seen as a boorish social-climber, she is a *female* boorish social-climber. She violates the mores of the social group by acting too aggressively. Her ambition is too much like a man's. And for the novels' readers at the time the story was published—as well as for the novel's author—Emily Jane's enterprising nature was understood to be dangerous, a threat to acceptable cultural standards.

From a different point-of-view, though, Emily Jane is very much a contemporary woman, self-assured, competent, unwilling to let men control her life. She is even admirable. But Smith's motives are not feminist. They are instead socially insular. Smith is perhaps frightened by Emily Jane's independence (as are his male characters in the novel). She certainly profanes the stereotyped female roles of the 1930s melodramatic popular fiction. Hence, the cleansing act of murder that Smith discusses in the first few pages of the novel is a particularly apt description for



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the process of eliminating a female loose cannon, and the process for keeping those people of social grace pure from the inroads of the boorish and the wickedly feminine.

But all is not serious in *Did She Fall?* In addition to Thorne Smith's use of social satire, the author loves employing broad strokes of comedy in his work. He effects this comedy by his utilization of eccentric secondary characters—Smith enjoys the off-beat personality—and by placing those characters in dangerous or tense situations. For example, Daniel's and Barney's daffy, dottering aunt, Matty Evans, is usually good for a chuckle or two when emotions are at a boil. Her simple-minded, yet sincere, expressions of sympathy for her two nephews provide an occasional light-hearted punctuation of otherwise grim events.

Daniel's brother, Barney, also is first portrayed as being frivolous; that is, he's frivolous before his entanglement with Emily Jane. Add another mark to her list of wicked accomplishments: the sobering of an otherwise carefree soul. The pre-Emily Jane Barney is wonderfully useless, as only the wealthy can be. Presenting a symbolic statement of individualism, a statement of his denial of life's worries, he paints purple oranges and orange grapes without regard to what his critics might say. He is naive, silly and lovable for his silliness. Smith early on frames him in a sympathetic light. Barney is quite similar to a number of other wacky protagonists in Smith's novels. For the author, Barney is the image of the divine fool, until, unfortunately, Emily Jane's influence takes hold of him. After her murder, Barney becomes manic-depressive in his actions, painting a picture of what he believes to be the murder scene (and presumably featuring his brother as the killer). This painting functions as a reminder for Daniel time and again in the story of his guilty conscience.

Thorne Smith has the most fun in *Did She Fall?* with his two bumbling police officers, both named Tim Shay. These men become Scott Munson's assistants in the investigation of

Emily Jane's death. To help keep them straight, Scott uses their nicknames, Shad and Red, and during the course of the narrative, Shad and Red furnish the author with an ample amount of comic relief. For example, they both are lazy, continually grumbling about their assignments. They also are cowardly, greatly fearing any contact with a potentially threatening situation, as well as being quite stupid, at times postulating solutions to the mysteries of Crewe mansion that are hysterically ludicrous at best. All in all, the two Tim Shays provide a perfect foil for Scott Munson. Whereas Scott is somber, the Shays are dizzy. Whereas Scott is brilliant, the Shays couldn't mentally slug their way out of a wet paper sack. Whereas Scott Munson deliberates about philosophical issues of life and death, the Shays worry about meeting their own personal needs at the most basic level. Thorne Smith enjoys contrasting the two widely differing detective types in his story, first because such a contrast meets with the formulaic requirements of the classical detective story where the professional policeman tends to be incompetent, and second, because Smith is able at various points to deflate the self-centered importance of people's social conduct, to remind the reader that life itself sometimes is one big joke, and to embrace comedy as an essential quality of the human condition.

The societal gatekeeper in *Did She Fall?* is Thorne Smith's detective, Scott

Munson. Scott, like his friend Daniel, also belongs to the right crowd, but unlike the rest of the blue-bloods of the story, his primary interest (at least initially) lies in his respect for enforcement of the law, and not necessarily in the protection of the Crewe's family name and fortune. Early in the story, Scott senses trouble in the air, and he specifically mistrusts the motive of his friend, Daniel, with regards to the impending marriage between Emily Jane and Barney. Though Scott is able to determine people's hidden motivations, in the finest tradition of the classical formula, Scott is *not* a professional sleuth. He is above that. He is described in the second chapter as being more the scholar (and more the student) than the professional civil servant. Of course this is all false modesty perpetuated by both the author and the character. Scott's powers of observation and deduction are second to none. His two "passions" are the "study of human conduct" and traveling. He stumps about as a speaker on the college lecture tour, giving presentations on criminology and psychology. When investigating a case, he is portrayed as being ruthless, adversarial. In total, the above character outline matches up well with any number of other classical detective profiles, but Smith begins with conventions only to modify them later to fit his artistic voice.

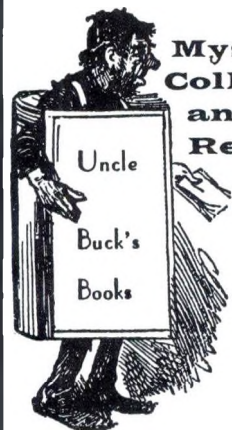
Scott Munson is unlike most other detective protagonists in that, being aware of the potential situation for



"Sorry, Inspector, I can't see who murdered Pearson, but I *can* tell you next Wednesday is going to be fair and warmer."

LORBER/DAVIDSON

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murder and of the potential motivations of the murderers (including Daniel's), he is able during the course of the story to effectively express in regret and outrage, outrage not about Emily Jane's death, but about his good friend possibly being involved in the mess. The typical classical detective once on the case is usually oblivious to everything but the solution of that case. This is not so with Scott. As Scott Munson investigates the crime, he carries on a continuing conversation with Daniel that in essence becomes an extended debate about the relationship between justice and the law.

This conversation is continued at several important points throughout the plot. Scott is sympathetic with Daniel's predicament, and more importantly, he understands that Emily Jane is an evil, ambitious woman. Time and again, he warns his friend, Daniel, of the terrible consequences of murder. The reader should remember, however, that the legal system that Scott talks about is a part of the working class bureaucracy that represents those lowly multitudes who don't count for much of anything, and is a system that Scott, by virtue of his blue blood, has no real respect for. A number of times, Scott has enough circumstantial evidence to charge Daniel with premeditated murder, but he doesn't. He frequently informs Daniel of the fix that he is in, but Scott does not arrest his friend.

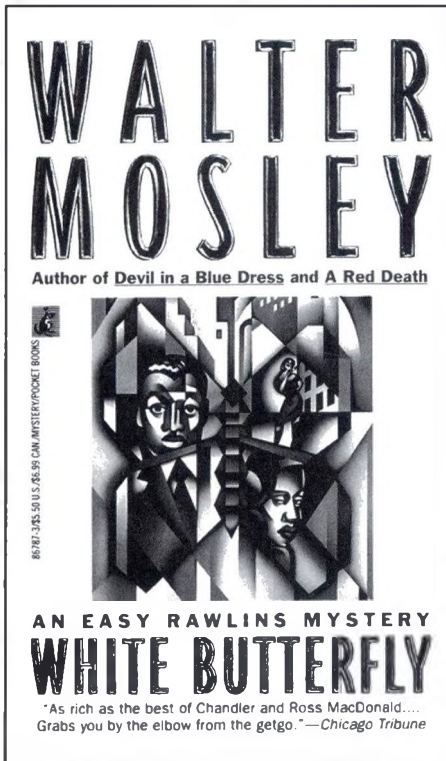
Paradoxically, by the end of the story when Scott has deduced the identity of Emily Jane's killer, he chooses not to pursue the murderer. He even allows the killer to escape, because, putting everything else he says aside, his true loyalties lie not with the law, but with the interests of high society. In the final chapter of the novel, aptly titled "Reunion," both Daniel and Barney are described a year after the murder of Emily Jane as being regenerated. Barney and his new love interest, Sally Brent (a much nicer girl than Emily Jane), visit with Daniel and June at the Swiss lake resort of Montreux. Barney and Sally have eloped, and are about to be married. The brothers are happy and frivolous again. Their comrade, Scott Munson, from Paris writes a letter to them in which he explains how June's

murder confession has been officially dismissed. Scott says at the end of his letter: "The law is no longer interested in either one of you, but I am. Why not join me this winter in Egypt? We could do well there."

Scott Munson abandons his enforcement of the law when he realizes how justice—his social class's justice—has been served by Emily Jane's death, how polite society has benefitted by its windfall, and how the Crewes will prosper by having protected their own. The narrative process in Smith's novel is one that details the moral (or immoral, as the case may be) conversation of the detective hero. His professed inflexibility as symbol of justice is ultimately a ruse, and he betrays not only the conventions of the detective formula, he betrays the democratic, middle-class legal system that he is supposed to represent as well. Scott has discovered a satisfactory resolution to his extended debate with Daniel about justifiable killings: some murders do indeed clear the air, especially for the wealthy.

Though Thorne Smith's fiction is today largely forgotten, it nonetheless expresses an idealized time in American society when the horrors of the First World War were quickly receding into the past and when the horrors of the Second World War had yet to arrive. In his novels, comedies all, life is one grand celebration, a party staffed by mythical creatures of the imagination and protagonists who are eccentric, daffy, solidly upper-middle class and pleasantly inebriated beyond sensibility. His single detective novel, *Did She Fall?*, despite the fact that it isn't one of the greatest mysteries ever written in the English language, upon a re-reading does present numerous examples of the author's personal charm and wit. And most importantly, it presents an effective satire of high society, illustrating the predatory nature of the rich and those who want to be rich. Whatever his artistic intentions are, Thorne Smith somehow effectively manages his hybrid of satire and detective fiction in *Did She Fall?*, and the result of his efforts is one of the more unique specimens to be found in the mystery genre. Perhaps one day *Did She Fall?* will see republication, a fate it so richly deserves. ■

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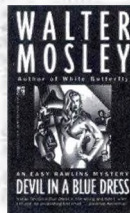
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# Report

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## from 221B

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### Baker Street

BY

**SHERRY ROSE BOND  
AND SCOTT BOND**

**Sherlock Holmes meets  
Jack the Ripper AGAIN?**

DEJA VU TINGED WITH ANTICIPATION AND DREAD WASHED OVER US AS WE GAZED DOWN AT THE COVER OF EDWARD B. HANNA'S SHERLOCKIAN NOVEL, *THE WHITECHAPEL HORRORS* (CARROLL AND GRAF, 1992). THIS WASN'T THE FIRST TIME

we had encountered Holmes and the Ripper between hard covers and it almost certainly wouldn't be the last.

In all the annals of real-life crime, only the Kennedy assassination and the Ripper atrocities have generated a body of speculative literature to rival that devoted to Sherlock Holmes himself. After the passing of more than a century, the unhappy fact remains that if anyone in the world knows the real name of Jack the Ripper, they're not about to tell. But every cloud has its silver lining and this one is no exception. Just as Watson's unpublished adventures have inspired countless pastiches over the years, so the Ripper has been prime grist for the mill.

Indeed, what could be more natural, more "high concept", than the Victorian world's most famous fictional detective attempting to solve its most famous crime? Even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle couldn't resist theorizing about the Ripper although, regrettably, his ideas were never formalized as part of the Canon. Where Sir Arthur failed, however, others have rushed in, with predictably mixed results.

Amazingly enough, the Ripper was shadowing Holmes almost from the moment of the detective's birth. *A Study in Scarlet*, the first published adventure, appeared in 1887. As if in response to this grimly appropriate title, the Ripper sprang to bloody life in the autumn of 1888, just one year later. By 1893, the now-famous Sherlock Holmes was made the subject of an unauthorized melodrama by a minor playwright named Charles Rogers. This obscure effort, predating the famous William Gillette play by six years, finds Holmes attempting to rescue Watson from the clutches of a Ripper-like maniac. The play toured the provinces for years, giving ample testimony to the deep impression both detective and Ripper had made on the public of that era.

It wasn't until 1965, however, that the game was afoot in earnest with the appearance of Herman Cohen's full color motion picture, *A Study in Terror* (Comptom-Cameo Films). Screenwriters Donald and Derek Ford used the Ripper murders as the framework for a well-paced thriller in which Sherlock Holmes triumphs once again. As both plot and characters are purely fictional (sic!), no claim is made to the real Ripper's identity. The film was

meant to be the first in a new series, but a particularly inept advertising campaign lead to a poor showing at the box office and a sequel never materialized. Underappreciated at the time of its release, *A Study in Terror* is rich in period atmosphere and has some fine moments. John Neville is splendidly cast as the detective but the chief delight here is the still-unsurpassed Mycroft of the late Robert Morley. The scene in Baker Street where Mycroft tries to rouse Sherlock to action is a small comic masterpiece ("Holmes fiddles while Mycroft burns," wrote Kevin G. Shinnick in *Scarlet Street Magazine*) and the film is worth seeking out for this scene alone. The film also inspired a tie-in novelization by the Ellery Queen team of Frederic Dannay and Manfred Lee. Queen introduces the Watson-penned narrative and then deduces the Ripper's identity himself! Happily, film and book have different solutions so you can be assured of enjoying both.

In 1976 a genuine shiver of excitement met the publication of *Jack the Ripper: The Final Solution* (McKay, 1976), written by Stephen Knight. Heralded as a real breakthrough at the time, the sad events related therein revolved around the unfortunate Prince Albert Victor ("Eddy"), Duke of Clarence and heir to the British throne. The Tale begins with a secret affair between Prince Eddy and a poor Catholic ship girl by the name of Elizabeth Annie Crook. The union allegedly produced a child, the discovery of which caused a major panic in the upper echelons of Whitehall. The government, still reeling from the "Bloody Sunday" riot of 1887 and beset by a host of other difficulties, feared that a fresh scandal could topple the monarchy. Events were subsequently set in motion which would separate the couple and ultimately led to the murder of five Whitechapel prostitutes in the autumn of 1888.

Although Knight's theory has been, for the most part, discredited (see *Jack the Ripper: The Complete Casebook* by Donald Rumbelow, Contemporary Books, 1988), the book is still a gripping read. Featuring real-life detective work, conspiracy, government cover-up and



Masonic ritual murder, the story was to inspire some significant offshoots.

The best known of these is Bob Clark's fine 1979 film, *Murder by Decree*. Produced in Canada, the story line follows the general outline of Knight's theory but is presented in the context of a Sherlock Holmes adventure. Although some reviewers found the plot confusing and difficult to follow, the film was generally well received, in part because of its splendid cast. Here we get Christopher Plummer as a sensitive, compassionate Holmes and James Mason in a much praised turn as Dr. Watson, along with Susan Clark, David Hemmings, Sir John Gielgud and Frank Finlay. The movie also had a tie-in novel by Robert Weverka (Ballantine Books, 1979), nicely adapted from John Hopkins' intelligent screenplay. Other works following the same path have included Brian Clemens' 1988 play, *Holmes and the Ripper*, and Paul West's non-Sherlockian novel, *The Women of Whitechapel and Jack the Ripper* (Random House, 1991).

Apparently spurred by this flurry of activity, 1978 also saw the appearance of Michael Dibdin's *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story* (Pantheon, 1978), a highly original pastiche with a shock ending almost as horrific as the murders themselves. Other authors of the period were also in hot pursuit, accompanied by some very familiar faces. The Napoleon of Crime, Professor James Moriarty, has a brush with the Ripper in John Gardner's *Return of Moriarty* (Putnam, 1974) and brother Mycroft joins the fray in Ray Walsh's *The Mycroft Memoranda* (Andre Deutsch, 1984). And, of course, let's not forget Inspector Lestrade, who gets his turn at bat in M.J. Trow's *The Supreme Adventure of Inspector Lestrade* (Stein and Day, 1985).

This brings us to the volume at hand. Author Edward Hanna's *The Whitechapel Horrors* is neither the best nor the worst of the lot. Although crisply and professionally written, in the final analysis it really has very little that is new to offer. Indeed, it seems purposely designed for people with little or no previous experience with Holmes or

the Ripper. To this end we are given over one hundred (!) footnotes which resurrect such scholarly chestnuts as Watson's wound, the color of Holmes' dressing gown, who the Baker Street



Irregulars were and so forth. Sometimes these notes come in handy to remind us who some of the supporting players in the Ripper saga were but, otherwise, you may want to skip most of them.

Author Hanna hews very closely to the historical record in presenting the case and, unfortunately, this is the book's undoing. The Sherlockian part of the novel is merely new icing on a very stale cake. Aside from one clever and, we think, genuinely new speculation as to how the Ripper committed his crimes unseen, all the rest has been done before. We're given no new theory of the Ripper's identity, no new or interesting twists on the Holmes/Watson relationship. We even have to suffer through warmed-over cameo appearances by Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, all too familiar to those in Nicholas Meyer's 1976 pastiche, *The West End Horror*. Even the titles are nearly identical.

Other difficulties abound. While Hanna handles his main characters fairly well, his depiction of Watson as an arch-Tory, complete with uncharitable views on the poor, strikes a false note. The author places deliberate anachro-

nisms on the lips of both Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes for no apparent reason other than to explain them away with more pesky footnotes. There are also frustrating lapses in Watson's notes at two critical points in the action, totally uncalled for as the story is delivered by an unidentified narrator. Most annoying of all are the characters who speak in the author's laboriously phoneticized Cockney. What are we to make of such words as "bel'vieve" and "stw'reet"? Conan Doyle never resorted to this kind of overkill and Hanna should have been astute enough to avoid such a glaring Americanism as "youse".

For those in search of a ripping yarn, this is a solid but ultimately disappointing effort.

## BAKER STREET JOURNAL Rescued

Last year the fate of the venerable *Baker Street Journal* seemed in doubt as its long-time publisher, Fordham University Press, announced plans to discontinue all journal publication. This, coupled with the resignation of its most recent editor, Philip Shreffler, suggested that the *BSJ* might be entering into its final days.

Happily for Sherlockians everywhere, the vigorous and speedy actions of *BSJ* head, Thomas L. Stix, Jr., have insured publication under an enthusiastic new editor. The journal will now be published, as it was in the beginning, under the banner of *The Baker Street Irregulars*. The newly installed editor is William R. Cochran, a life-long Sherlockian and English teacher residing in DuQuoin, Illinois.

The first issue under the new regime is at hand (March, 1993) and it is comparable in every way to its excellent predecessors. Scholarly articles, reviews, news, editorial comments and cartoons are all intact and enhanced by the welcome addition of half-tone photography.

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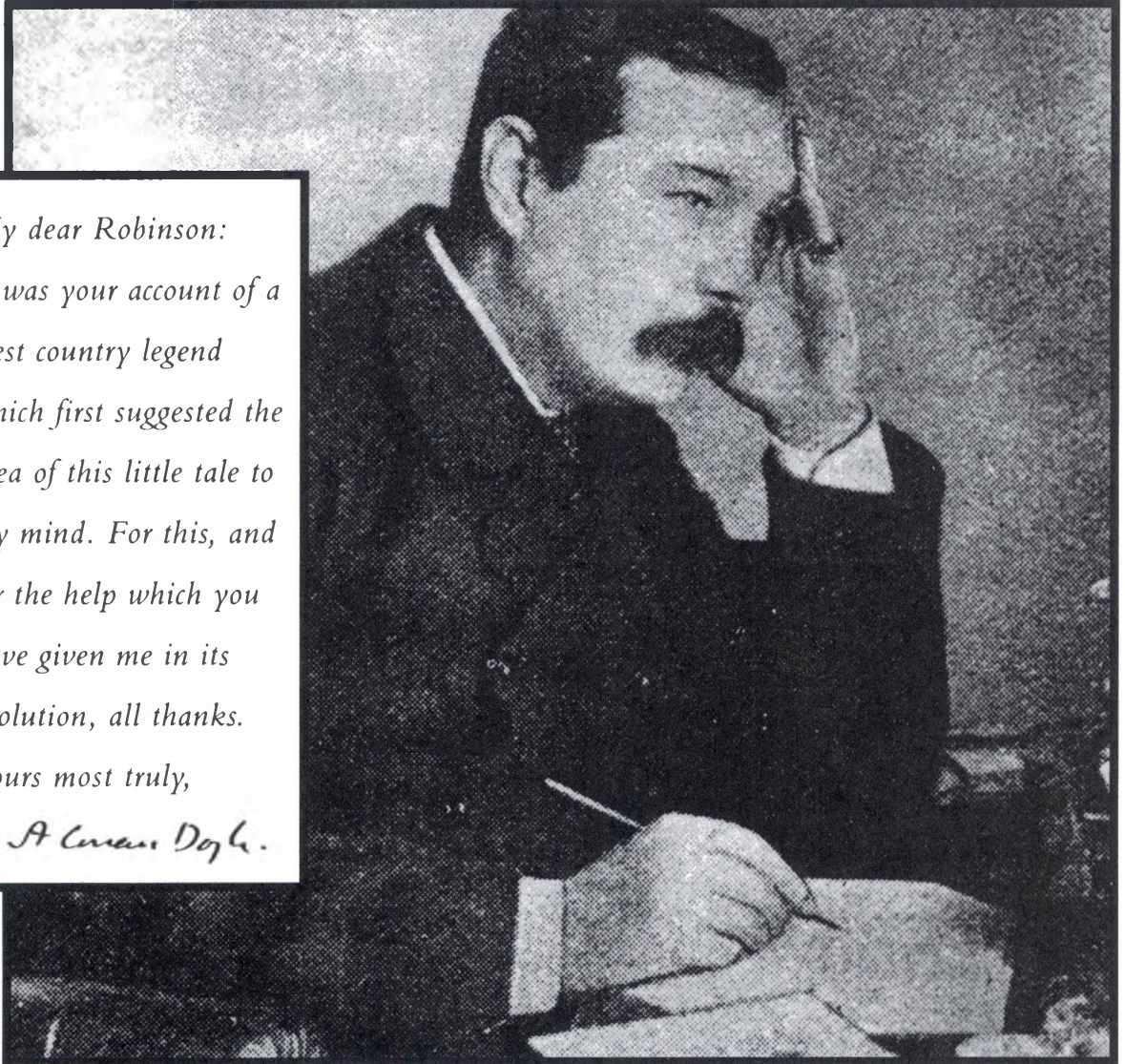
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# The Enigmatic B. Fletcher Robinson and the Writing of The Hound of the Baskervilles

*My dear Robinson:  
It was your account of a  
west country legend  
which first suggested the  
idea of this little tale to  
my mind. For this, and  
for the help which you  
have given me in its  
evolution, all thanks.*

*Yours most truly,*

*A Conan Doyle.*



**by William S. Cramer**



In the Spring 1984 issue of *The Armchair Detective*, the results of a poll of readers' favorite mystery novels were

announced ("The Armchair Detective Readers' Survey" by Michael Seidman and Otto Penzler). The top finisher among 460 titles nominated for best book was *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Arthur Conan Doyle's magnificent spine-tingler about Sherlock Holmes and his confrontation on a fog-shrouded moor with a reputed "hellhound." What most readers of this famous tale may not realize is that the originator of the central themes of the story was not Conan Doyle; it was a man whose influence, some have insisted, even extended to assistance in the actual writing. Indeed, Bertram Fletcher Robinson, while largely responsible for the best mystery novel ever written, remains himself to this day somewhat of an enigma.

The bare facts regarding the origin of the idea for *The Hound of the Baskervilles* are anything but mysterious—indeed, they were placed up front by Doyle for the reader to clearly note. In the story's initial installment in the August 1901 issue of *The Strand Magazine*, a footnote on the first page read:

This story owes its inception to my friend, Mr. Fletcher Robinson, who has helped me both in the general plot and in local details. A.C.D.

In the first book edition of the tale, published in London in 1902 by George Newnes, Ltd., this obligatory admission took the form of a dedication, which appeared as follows:

My dear Robinson:

It was to your account of a West-Country legend that this tale owes its inception. For this and for your help in the detail all thanks. Yours most truly,

A. Conan Doyle

All subsequent British editions of the book carried this same dedication, but the first American publication, also in 1902 and published by McClure, Philips and Company in New York, gave a slightly changed version. It read:

My dear Robinson:

It was your account of a west country legend which first suggested the idea of this little tale to my mind. For this, and for the help which you have given me in its evolution, all thanks. Yours most truly,

A. Conan Doyle

Questions immediately arose within literary circles, after the initial publication of the story in 1901, as to the extent of Robinson's role in this collaborative effort. Just what was his role, and just who *was* Fletcher Robinson?

It may be fitting that someone so intimately involved in the creation of the all-time favorite mystery novel should end up being a bit of a mystery himself. An exhaustive check by this writer (a professional academic librarian) failed to uncover any mention of Fletcher Robinson in any biographical dictionary or other standard reference source. But a fragmentary sketch of the man can be constructed from some scattered sources, as well as from a couple terse obituaries.

Bertram Fletcher Robinson was born at Ipplepen in Devonshire in 1871. After attending Newton College, he entered Jesus College, Cambridge University, in 1890, where he studied law. Endowed with a splendid athletic frame, Robinson played rugby football for the Cambridge Blues from 1891 to 1893.<sup>1</sup> After successfully completing his law degree, Robinson decided to forfeit a legal career in favor of journalism. His uncle, the journalistically-renowned Sir John Robinson, editor of the *Daily News* in London, used his influence to get his nephew a position on the *Daily Express*, where Fletcher Robinson (he dropped the "Bertram" at this point) became a popular columnist and, eventually, an assistant editor. He later held editorial positions with *Vanity Fair* and *The World*. He died quite suddenly

(more on this later) of typhoid fever, according to an obituary in *The Times*, on January 21, 1907, at about the age of thirty-five.<sup>2</sup>

There is some evidence that Robinson and Arthur Conan Doyle had met a number of times during the last decade of the nineteenth century,<sup>3</sup> but it was an occasion in 1900 which formed a lasting admiration between the two men that led eventually to the collaboration resulting in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Both had been actively engaged in South Africa during the Boer War, Robinson as a correspondent for the *Daily Express*, Doyle as a physician at a military hospital in Bloemfontein. In July 1900, they were coincidentally both aboard the *Briton* when this ship left Capetown bound for England. An incident occurred during the voyage which caused a casual acquaintanceship to become a lasting friendship between the two writers. A French army officer on board the vessel, Major Roger Raoud Duval, had provoked Conan Doyle's anger by expressing the opinion that the British troops had used dum-dum bullets during the Boer War.<sup>4</sup> The loyal and patriotic Conan Doyle had called Duval a liar to his face, and so there existed on board for a time a very strained relationship between the two. Robinson took it upon himself to act as a peacemaker, and interceded in the affair, convincing Duval that a letter of apology to Doyle would be appropriate. This letter, according to Conan Doyle, helped to avert "a serious incident."<sup>5</sup>

Upon his return home in August 1900, Doyle was initially caught up in an attempt to become a politician. He was unsuccessful as a candidate for Parliament for Edinburgh, but the vigorous campaign he waged caused a relapse of the enteric fever he had originally contracted while in South Africa. During the voyage home on the *Briton*, Robinson had urged Doyle to join him the following spring for a golfing holiday in Cromer, on the North Sea coast of Norfolkshire. Now, in March 1901, with a need for some type of recuperative activity, this seemed to Doyle a

William Cramer is an Assistant Professor and Reference Librarian at Oakland State University in Michigan. His library experience spans 22 years and has been a long-time fan of detective fiction, with a particular interest in Sherlock Holmes.

good time to accept this invitation for some rest and relaxation.<sup>6</sup>

At Cromer, the two men stayed at the Royal Links Hotel, and when not on the golf course, engaged in long and desultory discussions on many topics of mutual interest. During one Sunday afternoon chat, Robinson told Doyle of an old Devonshire legend about a spectral hound which caught the author's imagination.<sup>7</sup> According to J.E. Hodder Williams in *The Bookman* of April 1902, this conversation led eventually to what became *The Hound of the Baskervilles*:

The two men began building up a chain of events, and in a very few hours the plot of the sensational story was conceived, and it was agreed that Doyle should write it. When he came to working out the details, he found, however, that some masterful central figure was needed, some strong man who would influence the whole course of events, and his natural reflection was: "Why should I invent such a character when I have him already in [Sherlock] Holmes?"<sup>8</sup>

Doyle's excitement about all of this is evident in a short note he wrote to his mother during his stay at Cromer:

Fletcher Robinson came here with me and we are going to do a small book together, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a real creeper.<sup>9</sup>

Now that the idea for the story was firmly entrenched in Doyle's mind by Robinson, it was perhaps natural that the two would next want to visit the site of the legend. Hence, after a brief return to London, they were off together to Robinson's native Devonshire. In the early spring of 1901, the two men spent some time tramping about the moors of west England in the very area where the upcoming Sherlock Holmes novel would be placed. In yet another letter to his mother, this time from Princetown, Doyle wrote:

Here I am in the highest town in England. Robinson and I are exploring the moor over our Sherlock Holmes book. I think it will

work out splendidly—indeed I have already done nearly half of it. Holmes is at his very best, and it is a highly dramatic idea—which I owe to Robinson. We did 14 miles over the



moor today and we are now pleasantly weary. It is a great place, very sad & wild, dotted with the dwellings of prehistoric man, strange monoliths and huts and graves.<sup>10</sup>

The inspirational visit to the scenes of the soon-to-be-written novel probably included stops at Grimspound, Hound Tor, the infamous Princetown prison and other actual places which appeared in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* either under their real names (as did the prison) or as fictitious locations (the prehistoric village of Grimspound became the hamlet of Grimpen with its menacing mire, while Hound Tor is represented in the novel by the ominous Cleft Tor). Once the visit to the moor had been completed, the gestation period for the most beloved mystery novel of all time was complete. The time had come for the writing and it perhaps should not be overly surprising to learn that this much favored tale had its own rather whimsical mystery attached to it.

This concerned Robinson's exact role in the production of the story. As has been demonstrated earlier in this

article, Arthur Conan Doyle clearly and publicly acknowledged Robinson's contributions to the plot of *The Hound of Baskervilles*, in both the initial publication in *The Strand* and in the various book editions. However, from the initial installment in the August 1901 issue of *The Strand*, a rumor began going the rounds in literary circles that Robinson had been either partially or wholly responsible for the actual writing of the story. The editors of the influential journal *The Bookman* definitely adhered to the latter premise. In their October 1901 issue, they announced their belief that Doyle's contribution to the novel had been minimal:

In a brief note Dr. Doyle, whose name alone is at the head of the story, acknowledges the collaboration of Mr. Fletcher Robinson. Of course the matter is one which concerns primarily only the two authors and their publishers, but we have very little hesitation in expressing our conviction that the story is almost entirely Mr. Robinson's, and that Dr. Doyle's only important contribution to the partnership is the permission to use the character of Sherlock Holmes.<sup>11</sup>

This is not the only tantalizing tidbit left behind which hints at a larger role for Robinson in the novel's creation. In his published reminiscences, Archibald Marshall—a classmate of Robinson's at Cambridge University—claimed a very active role for his friend in the writing of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. According to Marshall, Robinson, or

"Bobbles," as he was always called...liked writing better than editing. He loved a story, and was a great inventor of them. He gave Conan Doyle the idea and the plot of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and wrote most of its first installment for the *Strand Magazine*. Conan Doyle wanted it to appear under their joint names, but his name alone was wanted, because it was worth so much more.<sup>12</sup>

According to Marshall's account, the pair were paid one hundred pounds for each one thousand words, in the proportion of three for Doyle to one for Robinson. As

Marshall claims to have portrayed this arrangement to his classmate:

Then if you write "How do you do?" Doyle gets six shillings and you get two. He said he had never been good at vulgar fractions, but it sounded right, and anyhow what he wrote was worth it.<sup>13</sup>

Curiously, Sir Arthur failed to provide any refutation to the persistent rumor of Robinson's co-authorship of the novel, or at least not in the forceful manner that one would expect from a man of his fiery nature. He did, in a letter to *The Strand's* editor H. Greenhough Smith, make a claim for sole authorship:

I have the idea of a real creeper for *The Strand*. It is full of surprises, breaking naturally into good lengths for serial purposes. There is one stipulation. I must do it with my friend Fletcher Robinson, and his name, must appear with mine. I can answer for the yarn being all my own in my own style without dilution, since your readers like that. But he gave me the central idea and the local colour, and so I feel his name must appear. I shall want my usual £50 per thousand words for all rights if you do business.<sup>14</sup>

But later, after Doyle decided to use Holmes as the novel's protagonist, he informed Smith that this would, as Marshall contended, double the price:

The price I quoted has for years been my serial price not only for you but with other journals. Now it is evident that this is a very special occasion since as far as I can judge the revival of Holmes would attract a great deal of attention. If put up to open competition I could get very particular terms for this story. Suppose I gave the directors [of the publisher of *The Strand*] the alternative that it should be without Holmes at my old figure or with Holmes at £100 per thous. which would they choose?<sup>15</sup>

The question of Robinson's role, beyond that of the one recognized by Doyle in his footnote in *The Strand* and dedications in the book editions never became a heated controversy in literary circles, if for no other reason than Robinson's failure to make anything of it. Beyond the purported reply to Marshall's jocular remark about the

division of the proceeds from the story, Robinson does not seem to have made any comment—at least no public one—on the matter. Doyle, as well, was anything but clear-cut on the question. His letter to Smith was private, and so one must assume not intended to counteract any public rumor that *The Hound of the Baskervilles* had been either partially or completely written by Fletcher Robinson. One would think that the best opportunity Doyle had to lay the entire matter to rest would have been to include the true version of the "collaboration" in his autobiography *Memories and Adventures*, published in 1924. However, he failed to say anything about the writing of this book in the single chapter he devoted to the Sherlock Holmes saga, and he only briefly mentioned his good friend Robinson one time, in relation to the dum-dum bullet episode on board the *Briton* in 1900.

The whole question seems to have been forgotten until long after both Robinson and Doyle were dead. In 1959, some publicity material released in

connection with the Hammer Film Productions motion picture version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* apparently gave Doyle less than full credit for the novel, which caused the author's son, Adnan M.C. Doyle, to write scathingly to the film company's publicity director:

Fletcher Robinson played no part whatsoever in the writing of *The Hound*. He refused my Father's offer to collaborate and retired at an early stage of the project.<sup>16</sup>


So, the last summation to this intriguing literary mystery would seem to be that Doyle was amenable to a collaboration, perhaps even encouraging it, but Robinson for reasons unknown and unknowable rejected this proposal. A very private individual who left no personal record for researchers to delve into, one can only surmise that he wanted to concentrate on his journalistic endeavors and choose not to spend his time and energies writing fiction.<sup>17</sup>

While it is completely fanciful, this brief account of Fletcher Robinson's contribution to the history of crime

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fiction cannot conclude without some mention of certain rumors concerning his death. As reported earlier, he died very suddenly in the prime of life, and some more susceptible minds seem to have attributed his demise to an ancient curse.

It appears that Robinson was engaged in writing a series of newspaper articles about a celebrated Egyptian mummy that had recently been shipped to the British Museum. In his autobiography, the English scholar and Egyptologist Douglas Sladen writes that some felt that Robinson's death was due to his having incurred the displeasure of the mummy:

The popular account of [Robinson's] death is that, not believing in the malignant powers of the celebrated mummy-case in the British Museum, he determined to make a slashing attack on the belief in the columns of the *Daily Express*, and went to the museum, and sent his photographer there, to collect the materials for that purpose: that he was then, although in the most perfect health, struck down mysteriously by some malady of which he died.<sup>18</sup>



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Perhaps it is fitting that one who contributed so much to the most popular mystery story of all time should, at the end of his life, exit under such mysterious circumstances.



### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Later, during his career as a journalist, Robinson would be the author of books dealing with rugby football, rowing and cycling.

<sup>2</sup> Obituaries in *The Times* (January 22, 1907) p. 12 and *The Athenaeum* (January 26, 1907) p. 104; data concerning Robinson's life and career also received in personal letter from E.F. Mills, Archivist, Jesus College, Cambridge University, dated August 22, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> P.A. Ruber, "Sir Arthur Conan Doyle & Fletcher Robinson: An Epitaph," *Baker Street Gasogene*, 1, no. 2 (1961) p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> In his autobiography, *Memories and Adventures*, Conan Doyle identified his antagonist only as "a foreign officer on board, whose name I will not mention..." Dum-dums were a type of soft-nosed expanding bullet which caused such ghastly destruction that they had been forbidden by the 1899 Hague Convention.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1924), p. 183.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, (3), p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Although the basing of Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* on a Devonshire legend as told to him by Robinson has an all but incontrovertible foundation, other claims have been made over the years. One, emanating from a family named Baskervilles no less, asserted that the idea for Doyle's story came from a legend of a fiery Black Hound that romped about in Herefordshire, near the Welsh border (*The Uncollected Sherlock Holmes*, p. 95). The writer Branch Cabell (in *Ladies and Gentlemen: A Parcel of Reconsiderations*, 1934, pp. 213-215) claimed that Doyle took the

idea not from a legend of a single Devon hound, but rather from a tradition of his own family which had his ancestor, one Richard Cabell, attacked and killed by a whole flock of fire breathing black hounds. And finally, Max Pemberton, editor of *Cassell's Magazine* and a close friend of Doyle, claimed to have once told Robinson of the legend of a phantom dog from the marshy areas of Norfolk, and he maintained that the latter had thus been reminded of the old Dartmoor legend, and that this had consequently given him the idea for the book (*The Uncollected Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 91-92).

<sup>8</sup> J.E. Hodder Williams, "The Reader: Arthur Conan Doyle," *The Bookman*, April 1902, pp. 12-13. Doyle probably debated a bit with himself over the wisdom of reviving Holmes, who he had effectively killed in "The Final Problem," by casting him, in the clutches of the evil Moriarty, into the roaring waters of the Reichenbach Falls. However, the financial advantages of bringing back the Master was too much to resist. The fact of the matter is, however, he did not really bring Holmes back to life, since the time period for *The Hound* was pre-Reichenbach.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Uncollected Sherlock Holmes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), compiled by Richard Lancelyn Green, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>11</sup> *The Bookman*, 14, no. 2 (October 1901), p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> Archibald Marshall, *Out and About: Random Reminiscences* (London: John Murray, 1933), pp. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> H. Greenhough Smith, "Some Letters of Conan Doyle. With Notes and Comments," *The Strand Magazine*, LXXX (October 1930), p. 391.

<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, (9), p. 96.

<sup>16</sup> S. Tupper Bigelow, "The Singular Case of Fletcher Robinson," *Baker Street Gasogene*, 1, no. 2 (1961), p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson appears, however, to have had a change of heart somewhat later, as he did produce two works of fiction, one as a co-author and one on his own. In 1904, Ward, Lock & Co. published the novel *The Trail of the Dead*, written by Robinson with J. Malcolm Fraser, and in 1915, Harper & Brothers published a collection of short stories by Robinson entitled *The Chronicles of Addington Peace*. Both are extremely difficult to locate.

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Sladen, *Twenty Years of My Life* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1915), p. 275. ■

# Criminals don't have a prayer

when faced with the sleuthing skills of Sister Mary Helen. She and another nun have won a trip to Spain that turns out to include unexpected extras: a corpse in a cathedral; a tour group that turns into a group of suspects; and several alarming incidents threatening Sister Mary Helen herself. Fortunately, she is able to call on divine intervention—as well as on her dear friend Kate Murphy of the San Francisco Police Department.

Heavenly reviews for Sister Carol Anne O'Marie and her sleuth Sister Mary Helen:

**"Sister Mary Helen...handles her cases with bustling efficiency and an elfin sense of humor."**

—*The New York Times Book Review*

**"Move over, Miss Marple, here comes supersleuth Sister Mary Helen, a nun with an unusual habit of solving murders."**

—*San Francisco Examiner-Chronicle*

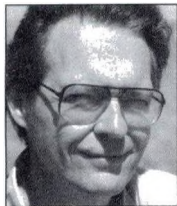
## MURDER MAKES A PILGRIMAGE

Sister Carol Anne O'Marie

A Sister Mary Helen Mystery by the author of  
*The Advent of Dying* and *Murder in Ordinary Time*

Delacorte  Press

Illustration by Brad Farns



# NOVEL VERDICTS

BY JON L. BREEN

## Explanation of symbols:

**A:** All or more than three-quarters of the book devoted to courtroom action.

**1/2:** One-half or more devoted to courtroom action.

**1/4:** One-quarter or more devoted to courtroom action.

**B:** Relatively brief courtroom action; less than a quarter of the book.

**B:** A collection of short stories or novelettes.

*Barbour, Anna Maynard, 186?-1941.*

### **That Mainwaring Affair.**

Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1900.

London: Ward, Lock, 1901. **(B)**

This is an early detective novel very much in the vein of Anna Katharine Green. In his palatial estate on the Hudson River, stockbroker Hugh Mainwaring is murdered and his newly-drawn will vanishes. The 50+ pages of okay trial action concern the will contest, culminating in a bizarre in-court climax attended by a surprising lack of objection from the advocates. The tremendously complicated family relationships and stilted Victorian dialogue make the novel rather hard going for a contemporary reader. The tale makes use of that celebrated mystery cliché, the long-lost claimant from Australia, and the solution embodies an equally hoary device. In her 1913 book, *The Technique of the Mystery Story*, Carolyn Wells praised the novel's construction but credited it with "the longest roll of hackneyed devices in one book."

*Brown, Walt.*

### **The People v. Lee Harvey Oswald.**

Preface by Martin Garbus.

New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992. **(A)**

Having Oswald survive the shooting by Jack Ruby and stand trial for the assassination of President John F. Kennedy is a natural for speculative legal fiction, and this long not-quite-novel, complete with illustrations, index, and bibliography, will intrigue

both assassination and courtroom buffs.

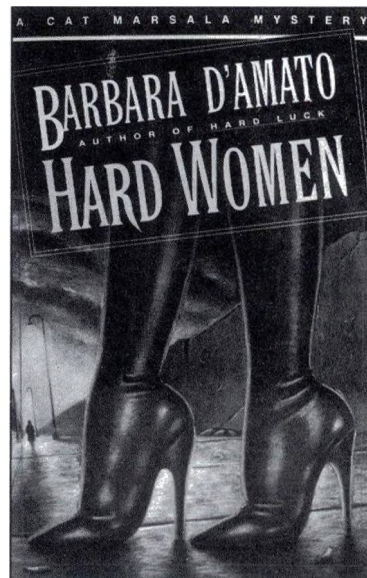
The book is not a success strictly as fiction, however, because the trial is no contest: the defense holds all the cards from the beginning, giving the outcome all the suspense of a bullfight or a foxhunt. The author clearly believes that no competent prosecutor could have tried this case with belief in its success, and as he presents the evidence, he may well be right. The poor prosecutor has been set up with such a porous and trap-strewn case, it takes some inventive authorial maneuvering to explain why it is even allowed to continue to a verdict. Brown offers no original theory of the case, save a very limited one on a single detail. If often as tedious as the real thing, the trial action is generally well done, though there are some oddities that surely cannot be fully explained by the Texas locale: the lawyers get away with too many editorial comments, and at least a couple of times, the judge specifically rules them appropriate and justified; the defense asks that the other side's witness be declared hostile for purposes of cross-examination (surely superfluous), and later the prosecution does the same thing; and I couldn't understand the surprise expressed by all at a routine motion to dismiss at the close of the prosecution case.

*D'Amato, Barbara.*

### **Hard Women.**

New York: Scribners, 1993. **(B)**

The series about Chicago journalist Cat Marsala is one of the best to debut in recent years, marked by lively telling, clever plotting, and the fruits of extensive authorial research. Early in her fourth adventure, Cat is working on a TV essay on prostitution, and her search for interview subjects takes her to Women's Court, a.k.a. hooker court, for a brief but informative ten pages.



*Disney, Doris Miles.*

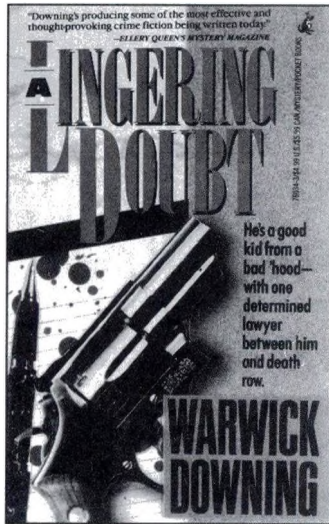
### **The Magic Grandfather.**

Garden City, NY:

Doubleday/Crime Club, 1966. **(B)**

In a typically inventive if not totally successful novel from a prolific and undervalued writer, the longest of three sections takes place in 1952 in a Connecticut town, where the sudden appearance of an elderly vaudevillian brings menace to his former daughter-in-law and joy to the little girl next door. The second section flashes back to 1925 and includes 25 pages on the Illinois trial of Milt Young for the second degree murder of James Ferris, including a brief scene in the jury room. The final section, in 1965, wraps up the story with a final surprise resolution many readers will anticipate. The courtroom action is efficient but not especially memorable. (My thanks to Charles Shibuk for suggesting this title by a favorite writer I'd have sworn never wrote a *Novel Verdicts*—qualified book.)





Downing, Warwick.

**A Lingerin' Doubt.**

New York: Pocket, 1993. (1/2)

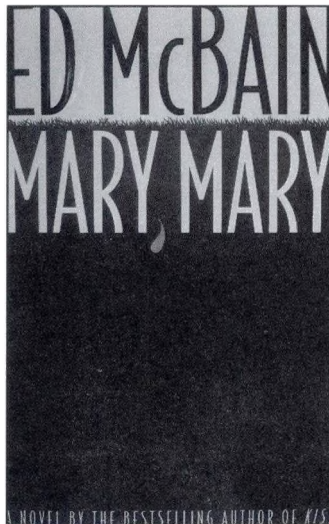
Though this is the third in the National Association of Special Prosecutors series, there is a difference: that organization's representative is not the hero but the nemesis. The novel begins with closing arguments in the Long Beach, California, trial of Drusus Church, charged with the murder of crack dealer Kingsley Rhodes. NASP's Keane Williams, a smooth Mel Torné lookalike with political aspirations, is prosecuting, and narrator Jack Bard, a self-described old-fashioned liberal, defends. There are flashbacks to the preliminary hearing, but most of the courtroom action comes in the penalty phase. In seeking the death penalty for the charismatic Church, Williams tries to prove him guilty of *another* murder for which he was not charged. In his third distinguished novel in a row, Downing again shows himself one of the very best legal fiction specialists currently practicing.

.....  
Mcbain, Ed.

**Mary, Mary.**

New York: Warner, 1993. (1/2)

At last we see Florida lawyer Matthew Hope in action in the courtroom. He defends Mary Barton, a retired school-teacher accused of murdering three little girls and burying them in her garden. She seems to have had a kind of Miss Jean Brodie relationship with her



students in an English girls' school, one of whom is bankrolling her defense. Prosecuting in the Colusa County court is Max (the Ax) Atkins, the original prosecutor having dropped out after she formed a sexual relationship with Hope. Nobody, law-trained or not, handles courtroom give-and-take more expertly than non-lawyer McBain. There's an especially nice set-piece on expert witnesses.

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FREDRIC BROWN'S  
PULP APPRENTICESHIP

1936-1944

---

BY JACK SEABROOK

**Fredric Brown's** LONG AND DIVERSE CAREER AS A WRITER INCLUDED MORE THAN TWENTY NOVELS AND THREE HUNDRED SHORT STORIES, THE VAST MAJORITY OF THEM MYSTERIES. HE IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS HUMOR AND SUSPENSE, TRAITS THAT MAKE NOVELS LIKE *WHAT MAD UNIVERSE* AND *HIS NAME WAS DEATH* CLASSICS. BUT BROWN WAS NOT ALWAYS THE SELF-ASSURED NOVELIST, REGULARLY ENTERTAINING HIS READERS WITH A STREAM OF CLEVER AND DEVILISHLY ORIGINAL NOVELS.

---

Jack Seabrook is the author of *Martians and Misplaced Clues: The Life and Work of Fredric Brown*, published by The Popular Press of Bowling Green State University, August 1993.

As a recent discovery in an old file cabinet passed down from Brown's widow to his son Linn shows, Brown began publishing in earnest in 1936, and some of this early work is of interest to fans who want to know how this popular writer's style evolved. Brown's widow was very protective of his private papers, and so most of the material remained hidden in this cabinet until her death. In the 1980s, Dennis McMillan Publications created a *Fredric Brown Pulp Detective Series* which reprinted previously uncollected or unpublished material from these files. The twelve volumes (so far) in this series contain mystery and some science fiction stories.

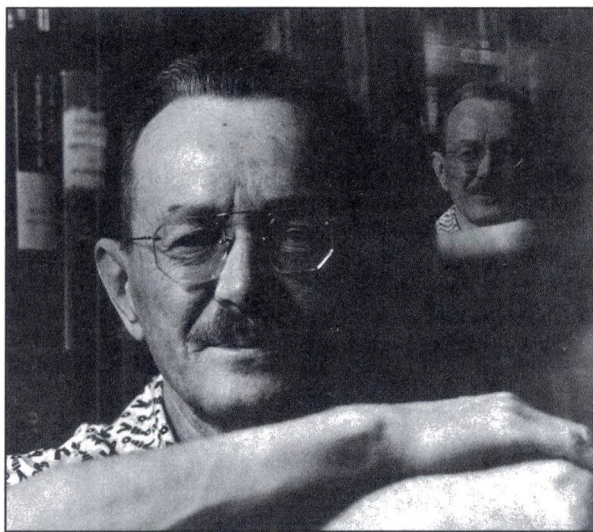
In a move that seems unusual for a pulp writer, Brown began a monthly column called "The Proofreader's Page" in the October 1936 issue of *The American Printer*.

He set himself up as a proofreading authority and answered reader's questions on grammar and style for the next ten years, showing a firm grasp of all aspects of "correct writing."

Meanwhile, also in 1936, Brown began selling humorous short pieces to a slew of trade magazines. He published a series of stories about steamshovel salesman William Z. Williams for the next several years in the *Excavating Engineer*; these stories were a salesman's version of "Can you top this?" in which Williams worked his way out of incredible situations and always managed to make a few sales in the bargain. Brown also masqueraded as "Colonel Cluck" in the late 1930s and very early 1940s. The good Colonel's "Questionable Answer Department" appeared in *The Michigan Well Driller* and several other magazines, featuring entirely fictitious questions and answers on unusual aspects of the trade.

Perhaps of greatest interest to mystery readers is the "Feedum and Weep" series, originally published in *Feedstuffs*, a magazine for feed dealers. These stories feature Ernie, an employee of the feed dealership of Feedum and Weep.

In a typical story, Ernie would hear about an unusual or mysterious occurrence at the farm of a customer—often one who owed money or was due for an order. In true detective fashion Ernie would ride out to the farm and inspect



FREDRIC BROWN, 1906-1972

PHOTO COURTESY OF LINN BROWN

the scene of the "crime." His boss would grow ever angrier as time passed without Ernie's return, then Ernie would telephone to explain that the mystery was solved and the farmer so grateful that he had placed a big order or paid his bill. One story, "The Case of the Uncountable Sheep," deals with Mr. Gettemeyer, who counts a different number of sheep each time he herds them into his barn. Ernie discovers that Gettemeyer's grandson, Walter, is playing a trick on his grandfather by letting sheep out through a loose plank in back so they can run around and be counted again. These stories can best be described as "hayseed Holmes" but their folksy humor and unpretentious style make them entertaining.

Around 1936-1937, Brown was working as a proofreader for a printing house in Milwaukee (probably Fowle Co.) that published pulp magazines, and, as he later remarked, he read so many of the damn things he knew he could write them better. Doing just that, he wrote and sold his first detective story to a pulp in 1937. "The Moon for a Nickel" was published in the March 1938 *Detective Story*, and, like

most of his earlier stories, is simple and rather primitive. The tale tells of a downtrodden man who operates a telescope in a public park, sees a robbery, and, after being saved by the police, cleverly uses his telescope to make the

money he needs for his wife's operation by charging fifty cents to view the scene of the crime. Brown does not give his characters names here, and the story is little more than a clever early effort. The conclusion is satisfying, though, and demonstrates Brown's attitude that problems can be solved by looking at them from a fresh angle.

"The Moon for a Nickel" shows that, from the start, Brown was not content with writing formulaic detective stories; simple as it is, it avoids private detectives and eschews violence or murder for a character sketch and a clever twist. The writing style is straight-forward, consisting

of punchy, journalistic, third-person narration. This style continues in Brown's four 1939 stories, "The Cheese on Stilts" (*Thrilling Detective*, January 1939), "There are Bloodstains in the Alley" (*Detective Yarns*, February 1939), "Murder at 10:15" (*Clues*, May 1939), and "Blood of the Dragon" (*Variety Detective*, September 1939). The first of these features Carter Monk, a reporter who investigates a lawyer's murder, and it is as standard as Brown's stories ever get. It includes several murders, a beautiful secretary named Sugar, gangsters, a nightclub, and a conclusion in which the hero explains how the crime was committed. Monk works for the *Daily Blad* (a newspaper name Brown was to use often), and the action implies an urban setting.

"There are Bloodstains in the Alley" is a routine story of a police investigation into a murder. It is punctuated regularly by the characters commenting, "Monday is an off night"—an ironic contrast to the violent action that occurs on the Monday in the story. "Murder at 10:15" revolves around Benny Boyle, a cop whose weight keeps him off the force until he proves



MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA ARCHIVES

**PERCIVAL WILDE (LEFT) PRESENTS THE 1947 MWA EDGAR AWARD FOR "BEST FIRST NOVEL" TO FREDRIC BROWN FOR *THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT*.**

his worth by saving the son of the Chief of Police. Finally, "Blood of the Dragon" introduces "Deadpan" Dunn, a detective who would turn up again (with a different last name) in 1940's "Murder Draws a Crowd." "Deadpan" lost his face in a nitroglycerine accident years ago, and a plastic surgeon gave him a new one that left him unable to register expression. This story finds the hero tracking down counterfeiters by investigating a child's tale of a dragon

roaming behind her house—the dragon is crafted to scare the child away from the criminals' lair, but the red and green printer's ink used to decorate it tips off the detective to its true nature.

Many of the incidental details of these five stories were reused by Brown as he continued to look for new ideas, but the basic shape of his most standard work was already clear by the end of 1939: unusual heroes, usually newspapermen or cops who are either dynamic

(like Monk and Deadpan) or underappreciated (like Boyle), solve a crime (with some violence or murder along the way) and win the prize they seek.

Brown outlined his ideas about writing detective fiction in a letter published in the October 1940 issue of *The Author and Journalist*. Condemning Superman, who had flown to fame just two years before, Brown says that the new tendency will be away from heroes who are invincible and toward the per-

flectly ordinary guy, who isn't a paragon of strength or courage, who, through no fault of his own, gets into a mess of trouble with criminals who are stronger than he, but who, through the courage of desperation, manages to pull a fast one and come out on top.

This is basically a blueprint for the stories Brown would write so successfully for the next twenty-five years, continually portraying the struggle of the ordinary man against extraordinary forces.

Among his 1940 stories, "Murder Draws a Crowd" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, July 27, 1940) features newspapermen, a private detective, and plenty of violence; "Footprints on the Ceiling" (*Ten Detective Aces*, September 1940) has Carter Monk solving another unusual murder and explaining things to Sugar; and "Fugitive Impostor" (*Ten Detective Aces*, January 1941) features Pudgy, a teenaged night attendant at a funeral parlor who outwits Duke Hall, a well-known gangster.

"Fugitive Impostor" is told in first-person narration by Pudgy, and is more cleverly written than the crime stories that precede it. Actually, Brown's first successful attempt at breaking the mold of the standard mystery is "Teacup Trouble" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, July 13, 1940), which uses delightfully slangy first-person narration in a comedy of crimes committed solely by a kleptomaniac. The story is told by Slip Wilson, a slightly dishonest character who meets Cadwaller Van Aylslea, a rich kleptomaniac. Unfortunately, Cad's kleptomania sometimes works in reverse, causing him to give back more than he stole. Cad then begins to think he is Napoleon (a condition that occurs in several Brown stories) and finally becomes convinced he is a teacup. At the end, Slip learns that Cad's brother is also crazy and, as a result, Slip vows to go straight. "Teacup Trouble" is a funny story which profits from its likable characters. There is no detective and really no mystery; it is simply an entertaining tale in which petty crime serves as a backdrop.

Another unusual early story is "Town Wanted" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, September 7, 1940), which is really the first of the short-shorts that would later

become one of Brown's trademarks. In it, the narrator, Jimmy, describes his meeting with the dishonest boss of a town and his plan to take control, which is met with no surprise by the boss. Jimmy is given a stake to set himself up in another town and tells the story from Miami, asking the reader if his own town is ripe for corruption. More social commentary than mystery or crime story, "Town Wanted" foreshadows "Don't Look Behind You" (1948), in which the narrator plans to murder the reader after he finishes the story.

Besides Carter Monk, who appeared in three stories, and Deadpan, featured in two, Brown created two other series characters in this early period. The advantage of such characters, of course, is that they allow an author to forego exposition after several stories. The first series character is Carey Rix, a private detective who solves crimes in "The Strange Sisters Strange" (*Detective Fiction Weekly*, December 28, 1940) and "Client Unknown" (*Phantom Detective*, April 1941). Although amiable, Rix has

no unique qualities, and these two stories are distinguished only by some eccentric characters and intriguing gimmicks in the way crimes are committed.

Brown's other series character is an original, a character who demonstrates some of the eccentricities that set this author apart from his contemporaries in the detective fiction field. He is Henry Smith, agent/investigator for the Phalanx Life and Fire Insurance Company, who appears in the following stories:

"Life and Fire"

(*Detective Fiction Weekly*, March 22, 1941)

"The Incredible Bomber"

(*G-Men Detective*, March 1942)

"A Change for the Hearse"

(*New Detective*, March 1943)

"Death Insurance Payment"

(*Ten Detective Aces*, October 1943)

"The Bucket of Gems Case"

(*Detective Story*, August 1944)

"Whistler's Murder"

(*Detective Story*, December 1946)

A pattern is set in "Life and Fire," the first and best of the series. Smith visits a remote house in order to sell insurance



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and is taken hostage by members of a gang who are also holding millionaire Jerome Kessler in an upstairs room. Through a combination of luck and quick thinking, Smith saves himself and Kessler and outdoes the criminals. Were

this the extent of the story, it would have little importance. However, Brown takes pains to make Smith seem as ordinary as possible, as is shown by a descriptive passage from "A Change for the Hearse":

There was nothing very special about Mr. Smith... (he was) middle-aged, small and dapper. He wore gold-rimmed pince-nez spectacles on a black silk cord fastened to his lapel, and he wore a conservative business suit with pin stripes...

In "Life and Fire," Smith is confused by the gangsters' use of the slang term "sap," and he is nearly killed because he does not even know that a gun's safety catch must be released for the gun to be fired. Smith's main characteristic is his selfless devotion to his job: all of his troubles are the result of his attempts to sell insurance or collect a premium, and when he solves a crime it is nearly always because he sees the solution as being beneficial to his company's interests.

In all but the last story, "Whistler's Murder," the denouement finds Smith selling insurance either to a grateful policeman or to someone whose name he has cleared of a crime. Although there is often violence around him, Smith rarely has to resort to physical activity; his powers of observation and deduction are usually enough for him to solve seemingly insolvable crimes. In this way, Smith may be Brown's most traditional detective: he uses the methods of Sherlock

Holmes, but he uses them not for the public good or out of a sense of moral duty. Rather, Smith is the perfect corporate employee, doing everything on

dog destined to win, merely because he is a more careful observer than anyone around him, he is completely unflappable, and his motives are so direct. The final Smith story demonstrates the little man's superiority over "hard-boiled"

private eyes—he is the only person able to solve a crime committed in broad moonlight right before the eyes of two well-paid operators from the city.

In May 1941, Brown published his first novelette, "Homicide Sanitarium" (*Thrilling Detective*). The story is a whodunit in which a private detective takes a job impersonating a lunatic in an asylum in order to flush out a murder. The story is action-packed and entertaining, but it only breaks new ground for the author by its length. "Trouble Comes Double" (*Popular Detective*, December 1941) is another long piece, and it profits from the use of several disguises and a fast-paced first-person narrative (as did "Homicide Sanitarium"). As Brown grew more experienced, he began to use the first-person style more and more to tell his stories; it eventually became his most effective method.

Other stories in 1941 vary in quality, but overall they show Brown finding his voice. He quickly discarded the idea of writing stories featuring private detectives and relied instead on average, working-class characters for his heroes. "You'll End Up Burning!" (*Ten Detective Aces*, November 1941) stands out, both for the twists and turns of its plot and for its punchy, first-person narration. "Thirty Corpses Every Thursday" (*Detective Tales*, December 1941) is also notable mostly for its regional detail—it tells of a harrowing bus trip through the Southwest. Again, Brown's prose is



## The Novels of Fredric Brown

### *The Ed and Am Hunter Mysteries*

THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT (1949)\*

THE DEAD RINGER (1948)

THE BLOODY MOONLIGHT (1949)

COMPLIMENTS OF A FIEND (1950)

DEATH HAS MANY DOORS (1951)

THE LATE LAMENTED (1959)

MRS. MURPHY'S UNDERPANTS (1963)

### *Other Mystery Novels*

MURDER CAN BE FUN (1948)

THE SCREAMING MIMI (1949)

HERE COMES A CANDLE (1950)

NIGHT OF THE JABBERWOCK (1951)

THE CASE OF THE DANCING SANDWICHES (1951)

THE FAR CRY (1951)

THE DEEP END (1952)

WE ALL KILLED GRANDMA (1952)

MADBALL (1953)

HIS NAME WAS DEATH (1954)

THE WENCH IS DEAD (1955)

THE LENIENT BEAST (1956)

ONE FOR THE ROAD (1958)

KNOCK THREE-ONE-TWO (1959)

THE MURDERERS (1961)

THE FIVE-DAY NIGHTMARE (1963)

### *Collected Short Stories*

Carnival of Crime: The Best Mystery Stories of Fredric Brown, ed. by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. and Martin H. Greenberg.

Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985

\*All dates are for first American publication

behalf of the insurance company for which he works. Taken in this light, the character could become annoying, but Brown's humor makes him instead a wonderful eccentric: he is the under-

functional and quick: he is writing at a high level for the pulps, but he has yet to reach the more lyrical style of his mid-forties work.

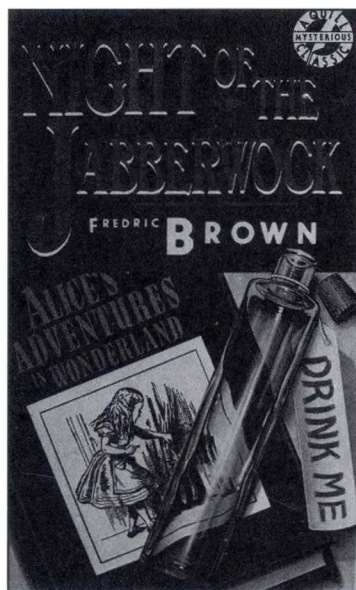
Finally, one of Brown's best early stories appeared in the August 2, 1941 *Detective Fiction Weekly*. It is "Little Boy Lost," a brief tale of a young man who wants to join a gang on a robbery and the grandmother who seems to live in the past and think of the young man as her little boy. The ending is nearly tragic: a policeman comes looking for the boy because his friends were captured, but their confederate, who shot another policeman, escaped. The boy's mother is terrified until the grandmother reveals that she put sleeping pills in a drink she gave the boy, who has been asleep in his car across the street the whole time. "Little Boy Lost" is a moving story in which the characters are beautifully drawn and the third-person narrations just omniscient enough to reveal the necessary thoughts and feelings of those involved. An urban tragedy with a classic twist, it is a nutshell sample of the type of realism and humanity that Brown would use so successfully in *The Fabulous Clipjoint*.

By the next year the country was at war, and Brown was writing stories at a terrific pace, publishing 40 stories in 1942. Consequently, there are some duds, but there are also a number of stories that show Brown's skill growing rapidly. In many stories written in 1942, Brown's prose becomes lyrical in passages, signalling a move away from the punchy, journalistic style with which he began his career. One of his lesser efforts, "A Cat Walks" (*Detective Story* April 1942), at one point evokes the unpublished poetry that Brown wrote throughout his career:

There was a thin sliver of new moon playing hide and seek among high cumulus clouds, fast drifting, although down on the ground there didn't seem to be a breath of wind.

"Little Apple Hard to Peel" (*Detective Tales*, February 1942) is one of Brown's most chilling tales, about a boy who is completely evil and what happens to him as he grows up. It features first-person narration and a detailed evocation of a small midwestern town. John

Appel, the evil antagonist, is without virtue, and the shock of his vengeful actions on the innocents of the town is powerful. Finally, when one of the characters is pushed beyond his limit of endurance and kills Appel, the result is



only relief: no punishment is deserved or given. In her autobiography, Brown's wife recalled this story as one which violated a taboo but was so good that it sold. "The thing that mainly made it off-trail," she wrote, "was that a character, though a sympathetic one, was permitted to get away with a crime, without punishment." Although this taboo is now a thing of the past, the story remains shocking and powerful due to its crisp prose and striking imagery.

"Death in the Dark" (*Dime Mystery*, March 1942) is another taut story about a man conquering his fear of the dark and reaffirming his love for his wife. Here, Brown examines a psychological problem and thus hints at what would become a major concern in his later novels. In fact, several stories written in 1942 contain ideas that would later appear in Brown's novels. "Handbook for Homicide" (*Detective Tales*, March 1942) includes an unusual book that gives the story's killer the ideas for his actions; this theme is echoed in *Compliments of a Fiend* (1950) in which one of Charles Fort's books is used by a kidnapper to his own advantage, and in

*Night of the Jabberwock* (1950), in which the works of Lewis Carroll are used for various criminal purposes. The character of Sibi Barranya, a fortune-telling killer in "A Date to Die" (*Strange Detective Mysteries*, July 1942), predates that of Ramah Singh, who serves the same function in *Compliments of a Fiend*.

Brown's most experimental novel, *Here Comes a Candle* (1950), is foreshadowed in several early stories. "Red is the Hue of Hell" (*Strange Detective Mysteries*, July 1942) features a hero who must conquer his own pyromania in order to contribute to the American war effort (in the later novel, Joe Bailey is unable to overcome his obsessive psychological fear of candles and hatchets). "The New One" (*Unknown Worlds*, October 1942) has a similar plot but also includes elements of fantasy. Dreams are used effectively (in a manner similar to that of *Here Comes a Candle* and parts of *Murder Can Be Fun*) in "Nothing Sinister" (*Mystery Magazine*, September 1942), a story concerning an advertising man whose wife and friend are trying to kill him.

One of the strongest stories of this period is "A Little White Lye" (*Ten Detective Aces*, September 1942), in which Brown first tries out the plot he would later use so well in *The Far Cry* (1951) and where he begins to experiment with the narrative process. Briefly, the story concerns Dirk and Ginny, newlyweds who buy a house in which a man had previously murdered his wife and dissolved her body in a tub filled with lye. Ginny begins to suspect that Dirk is the murderer, and she fears that his new identity is a ruse to allow him to search the house for money hidden by the murdered woman. In the end, Ginny is wrong, but she must tell a white lie in order to avoid admitting the truth of her suspicions about her innocent husband. Although the story is told in the third person, it is occasionally broken by passages in parentheses which express Ginny's thoughts as interior monologues. The suspense is great, and the narrative pace and style serve to heighten the tension. Yet for all its good qualities, "A Little White Lye" is merely a story; when it is expanded and colored with personal experience in *The Far Cry*, it becomes

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one of Brown's finest moments.

There are other fine moments in Brown's 1942 work, and by the end of the year he is writing in a manner which sets him apart from all but the best of his pulp contemporaries. "Get Out of Town" (*Thrilling Detective*, September 1942) reads somewhat like early Chandler and features a scene that recalls Hemingway's *To Have and Have Not* in a story about courage, whether in fighting, denying old age, or plying one's art as one sees fit. "I'll See You At Midnight" (*Clues*, November 1942) includes several passages in which the lead character recalls happier times with his estranged wife and concludes with their reuniting:

And then I quit trying to be funny and sat down on the edge of the bed and put my arms around her. I said, "Honey, I went around to find out and we can get the same apartment back that we had before. Thank God it doesn't take as long to get remarried as it does to get divorced, and everything will be—"

The same? No, I knew it wouldn't, and from her eyes I could see that she felt that way about it, too. Not the same, but a thousand times better. You have to lose something first and then, miraculously and unexpectedly, get it back, before you can begin to understand how much better.

In October 1942, Fredric Brown published his longest story yet, "The Santa Claus Murders," in *Detective Story*. The seed of the 1948 novel *Murder Can Be Fun*, this story concerns Bill Tracy, writer of the radio soap opera "Millie's Millions," who writes scripts for a new radio show called "Murder Can Be Fun" and is the prime suspect when the

murders he plots on paper begin to occur in real life. Other highlights of this busy year include "Double Murder" (*Thrilling Detective*, November 1942), which begins with a chapter written from the perspective of a psychotic killer and thus anticipates *Knock 3-1-2* (1959); and "A Fine Night for Murder" (*Detective Tales*, November 1942), which recalls "I'll See You At Midnight" in its portrait of an estranged couple reuniting and anticipates *Night of the Jabbenwock* (1950) in the lamentation of a policeman that nothing ever happens in his town on Monday nights (a theme continued from "There Are Bloodstains in the Alley," as well). All in all, 1942 is a major year in Fredric Brown's work; he writes so many stories and explores such a variety of themes that he begins finding new methods of expression in his prose, his plots become inventive enough to be mined for later novels, and his characters grow farther and farther away from the cardboard detectives and villains that dominate the detective pulps.

Brown's short story output from this point on is more manageable, and he begins to rework several themes that reveal interesting facets of his concerns. Perhaps the most important theme is that of the influence of philosopher Charles Fort. "Charles Fort," explains one character in *Compliments of a Fiend*:

"...was a New York newspaperman who died about twenty years ago. He was either a screwball or a genius, and plenty of people think he was a genius; people like Ben Hecht and Tiffany Thayer, and Carl Sandburg and Sherwood Anderson. They organized a Fortean Society and published a periodical. I

don't know whether it's still running or not."

"But what did he write about?" I asked.

"Damn near everything. He believed that science, especially astronomy and meteorology, was screwy, that it had gone off the beam somewhere and led us astray. He gathered facts—mostly in the form of news clippings from everywhere—of things that didn't fit in with the current opinions of the scientists and are therefore ignored or explained away. Rains of frogs, rains of fishes, mysterious appearances and disappearances, werewolves, spaceships, sea serpents, earthquakes and meteors, Martians and mermaids. It's damned fascinating stuff..."

A collection of Fort's books was published in 1941, and it is possible that Brown read it not long after, for "The Spherical Ghoul" (*Thrilling Mystery*, January 1943) and "The Angelic Anglemorm" (*Unknown Worlds*, February 1943) are both clearly influenced by Fort's writing.

In "The Spherical Ghoul," Jerry Grant is a student working nights at the morgue while finishing studies for his Ph.D. and developing his thesis on "The Origin and Partial Justification of Superstitions." He reads the scholarly text, *The Golden Bough*, throughout the story, and is a completely different character than the young night attendants at morgues who solved crimes in earlier Brown stories ("Fugitive Imposter," January 1941 and "Twice-Killed Corpse," March 1942 for example). The crime in this story belongs in the classic mystery category of the locked room: how did a corpse in a glass case in the basement of a guarded funeral parlor get its face destroyed so thoroughly that it could not be identified? The solution to the mystery is ridiculous—an armadillo lowered through a small opening above the coffin did the job—but the methods Jerry uses to solve it are what matter.

"Death is a Noise," published in *Popular Detective* a month after "The Spherical Ghoul," demonstrates the truth of a claim Brown made in a 1949 article in the *Unicorn Mystery Book Club News*, discussing a trip to Los Angeles during the Depression:

I traveled to Los Angeles and back, broke flatter than a tortilla, and, during six months in L.A., Tucson and Phoenix, got a beautiful



Grapes-of-Wrath view of the underside of things which has probably influenced my writing ever since. I hitch-hiked out, but by the time I came back I was an expert "bo" and rode the redball freights, including the top of a reefer through a dust storm in Kansas that I'll never forget.

In the story, George Scardale rides a train as a hobo, heading for a job driving a nitroglycerine truck through the mountains. He describes the beginning of his train ride:

The third of the string was an empty, with the side door open. I ran alongside and got in.

The back end of a box-car is the best place. You can sit facing forward with your back against the wall. I took a newspaper out of my pocket and unfolded it to sit on while I walked into the darkness of the back of the car. Walked slowly, feeling the way with my feet, so I shouldn't stumble over any bo who happened to be there.

I reached the back end and without stepping on anyone, put down the paper and sat on it. I gave a contented grunt to be out of the wind, and shoved my hands into my pockets to get them warm again.

Brown is now capable of enriching his stories with details from his own past experience, and his writing is mature enough to evoke successfully the world of the hobo.

Not all of Brown's 1943 work is dependent on characterization and atmosphere, however. "The Wicked Flea" (*Ten Detective Aces*, January 1943) turns on a biblical pun: "The wicked flee when no man pursueth." In a very funny short story, "The Sleuth from Mars," (*Detective Tales*, February 1943), Terry Wilson dresses as a Martian for a costume ball and catches bank robbers while still dressed in his bizarre outfit. The fast pace and outlandish humor of this tale prefigure Brown's 1949 science fiction masterpiece, *What Mad Universe*. "Hound of Hell" (*Ten Detective Aces*, February 1943) is a short tale which relies solely on a good plot set-up to deliver a vicious twist ending. "Death's Dark Angel" (*Thrilling Detective*, May 1943), although relatively poor, includes a plot element that appears in a number of Brown's wartime stories: that of the hero's signing up to fight the

war and thus thawing a love interest which had previously been cold. There are quite a few other stories in this period that deal with war themes; most are terribly dated and rather forced. Brown's work in this year is varied: he is striving toward longer, more personal and complex tales, yet in several places he continues to reuse old formulas and season his plots with the simplest contemporary issues.

An unusual element also found its way into Brown's fiction in 1943: that of the carnival, the strange worlds of freaks, vagrants, and people of the fringe that Brown was to use so well in *The Dead Ringer* (1948) and, especially, *Madball* (1953), one of his wildest novels. "The Freak Show Murders" (*Mystery Magazine*, May 1943), a novella, is most important, for in it can be found many of the characters and events of *The Dead Ringer*, as well as a prototype of Ed Hunter, the young hero of that novel and six others.

"The Freak Show Murders" (which Richard Lupoff has compared favorably to William Lindsay Gresham's *Nightmare Alley*) begins with the murder

of Al Hryner, a carnival hanger-on, and then moves right into the romance between Pete Gaynor, the young narrator, and Stella Alleman, the "snake girl" whom Pete loves. They ride the ferris wheel at night and Pete muses on the combination of beauty and ugliness that he sees when he looks down at the carnival (in a passage similar to one found in *The Dead Ringer*):

It was funny, to be up on top of the world like we were when our car was way up there. Looking down on the midway full of toy tents and toy people walking around and knowing that you were seeing the mixing of two worlds down there. The carneys and the outsiders.

And there was an ugly side of each. Lies and gaffs and deceit and never give a sucker an even break, on the carney's part. But the marks, too. It was because the marks were what they were that the carneys had to be that way. It was larceny in their hearts that made them mob the gambling concessions, trying to get something for nothing...

Then the Ferris wheel went round again and this time, up on top, I forgot all that and saw it as it should be seen. The beauty and pageantry, and brave bright pennants waving in the wind,

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the brave bright brass of the carney band and the red of their uniforms. The ripple of canvas and the ripple of laughter and the ripple of movement.

Passages like this reveal Brown's poetic side. His strength was in his ability to see the good and the bad in the world and in his characters; by spinning a ferris wheel he could include both sides in his portrait without one precluding the other.

By the time he wrote "The Freak Show Murders," Brown was clearly capable of writing a novel. But he waited, and instead wrote more stories, including two that continued the carnival theme. "Tell 'Em, Pagliaccio!" (*Detective Story*, September 1943) includes a circus kidnapping, using the same method as that of an earlier story, "The Monkey Angle" (hide the kidnapped child by putting him in a monkey suit, drugging him and keeping him in a cage). "The Motive Goes Round and Round" (*Thrilling Detective*, October 1943) is Brown's third carnival tale, and it features a nicely written final paragraph:

He stood there for a moment, just looking at her, and then turned and walked, almost blindly, to take down a sidewall curtain of silk brocade to reveal a carousel of solid gold whose glittering menagene was of jade and lapis lazuli steeds with rubies set for eyes.

By 1944, when Brown began work on his first novel, his stories had grown quite personal and his prose was mature. His first story of the year, "The Djinn Murder," was published in the January issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*,

a digest rather than a pulp, and probably the most respected magazine in the field at that time. The story is far-fetched and fun, with the crime solved by a psychology professor and incidental references to Maeterlinck's *Life of the White Ant* and the Seal of Solomon thrown in for good measure. Even "Murder in Miniature" (*Detective Story*, January 1944), which is a more standard murder mystery, is distinguished by its hero, Walt Trenholm, who must overcome his necrophobia to solve the case and rejoin the war effort.

Brown's humor resonates in "The Ghost of Riley" (*Detective Tales*, February 1944), in which a lazy policeman is revered as a hero when he seems to save a group of small girls from an assassin's bomb, but who must be paid off and sent away when the mayor learns that he is alive and was not a hero at all. The treatment of small-town politics is clever and recalls "Town Wanted" in its demonstration of the ease with which corruption spreads. The story is a comedy, though, and as such it is quite successful: Frank D. McSherry, Jr., has called it "perhaps the funniest story in the entire mystery field."

There are some average stories in this year, as well, like "The Ghost Breakers" (*Thrilling Detective*, July 1944) and "The Devil's Woodwinds" (*Dime Mystery*, March 1944), but it is clear that, at its peak, Brown's 1944 work demonstrates that his apprenticeship is over. This is nowhere more evident than in "Murder While You Wait" (*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, July 1944), in which plot is overshadowed by narrative technique: the story is narrated in the first person by Larkin, a private eye, who is

revealed as the murderer at the conclusion by the seemingly naive fat boy he has hired as his assistant. The story uses various standard plot elements—war shortages, the private eye, the fat boy kept off the police payroll because of his weight—and combines them in a fresh and entertaining manner which is enriched by the twist ending where narrator is revealed as criminal.

Another marvelous 1944 tale is "The Jabberwocky Murders" (*Thrilling Detective*, Summer 1944) which, combined with "The Gibbering Night" (*Detective Tales*, July 1944), would become *Night of the Jabberwock*, Brown's excellent 1950 novel. "The Jabberwocky Murders" is great fun, using Brown's substantial interest in Lewis Carroll's works to weave a tale of crime in small-town America. Other engaging stories include "To Slay a Man About a Dog" (*Detective Tales*, September 1944), featuring Peter Kidd, a detective with horn-rimmed glasses who likes explaining the roots of words and who can quote Alexander Pope; and "A Matter of Death" (*Thrilling Detective*, November 1944), which tells the story of Jack Pratt, a young man who returns to Cincinnati after his father's death only to find himself disliked by old friends due to a false rumor that was spread while he was away. In these stories, Brown uses bits and pieces of his experiences, his reading and his old plots to create a mix that is original and unique. By the end of 1944, he had completed *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, and his stories from then on must be discussed in that light.

The period from 1936 to 1944 is thus a period of training for Brown as a writer: he begins with simple detective stories and progresses through a number of experiments in plot and narrative, working with formulas and personal experience until he is able to forge a style all his own.

How, then, are these early stories to be taken? There are many that can stand as classics of the mystery or suspense field, as well as several which would stand out in any genre. Many themes run through the work, and many ideas are raised which provide starting points for later novels. In his



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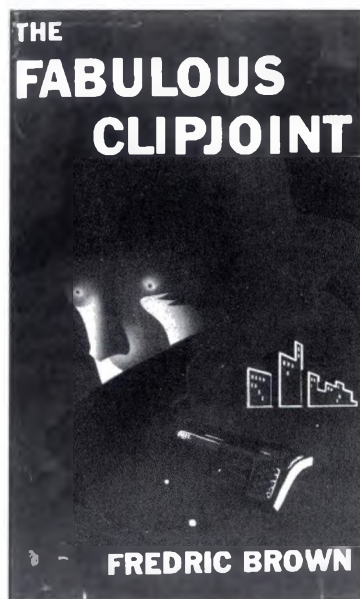
article, "The Structure of the Detective Story: Classical or Modern?" Timothy Steele makes several points that are helpful in studying the early detective fiction of Fredric Brown. Emphasizing the importance of plot and resolution in the mystery story, Steele writes:

Although much modern fiction represents a flight from prearrangement and order, the successful detective story inevitably offers a narrative which is clearly structured; and whereas much modern fiction exhibits an interest in the psychological elaboration of character at the expense of plot, detective fiction embodies, generally speaking, an elevation of plot over character.

Brown's early efforts demonstrate such a clearly-structured narrative for the most part; it is not until he has begun writing novels that he begins to experiment constantly with storytelling methods. His plots are often one of his greatest strengths, yet character is emphasized in many of the better early works, such as "A Little White Lye" and "The Freak Show Murders." Appearing in the pulps, these stories had little opportunity to grapple with intellectual issues—they were chiefly meant to be entertaining, and pace was essential. Brown's fascination with language is not yet evident in these stories, either, but his treatment of serious emotional issues is often quite good: for instance, courage is addressed in "Get Out of Town," marital trust is dealt with in "A Little White Lye," and despair is examined in "The Numberless Shadows." Brown may have felt more comfortable dealing with intellectual issues in his science fiction stories; regarding matters of emotion, however, Brown's early detective stories are often very serious and many deserve a closer look.

"Teacup Trouble" and "Town Wanted" are early examples of stories that break the detective fiction mold: there is more humor than crime in the first, and a clever narrative lifts the second to the level of social commentary. The series of stories featuring insurance salesman Henry Smith demonstrates Brown's penchant for unusual heroes, and novelettes like "Homicide Sanitanum" and "The Santa Claus Murders" show the author begin-

ning to stretch toward novel length. By 1942, Brown was writing stories that he would later mine for elements to use in his novels, and such stories as "Death in the Dark" and "Red is the Hue of



Hell" point toward the psychological concerns that would dominate his later work. "I'll See You At Midnight" is one of several stories that recall the author's poetry and treat marital relationships with insight.

Brown's ideas about philosophy begin to creep into his work with "The Spherical Ghoul," and elements of his personal experience (which again recall the poetry) are behind "Death is a Noise." In "The Freak Show Murders" and several other stories, he integrates his carnival experience into original plots that prefigure *The Dead Ringer* and, by 1944, he is being published in the top magazine in the field as well as writing quirky tales like "To Slay a Man About a Dog." Brown's ability to invent and control his fiction grew rapidly in this early period, and, even though the stories were written for the popular pulp market, he often succeeds in transcending the simple concerns of the detective story with his unique style. Brown's style and variety are what set his early detective fiction apart from that of his pulp contemporaries; in the best of these early stories he is capable of deep emotion and highly-controlled prose, tools that were to

serve him well as his work grew longer and more complex.

I went in the living room and picked up a magazine. It was starting to rain outside, a slow steady drizzle.

It was a detective magazine. I started a story and it was about a rich man who was found dead in his hotel suite, with a noose of yellow silk rope around his neck, but he'd been poisoned. There were lots of suspects, all with motives. His secretary at whom he'd been making passes, a nephew who inherited, a racketeer who owed him money, the secretary's fiancé. In the third chapter they'd just about pinned it on the racketeer and then he's murdered. There's a yellow silk cord around his neck and he's been strangled, but not with the silk cord.

I put down the book. Nuts, I thought, murder isn't like that.

Murder is like this

## THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT

In his detective fiction prior to 1944, Fredric Brown most often deals with murder of one sort or another, always in the short story form. In 1944, when he wrote *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, he was finally able to address a larger subject, one only incidentally related to murder. In an article published around 1952 in the *Unicorn Mystery Book Club News*, Brown's longtime agent and friend, Harry Altshuler, describes the genesis of the novel and writes that Brown had begun work on it in August 1944. He continues: "...the book was finished by the end of 1944...but the first twelve publishers I submitted it to resisted it firmly." The book was finally published in 1947 by Dutton, and it won the Edgar for best first mystery novel that year, an award Brown received late in 1948.

*The Fabulous Clipjoint* was written in the latter part of 1944 but, unlike many of Brown's short mysteries, it is not topical. Although the country was at war, there is no mention of this in the novel, which is set in the slums of 1940s Chicago. Instead, the author's concern is with his characters, especially with that of the nineteen-year-old narrator, Ed Hunter. *The Fabulous Clipjoint* is Ed's rite of passage: at the beginning of the novel he is going nowhere as a printer's apprentice, still living at home

with his family. By the end, he has left home and entered the adult world; the last scene finds him and his uncle riding out of Chicago on a boxcar, with Ed happily looking forward to the challenge of life. Ostensibly a mystery novel, *The Fabulous Clipjoint* actually sabotages that which it pretends to be: the central murder is barely a murder at all, the villains turn out to have had nothing to do with the crime, and detecting—the process of collecting clues and following leads—is in the end less important than the exploration of memory and the understanding of the past.

The story involves the attempt to solve the murder of Wally Hunter, a drunken, middle-aged printer found dead in an alley. His son Ed enlists the aid of his Uncle Ambrose—"Uncle Am"—and, after investigating a number of false leads, they discover that Wally had wanted to die and had led his friend Bunny Wilson into committing a murder that was really a substitute for the suicide Wally could never bring himself to commit. A large part of the novel is taken up by Ed and Am's investigation of Harry Reynolds, a gangster whose brother was convicted by a jury that Wally had once sat on. Yet Reynolds is a convenience, not a necessity: he never appears in the book and the characters that Ed meets on the gangster's trail are important only in that they mark stages of the boy's growth, not because they are essential in understanding the crime.

Thus, *The Fabulous Clipjoint* is a novel of an adolescent's growth from boy to man, played out among Chicago's gritty, working-class characters. The formula for hysteria is evident from the first: Ed dreams an overtly sexual dream of his young stepsister, wakes up and walks past her room, where she lies topless, clearly tempting him. His stepmother is drunk from the night before, and he soon learns that his father has been found dead in an alley. In such a situation, what can Ed be but bitter? He thinks of Chicago as a disgusting place, where people are only interested in the sensational deaths of others. Quite understandably, he runs away on a train to Janesville, where his uncle's carnival awaits.

The carnival life, as presented in chapter two, represents an adult world

of freedom which Ed is not yet able to comprehend but which is saner and more supportive than the environment he has left in Chicago. It is to the carnival that Ed returns at the end of the novel when he is ready to



begin life as an adult.

Upon returning to Chicago, the investigation begins in earnest. Ed and Am enlist the aid of Frank Bassett, a policeman (and another "specialist" whose speech Ed cannot understand, like that of the carnival performers), and begin to retrace the steps Ed's father took on the night he died. The next few chapters trace Ed's growth on two fronts, as he begins his investigation and as he tries to keep his family together and sober for his father's funeral.

Ed is already maturing as these events occur: he is responsible for building order out of the chaotic strands of his life and must resist his own fear and temptation to avoid being devoured by the world around him.

Once Ed has passed these tests, the real concerns of the novel begin to unwind: he learns that his father, who had appeared to be little more than a "drunken bum" had had a romantic youth which included duelling in Mexico, bullfighting in Spain and acting in vaudeville. Wally also wrote poetry in secret, and Ed thus learns that his murdered father had a charac-

ter far deeper than he had realized. From this point on, solving the mystery becomes a matter of probing Ed's memory. In his years in Chicago, living in a steadily disintegrating family environment, Ed has forgotten the happiness of his earliest years and has put aside the memory of his family's sudden move from Gary to Chicago, an event that becomes the key to tying together the various pieces of evidence. In chapter eleven, Ed and Am visit Gary and the scenes of Ed's boyhood, and it is here that Ed's memories flow to the front of his mind. His life becomes not merely the day-to-day existence it had been in Chicago, but rather a continuum of past, present and future; he finally understands his past and is able to put his present in perspective, thus clearing the way for the future.

Ed's realization of his own past, triggered by the trip to Gary, is the highlight of *The Fabulous Clipjoint* and, one could argue, its climax as well. After Ed and Am return to Chicago, Ed can no longer feel comfortable in his home—"It seemed like I was going back there after having been away for years. It didn't seem like home or anything, though. It was just a familiar room." Ed takes matters in his own hands and visits Claire Reymond, Harry Reynolds's mistress, in her fancy hotel room. There, Ed kills a gang member and sleeps with Claire before she leaves Chicago for good; no longer the boy of the novel's early chapters, he is in control of his life and acts in the world, not merely in the microcosm of his family. When, at the novel's end, the killer is revealed to have been Bunny Wilson, the crime is already meaningless. It is clear that Ed's father had wanted to die; he had been devoured by the environment that Ed spends the novel trying to escape and had become a hollow shell of a man whose romantic past was relegated to a cheap suitcase at the bottom of a locker.

Ed has resisted and is able to set out on his future life with some measure of control. Two parallel scenes demonstrate the change. In the first, Ed and Am look out of the window of Am's hotel room after Ed has just resisted his stepsister's drunken attempt at seduction:

I went over and looked out. It was still foggy, gray. But you could see south to the squat, monstrous Merchandise Mart Building, and between the Wacker and it the ugly west near-north side. Mostly ugly old brick buildings hiding ugly lives.

"It's a hell of a view," I told him.

In the second scene, which occurs after the murder has been solved and just before Ed and Am leave Chicago, they look out of a window in the "very swanky cocktail bar" on the top floor of the Allerton Hotel:

We took a table by the window on the south side, looking out toward the Loop. It was beautiful in the bright sunshine. The tall, narrow buildings were like fingers reaching toward the sky.

Ed has passed through the fire and his perceptions have changed accordingly. On the surface, his situation has changed but little: his father is dead, his mother and stepsister are examples of the traps that can kill a young man's spirit. But beneath the exterior, Ed has acquired a new sense of purpose, a freedom that allows infinite potentialities for the future.

At the end of *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, Ed and his uncle speed off, hoboes on a train, toward an uncertain but promising future. A spark of hope has been ignited in the young man, and it is clear that he will succeed in escaping the societal forces that destroyed his father. The novel is thus a mystery only in passing, and its success demonstrates that the promise shown by Fredric Brown's best work in the detective pulps—rather than the annoying exercises in convention that mark the worst of his early work—would be fulfilled in his work as a novelist. The novel has autobiographical elements—Brown had lived in Chicago, his father had died and left him in an uncle's care when Brown was a teenager, he had traveled with a carnival and was familiar with the world of slums, bars and hoboes—and Ed's triumph over his environment corresponds to Brown's triumph over the short mysteries he had been writing for the pulps, where plot was central and characterization a bonus. He sabotages

the traditional mystery in *The Fabulous Clipjoint* by putting all of the answers in the narrator's head and then downplaying the murder and the murderer in favor of examining the boy's initiation into the adult world. All of the conventions of the hard-boiled mystery are here, and Brown even writes an occasional scene in a Chanderlesque style. For example, when Ed pretends to be a tough guy, his narration recalls the irony for which Philip Marlowe was noted: "We had one more drink around, and then the two muscle-boys went out. It was very chummy." Yet this "tough-guy" prose is just play for Brown—he satirizes the smug narration of Chandler's private eye by putting it in the mouth of the frightened Ed Hunter. In his introduction to a recent edition of *The Fabulous Clipjoint*, Ron Goulart noted that Brown:

...could work in the hard-boiled tradition...yet he comes across as a somewhat gentle tough guy, a man not quite as detached and cynical as some of his contemporaries. There is a sensibility underlying [*The Fabulous Clipjoint*], an appreciation of the people who have to make their way on the mean streets and still manage to hold on to their honesty.

It is this "sensibility" that sets the novel and its author apart from the standard mystery.

After *The Fabulous Clipjoint* received the Edgar award in 1948, Brown quit his day job and devoted all his time to his craft. His career spanned another twenty years or so, and in that time he was primarily a novelist, although he wrote a large number of short stories as well. But it is in his first novel that Brown takes his greatest leap forward, out of the cheap, penny-a-word pulps in which he had been working and into the form of the novel, and the result demonstrates that he had talents his early short stories had not given him room to exhibit. The first novel succeeds as a mystery, but the images and thoughts that propel the story along are those of its sensitive narrator, Ed Hunter.

Fredric Brown's short story output dwindled in his later years, as the writing of novels became a full time job. The pulp market died and was replaced

by paperbacks; the penny-a-word writers had to either give up their trade or find a way to write something new. Luckily for Brown, his maturation as a writer coincided with the change in the marketplace, and his first effort was a smashing success.

Brown had not intended to write a follow-up when he wrote this novel, but its success led to a sequel, *The Dead Ringer*, and another five novels and several stories about Ed and Am Hunter after that. Brown continued to write novels well into the 1960s, producing classics of suspense like *The Screaming Mimi* and *The Far Cry* as well as adventurous and experimental novels like *Here Comes a Candle* and *Madball*. But he never completely forgot the early part of his career as a writer, and themes pop up throughout his work that were begun in his earliest stories. Perhaps much of Brown's early work is primitive, quickly written to make a buck in tough times. Yet the majority of it is entertaining, and all of it is of interest to fans of this quirky and often brilliant mystery writer. ■

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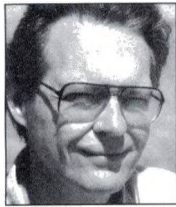
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# WHAT ABOUT MURDER?

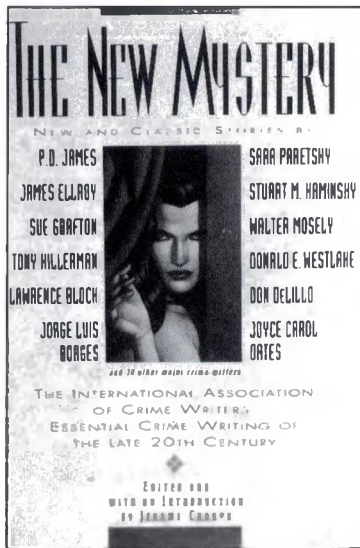
BY JON L. BREEN

Charyn, Jerome, ed.

**The New Mystery: The International Association of Crime Writers' Essential Crime Writing of the Late 20th Century.**

New York: Dutton, 1993. xii, 387p.

In a six-page introduction, Charyn has plenty of interesting things to say. He discusses the damage done to the reputation of crime fiction by Edmund Wilson's attacks in the forties and credits "the best crime writers of this decade" with creating "their own howling whirlwind inside the mouth of God...a new *noir* tradition." He calls



Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre's *Fantomas* (1911) "one of the first 'modern' crime novels" and recounts the 1987 formation of the International Association of Crime Writers as a response to the "new face" of crime fiction. There are also nine pages of author notes on what must surely be one of the most star-studded tables of contents in a crime fiction anthology. This volume presents world literary figures like Joyce Carol Oates, Jorge Luis Borges, Don DeLillo, Raymond Carver, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and

Nadine Gordimer alongside mystery genre giants like Sara Paretsky, Lawrence Sanders, Donald E. Westlake, Tony Hillerman, James Ellroy, P.D. James, Ross Thomas, and Sue Grafton. Of greatest interest, because least familiar, may be foreign crime specialists like Didier Daeninckx, Julian Semionov, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, Piek Biermann, and Laura Grimaldi.

Lachman, Marvin.

**A Reader's Guide to the American Novel of Detection.**

New York: G.K. Hall, 1993. xii, 435p. Index, bibl.

In the format established by Susan Oleksiw's *A Reader's Guide to the Classic British Mystery* (see WAM 2 #49), the author lists and annotates over 1,300 titles by 166 authors. Since future volumes in the series are to cover private-eye and police procedural writers, Lachman has primarily stuck to creators of amateur detective characters, though some police and sleuths-for-hire (notably Nero Wolfe) have been admitted if they clearly belong to the classical rather than the hardboiled or procedural tradition. Following three handy lists—pseudonyms, creator to series character, and series character to creator—the main section is alphabetical by author, with listings of both first American and first British editions and of any alternate titles used for reprints. Annotations are excellent, giving a sense of the plot and flavor of each book, but given Lachman's wide reading and keen critical sense, it is especially regrettable that the series' format excludes any evaluation. For most contemporary authors and series, Lachman has provided a complete listing, but for older series a few sample titles suffice. This is an understandable decision: much as I would have liked comprehensive coverage of C. Daly King or Clifford Knight or Clyde B. Clason or Lenore Glen Offord or Lee Thayer or Carolyn

Wells, when an author has been out of print for thirty to fifty years, one should be grateful for even a mention. The most important older writers—Carr, Queen, Stout, Gardner, Van Dine, Helen McCloy (at least in the Basil Willing series), Phoebe Atwood Taylor, the Lockridges (when writing about Mr. and Mrs. North), Patrick Quentin—are covered thoroughly. Likely the greatest value of the book is the extensive coverage, up to date through 1991, accorded contemporaries like Lilian Jackson Braun, P.M. Carlson, Amanda Cross, Aaron Elkins, Joe L. Hensley, William X. Kienzle, Emma Lathen/R.B. Dominic, Sharyn McCrumb, Ralph McInerney, Charlotte MacLeod, Herbert Resnicow, and William G. Tapply.

Following the main section are over a hundred pages of specialized listings: by occupation of series character, period of story, location, setting (i.e., specialized backgrounds), miscellaneous information, and holiday. Finally, Lachman selects one hundred "notable novels of detection." This belongs on every mystery lover's reference shelf.

Nehr, Ellen.

**Doubleday Crime Club Compendium 1928-1991.**

Martinez, CA: Offspring, 1992. xxi, 682p. Illus., index.

One of the most formidable fan-critics in the mystery field here takes on a job that should have every collector's gratitude: a year-by-year listing, including (where available) bibliographic description, identification of series character and setting, and publisher's blurb, of the greatest and longest-lived of American mystery imprints. From the point when the various symbols for sub-genres (e.g., the laughing skull, the chess piece, the firing gun, and the grasping hand) were introduced in 1943, these are noted. There is a 24-page section of color plates, including many jacket reproduc-

tions—and the Crime Club had some great jackets, especially in its early years.

The overall introduction to this 1993 Edgar-winning volume offers a history of the imprint, including quotations from several of its editors: light-versifier Ogden Nash, Ken McCormick, Lawrence Ashmead, and the longest-tenured and most significant editor of the line, Isabelle Taylor. In the introductions to each year, Nehr has included biographical information on many of the authors, either from the books themselves or from independent sources, including such familiar (or sometimes obscure) bylines as Rufus King, Stephen Chalmers, Kathleen Moore Knight, Charlotte Murray Russell, Frederica De Laguna, Constance and Gwenyth Little, Elizabeth Dean, Amber Dean, Mabel Seeley, Theodora DuBois, Marten Cumberland, Jean Leslie, Margaret Scherf, Margaret Erskine, John Sherwood, the Gordons, Pat McGerr, Doris Miles Disney, Bernice Carey, M.V. Heberden, Hilda Van Siller, Juanita Sheridan, Robert Bloomfield, Dolores Hitchens, and Baynard Kendrick. In the '50s the yearly introductions begin to peter out, disappearing entirely from 1960 on. Even the final year, 1991, has no intro to tell us about the decision to close out the line or to identify which was the very last Crime Club volume. This is not a serious defect, however. It reflects Doubleday's own seeming indifference to the line in its last days, and there is plenty of information around about today's relatively obscure authors, little about those of the earlier period.

Interesting tidbits of information abound. The Crime Club originally had a jury, among whose members were Frances Noyes Hart and William Rose Benet. The "authors" of the *Baffle Book* series, Lassiter Wren and Randle McKay, were actually *one* person, John F. Colter. (Is this the only instance of a single writer using a collaborative pseudonym? And whether it is or not, why?) Milward Kennedy was the author of a 1931 Crime Club selection, *Death in a Deck Chair*, a title that would be used a half-century later for a K.K. Beck nostalgia 'tec. An appendix lists the programs included in the 1931-32

Crime Club radio series.

Nehr is too meticulous a compiler to be caught in many errors. Though Taylor Caldwell's 1963 Crime Club one-shot, *The Late Clara Beame*, appears in its proper place, her name is not in the author index. Caryl Brahms and S.J. Simon's *A Bullet in the Ballet* (1938) becomes *A Bullet for the Ballet*, rather ruining the joke. Though plenty of pseudonym information is included, there is no identification of Eliot Reed, a joint *nom de plume* of Eric Ambler and Charles Rodda. Xantippe, author of the radio satire *Death Catches Up with Mr. Kluck* (1935), is identified as Edith Meister McKnight, a longtime writer of Sherlock Holmes radio programs. The name should be Meiser.

The indefatigable compiler requests corrections and missing information for future editions, which I hope will materialize. Meanwhile, wouldn't it be nice if someone did a similar job for the other (not-quite-so-)long-lived mystery imprint, Dodd, Mead's Red Badge?

(Note: The publisher's address is 75 Millthwait Drive, Martinez, CA 94553.)

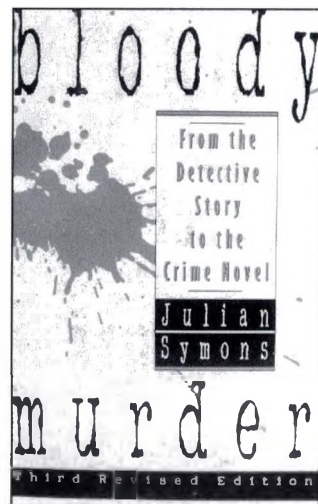
*Symons, Julian.*

**Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel.**

Third revised edition. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992. New York: Mysterious, 1993. xii, 349p. Index.

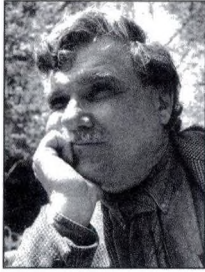
In what its author declares is the final edition of this important history, first published in the U.S. in 1972 as *Mortal Consequences* (see WAM #5), a 36-page "Postscript for the Nineties" is added to the unaltered text of the second edition (see WAM 2 #555). Symons's opinions continue to be forthright and often against the prevailing tide. He finds Elmore Leonard good but overrated (my sentiments exactly) but finds nothing to like in Ellis Peters's Brother Cadfael series—"the dialogue no more than humdrum, the characters ploddingly dull," a conclusion I (along with, as Symons realizes, "tens of thousands" of others) would heartily dispute. His harshest damnation is reserved for violent American writers James Ellroy, Andrew Vachss, and Thomas Harris. Symons updates the careers of writers previously covered (Ruth Rendell, George V. Higgins) while discussing

many newer writers at greater or lesser length. He gives mixed but on balance favorable notices to Simon Brett and Colin Dexter, two of the authors I was surprised not to find in the second edition. (James Crumley, Robert Barnard, and K.C. Constantine continue to be ignored.) Among the other British writers newly discussed are Michael Dibdin (highly praised), Derek Raymond,



Mike Phillips, and Dan Kavanagh (Julian Barnes). Of the new American private eyes, he finds Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone and Loren D. Estleman's Amos Walker "the only ones I have read who emerge as distinct and individual." Sara Paretsky and V.I. Warshawski received a mixed notice. In a section on "the jokers," Symons discusses non-genre writers who use the mystery form only to subvert it, notably Jorge Luis Borges, Umberto Eco, and Paul Auster.

Symons concludes pessimistically: "No matter what logical arguments are raised against them, the popularising Philistines will have their way in the next few years. Strip cartoon writing will become more prevalent and be praised for gritty realism, more unsilenced lambs will raise their sado-masochistic cry. Perhaps there will also be books that equal the best of the writers I admire, but swimming against the tide is a tiring and unwise practice for the old." While understanding the octogenarian's viewpoint, I selfishly hope he will reconsider. ■



# Dial N for Nonsense

By  
LOUIS PHILLIPS

## NEW WORLD ORDER

BECAUSE I AM A NEW YORKER, ONE OF MY FAVORITE BOOKS IS *BIG APPLE ALMANAC*, A COLLECTION OF COMIC STRIPS BY PATRICK M. REYNOLDS. THESE STRIPS, WHICH ORIGINATED IN *NEW YORK NEWSDAY*, CHRONICLE LITTLE KNOWN STORIES ABOUT NEW YORK CITY'S HECTIC PAST.

In his collection, Mr. Reynolds discusses a seminal event: "The first paid police force in America was created by Governor Peter Stuyvesant in 1658 to protect New Amsterdam from nine P.M. until the militia took over at six A.M. Each officer carried a musket, pistol, sword, hourglass, lantern, and a

huge wooden rattle."

About 150 years later, in the early 1800's, the fore-runners of New York's police were paid 87 1/2 ¢ per night and they were called Leatherheads because they wore heavy leather caps.

### Basil Rathbone on Sherlock Holmes

"...I came to the conclusion (as one may in living too closely and too long in seclusion with any one rather unique and difficult personality) that there was nothing lovable about Holmes. He himself seemed capable of transcending the weakness of mere mortals such as myself...understanding us perhaps, accepting us and even pitying us, but only and purely objectively. It would be impossible for such a man to know loneliness or love or sorrow because he was completely sufficient unto himself."

—Basil Rathbone, *In and Out of Character*. Limelight Editions. 1962



### From The Armchair Detective Book of Lists

COLORFUL UNDERWORLD NICKNAMES

1. Willie the Weeper Levin
2. Ha Ha Joe Aluppa
3. Charlie the Bug Workman
4. Louie the Louse
5. Box Car Bertha
6. Footo Foots Biello
7. Johnny "Pinhead" Tudisco
8. Joe "Bananas" Bonnano
9. Potatoes Daddano
10. Frank "The Dasher" Abbandando

Anyone out there with ideas for off-beat lists pertaining to detective and mystery writing?

### TAD Trivia Quest

1. Sometimes those who write about mysteries and murders end as victims of crimes themselves. What mystery writer had his career ended at the age of 37 when his brother, in a dispute over the family inheritance, murdered him?
2. In 17th Century London slang, what were Charlies?

### The Cock Lane Ghost

In 1901, William Henry P. Phyfe issued his *Cyclopedia of Unique Information—5000 Facts and Fancies*. Some of the entries might well appeal to the curious nature of *TAD* readers. For example:

**COCK LANE GHOST**—The name given to a hoax perpetrated in London in 1762, by one William Parsons, his wife, and daughter at their house, 33 Cock Lane. According to the account, a luminous figure resembling Mrs. Kent, a deceased lady that once resided in the house, was seen, while certain knockings and scratchings were heard every night in the room formerly occupied by her. Suspicions as to Mr. Kent having murdered his wife were at once aroused and confirmed by the ghost, which, on being interrogated replied in the affirmative by knockings, as is the way with spirits at the present day. The Duke of York, Dr. Johnson, Horace Walpole, and others visited the house and investigated the affair. An examination proved it to be a conspiracy on the part of Parsons and his wife, for the purpose of extorting money from Mr. Kent. They were tried for imposture and defamation of character, and were condemned to the pillory and imprisonment on July 10, 1762.

### Who Lives There

Everyone knows who lives at 221B Baker Street (or at least who once did), but can you match the following addresses to the fictional detectives who still may be found there?

1. 32 West 74th Street, NYC
2. 39 Gay Street, NYC
3. 43 Elm Street (Uniontown, CT.)
4. 7B Praed Street, London
5. 38 Sutter Street, Los Angeles
6. 13 1/2 Washington Square N., NYC

- A. Solar Pons  
B. The Great Merlini  
C. Hildegard Martha Withers  
D. Paul E. Standish  
E. Rachel Murdock  
F. Jeff & Haila Troy

### Answers to TAD Trivia Quest:

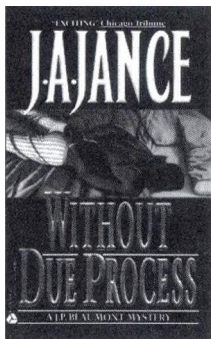
1. Paul L. Ford (1865-1902).
2. Charlies is the nickname for the London Night Watchmen (circa 1640). The name is derived from Charles I, who improved the police system.

### Solution to Who Lives There?

- 1-C, 2-F, 3-D, 4-A, 5-E, 6-B ■



# THE SIGN OF THE CRIMES

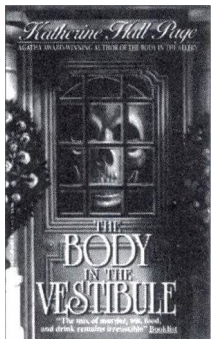


## WITHOUT DUE PROCESS

J. A. Jance

Like everyone else on the force, homicide detective J.P. Beaumont knew Officer Benjamin Weston as "Gentle Ben." Now Weston has been brutally murdered, along with his wife and children. Only five-year-old "Junior" Weston survived. To make matters worse, they're saying Ben was not the model cop he seemed. Beaumont isn't going to let *anyone* get away with that. "Lean forward, grab on, and ride."—*Library Journal*

\$4.99



## THE BODY IN THE VESTIBULE

Katherine Hall Page

Amateur sleuth and former big-time New York caterer Faith Fairchild is writing a cookbook and pursuing epicurean adventure in the French provinces, the ideal place to throw a dinner party. But Faith ends up with an after-dinner corpse, as the Agatha Award-winning author of *The Body in the Bellry* "continues to hit the mark with this charming series."—*Publishers Weekly*

\$4.99



## THE PUMPKIN-SHELL WIFE

Susanna Hofmann McShea

The wife of a small-town plastic surgeon, Esther Maine, was certainly not the sort to end up dead in a New York hot-sheets hotel. Now the geriatric quartet of her neighbors, first encountered in *Hometown Heroes*, has journeyed to the Rotten Apple to seek the truth. "Original, funny and appealing."—David Stout, Edgar Award-winning author of *Carolina Skeletons*

\$4.99



# SOUNDS OF SUSPENSE

BY DICK LOCHTE AND TOM NOLAN

*Lilian Jackson Braun:*

**The Cat Who Went Into the Closet,** read by Dick Van Patten (Dove Audio, 3 hrs., abridged).

Braun's charming whodunits, featuring millionaire Jim Quilleran and his precognitive cats all solving murders in the fictional rural community of Moose County, are fables. As such, they run the risk of seeming overly cute or coy. Braun avoids this possibility by creating a cast of continuing, dimensional characters and placing them in a small town that is as believable as it is appealing. In other Dove Audio adaptations, Theodore Bikel's rich, somewhat brusque narration has added to the solidity of Braun's writing. Here, however, Dick Van Patten (the father figure of TV's "Eight Is Enough"), reads an abridgment of her latest novel as patronizingly as if it were written for children or young adults. Fans of the series may not be amused.

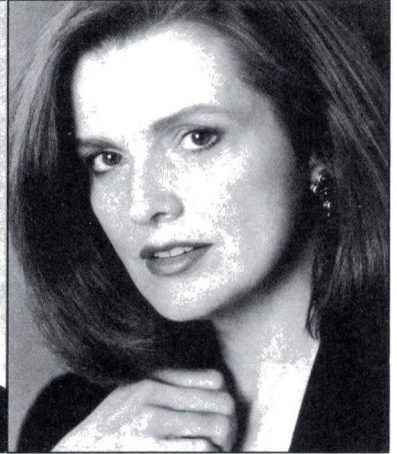
*Patricia D. Cornwell:*

**Body of Evidence,** read by Lindsey Crouse (Harper Audio, 3 hrs., abridged).

Published in 1991, Cornwell's second novel in a series about Dr. Kay Scarpetta, chief medical examiner of Richmond, Virginia, begins with the vicious fatal stabbing of Beryl Madison, a 33-year-old author. Did her killing have anything to do with her current manuscript (since disappeared), a book that might have revealed unpleasant facts about her relationship with legendary reclusive novelist Cary Harper? The conscientious Scarpetta can't help becoming emotionally involved with the victims she encounters. Soon it looks as if the killer is obsessed with her, too. There's a lot more going on here—literary sharks, political rivals, an old flame of Kay's who may or may not be what he seems. The last few twists

in this overcrowded plot are a bit hard to take; but the author writes well, and Oscar-nominee Crouse eventually strikes a good balance between intensity and lyricism.

breathe life into the cardboard cast of bestselling novelist Grisham's latest fiction. The "client" is Mark Sway, an eleven-year-old Memphis boy present at the suicide of a mob lawyer. The lat-



PATRICK MACNEE ("THE AVENGERS") READS JACK HIGGINS' *EYE OF THE STORM*. BLAIR BROWN GIVES A REMARKABLY THOUGHTFUL READING OF JOHN GRISHAM'S *THE CLIENT*.

*Robert Goldsborough:*

**Silver Spire,** read by Michael Murphy (Bantam Audio, 3 hrs., abridged).

Goldsborough's continuation of the Nero Wolfe-Archie Goodwin saga puts the duo in touch with a TV evangelist and his inner circle. The author admirably mimics the set-ups of Wolfe's creator, Rex Stout, and even some of his stylistic touches. But, on this adaptation at least, he uses the "shepherd of the Tabernacle of the Silver Spire" and his crowd purely for reasons of populating a murder mystery. Stout would have had a bit more to say on the subject of the religious right.

*John Grisham:*

**The Client,** read by Blair Brown (BDD Audio, 6 hrs., abridged).

Blair Brown gamely attempts to

ter represents a New Orleans hood indicted for the murder of a United States Senator whose body has not yet been found. Before killing himself, the lawyer tells young Sway where the body is buried. Local and federal law enforcement want Mark to tell what he knows, but the mobster's minions warn him to stay mum.

Afraid for his family and himself, the precocious Sway (in a scene worthy of an old episode of "Mannix"), for the sum of one dollar, retains the services of 52-year-old Reggie Love, a shrewd and capable female advocate who happens to specialize in protecting children's rights.

A great deal of disbelief must be suspended in order for the plot to unfold. Does it make any sort of sense for the mobsters to "warn" this boy to keep quiet instead of bumping him off? And how does keeping silent protect Sway?

Surely telling what he knows is the only way to safety. And why doesn't the villainous hood get some cronies to move the troublesome corpse?

Eventually he does just that, but only in order to set up a contrived slam-dunk sequence where Sway and Love outwit a bunch even clumsier than The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight. If anyone is still listening by then, it can only be because of reader Brown's remarkably thoughtful rendition.

*Jack Higgins:*

**Eye of the Storm,**

read by Patrick Macnee  
(Dove, 3 hrs., abridged; \$15.95).

Higgins' recent thriller takes off from an actual historical incident: the attempted mortar bombing of 10 Downing Street during a meeting of Prime Minister John Major's cabinet at the height of the Gulf War. In the novel, the attack stems from an Iraqi billionaire's attempt to fulfill Saddam Hussein's request for a truly impressive act of terrorism. The businessman calls on a hardline anti-glasnost KGB colonel working out of Paris; the colonel enlists one Sean Dillon, legendary and elusive former IRA agent whose talent for disguise was learned at England's Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. British intelligence learns of Dillon's plans. To foil him, the English turn to Martin Brosnan, an American Special Forces vet who worked alongside Dillon in their old IRA days. Brosnan is rehabilitated now, a professor of political philosophy at the Sorbonne. Will he set aside his books and his promises to his girlfriend and actively join the hunt for his ex-crony? Is that the mother of all rhetorical questions? "The Avengers" Macnee brings a winning professionalism to this slick but rather tired yarn.

*Robert R. McCammon:*

**Gone South,**

read by Will Patton  
(Simon & Schuster Audio,  
3 hrs., abridged).

A Vietnam vet, a victim of Agent Orange, is on the run in the Louisiana swamplands from two bounty hunters—one an Elvis Presley impersonator, the other a Charles Bronson type who happens to have two heads.

That's right. Two heads. And three arms. Even more bizarre, the story is actually suspenseful and darkly hilarious and, well, magical. It's McCammon's warped yet somehow wonderful version of "The Wizard of Oz," with the hero and assorted oddball friends and foes on an odyssey through mysterious and dangerous bayous in search of a legendary faith healer known as The Bright Girl. Reader Patton, an old hand at capturing every nuance of Dixie dialect, is the perfect tour leader for this audio version.

*John D. MacDonald:*

**The Green Ripper and Free Fall in Crimson,**

read by Darren McGavin  
(Random House Audiobooks,  
3 hrs. each, abridged).

These are two late sequential entries in the Travis McGee canon. In *The Green Ripper*, not one of the popular "salvage expert's" better outings, his beloved is murdered and he goes on a rampage against a sinister cult that makes Mike Hammer look like Miss Marple. Curiously, the tale sounds better than it reads. Part of that is due to the abbreviated nature of the audio. The bloodshed doesn't seem as overpowering. But the big difference is that reader McGavin really throws himself into the telling, adding dimension to the supporting cast and solidarity to McGee himself. *Free Fall in Crimson*, though it is still not up to the author's best work, is more typical of the other entries in the series. It involves porno filmmaking, murder and the sport of ballooning. And it has an ending that is truly chilling.

*Georges Simenon:*

**Maigret and the Toy Village,**

read by Andrew Sachs  
(Chivers/G.K. Hall, 4 hrs.  
plus, unabridged).

An old nautical type known as "Peg Leg" is found murdered in his quaint cottage outside of Paris, and Inspector Maigret sets out to solve the crime in this 1944 adventure. A disingenuous housekeeper becomes the focus of the Inspector's attention; their war of wits is a battle of attrition, as the plodding Maigret wears away at the young woman's fabrications. British actor Sachs

("Fawlty Towers") substitutes English dialects for French, to satisfying effect.

*Josephine Tey:*

**The Franchise Affair,**

read by Edward Petherbridge  
(The Mind's Eye, 2 hrs. 45 mins.,  
toll-free order: 1-800-227-2020).

This popular 1948 novel turns upon an English teenager's accusation that she was held prisoner and beaten by a pair of women who live alone in a country house called The Franchise. The women's solicitor attempts to find the truth behind what he believes to be the girl's false story, even as the lawyer nurses a crush on the younger of his clients. All is resolved in a courtroom confrontation. This mixture of suspense and mild romance needs a nimbly sophisticated reader to make it work. Petherbridge, our second-most-favorite Lord Peter Wimsey, more than meets the challenge.

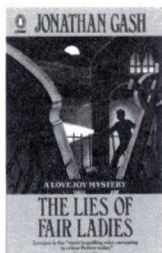
*Joseph Wambaugh:*

**Fugitive Nights,**

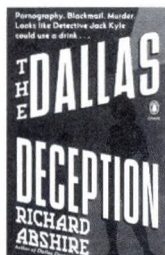
read by J.C. Howe  
(Bookcassette, 8 hrs., unabridged, toll-free order: 1-800-222-3225).

Comedy all but gains the upper hand in this 1992 thriller. The chief buffoon here is Lynn Cutter, a fortysomething Palm Springs police detective with bad knees, a bulging gut and a massive craving for alcohol. The book's second banana is 5-foot-7 Nelson Hareem, a young eager-beaver officer given to throwing choke-holds first and checking IDs later. Bringing the two together is Breda Burrows, former LAPD officer and neophyte Palm Springs private investigator. Burrows needs a police contact to assist with a lucrative surveillance case and persuades Cutter to moonlight. When the man they're watching meets a much-wanted fugitive illegal alien, Hareem joins their team. Wambaugh uses a pretty thick brush in painting this desert scene, and his novel's main figures often seem like cartoon characters. But *Fugitive Nights* has some subtlety, some suspense and a few surprising twists. Reader Howe does a serviceable job with the unabridged text and supplies a good one-word impression of Palm Springs' former celebrity mayor. ■

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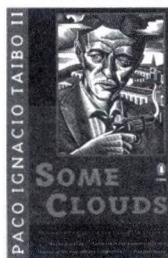


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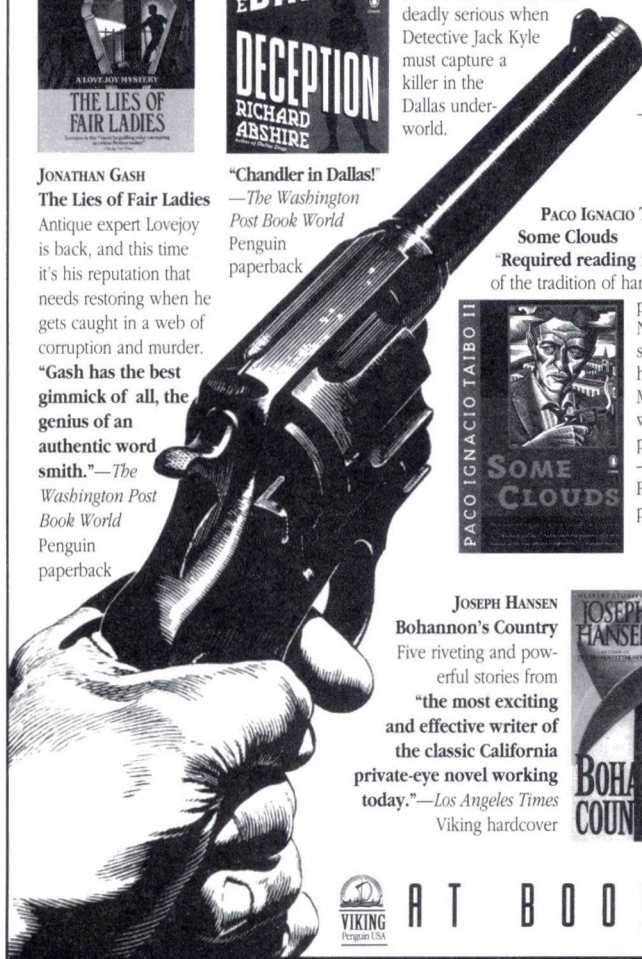


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# Armchair Reviews

## COZY

### Death of the Office Witch

by Marlys Millhiser. New York: Otto Penzler Books, 1993. \$20.00

*Charlie Greene turned off the engine and rolled down the car window. When her eyes began to water from the fumes, she rolled the damned thing back up again.*

So begins another frustrating day in the life of Charlie Greene, a single mother who's relocated to LA to pursue a career in a mid-sized talent agency. Her daily hassles include, but aren't limited to, the never-ending battle with morning LA traffic, the futile attempts to keep her hair and make-up immaculate in uncomfortably sticky weather and the ongoing struggles with her feisty 15-year-old daughter, Libby.

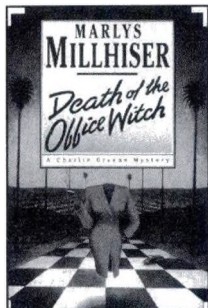
But despite the hassles, you can tell that Charlie loves her life and wouldn't change it a bit. Sure, a little more money would help, and a love interest wouldn't be too bad a thing, but with the demands of her job and the full-time occupation of raising a teenager, who has time to even think of any other options in life?

Well, apparently Lieutenant Dalrymple of the Beverly Hills Police Department thinks that Charlie has plenty of time to spare for a little detecting. He's also convinced that she has definite psychic talents, especially once he overhears her speaking to a dead woman.

You see, Gloria, the company receptionist and "office witch" is missing. Then, she's found in the bushes, quite dead. But not before Charlie has heard her calling for help from a hallway broom closet. Only Charlie couldn't have heard her calling since she was already dead and her body was somewhere else.

So begins the chaotic search to find Gloria's killer. Soon the wide-ranging

cast of characters include an ex-mental patient/secretary, a famous author/Montana housewife/white witch, a stunningly handsome gay assistant, an embezzler turned agent, all bizarre, but all relatively believable in their motives and actions.



When another body turns up, Charlie finally begins to more closely scrutinize her co-workers, unnerved by the thought of being near a murderer and annoyed by the constant pestering of Lt. Dalrymple, who is mesmerized by her seeming psychic powers.

The murders are solved and the book ends with Charlie pooh-poohing the paranormal away while her precocious daughter Libby just as nonchalantly accepts that some definitely weird communications did occur between her mother and a dead witch.

Millhiser's bright, quick style and flip observations make this second Charlie Greene mystery, *Death of an Office Witch*, an enjoyable, light and engrossing read. Charlie Greene is an engaging, realistic character whose struggles, with the exception of a murder investigation, are those that we can easily relate to: single parenthood, office politics, mortgage payments, dating, family guilt, and financial anxieties. This office-oriented mystery also does a pretty slick job of revealing how little any of us really know about those people with whom we spend 40 hours or more a week!

— Danielle Mowery

### Recipe for Death

by Janet Laurence. New York: Doubleday, 1993. \$17.00

There will soon have to be a sub-category in mystery writing to accommodate the growing wave of chef/authors whose books are crammed with menus and calories as well as murder. While women writers presently predominate in this field, there are also male authors of Robert Parker's mold whose heroes

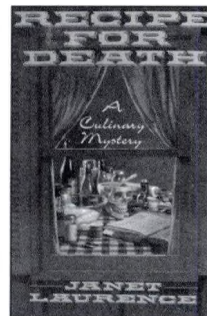
not only opt for exotic meals but persist in detailing every step of preparation.

One of the most prolific writers in this culinary field is Janet Laurence and readers have charted her heroine Darina Lisle's course from cooking school through catering and hotel operation to her present status of successful cookbook author. The latter career involves her in many invitations to judge cooking contests and her latest adventure finds her entangled in a murder case because of such an event.

After a year and a half of harmonious living with Detective Sergeant William Pigram, the latter is dispatched to New York on a case but insists that Darina continue to use his Somerset cottage as her base while she writes her newest book. William and Darina have differing opinions on careers and marriage, and this love affair sees periodic clashes over same.

As William leaves, there remains a slight coolness between them, but Darina is soon so involved with a local family that she can put her own problems aside.

Darina meets the Fry family when she judges a cooking contest and the winner is young Verity Fry, who introduces her to her mother Constance and sister Pru. The family owns and operates a business supplying organically fed animals and fowls to restaurants and markets and invites Darina to come on a tour. Since the farm is in the neighborhood, she accepts and finds the business and family fascinating. She already knows one local chef and eventually learns that he is Pru's husband, although they are separated with Pru and their two children living and working at the farm. Verity, the younger sister, is quite the opposite of her mother and sister, having lofty culinary ambitions and is at this time engaged to an older man who



seemingly encourages her.

These characters have the main roles in a large cast of cooks, suppliers, and cookbook authors and the ingredients for a fatal recipe pile up. Two women, former residents and cousins, are also players, one being a famous cookbook author and when she dies in a fire in France, her secretary-cousin returns to Somerset to live in the family home which is covered by another cousin, an herb supplier.

If all this sounds confusing, just wait. Constance Fry is killed in a hit-skip accident and another death occurs as the result of poisoned paté. With suspects galore, Darina plunges into the mudst of this lethal brew, nosing about for malodors. All sorts of dirty family linen comes to light as the case progresses and to add to our sleuth's woes, William appears to have met an attractive woman in New York. Not to worry, the resourceful Darina sorts out the clues, nails the murderer and surprise, surprise, reunites with her errant lover.

Readers are forewarned that every character in this tale, with the exception

of Verity's intended, is connected with the production, cooking or writing of food and at times, it seems as if some chef has run amok in the kitchen, recklessly throwing in too many soupcons of this and that, resulting in an overloaded dish, or at the least, too many red herrings.

—Miriam L. Clark

#### **The Holy Thief**

by Ellis Peters. New York: Mysterious Press, 1993. \$17.95

The count is nineteen and still climbing for Brother Cadfael. The monk and herbalist has become something of a fixture for mystery fans. This nineteenth century mystery, written by Ellis Peters (a.k.a. Edith Pargeter) and featuring Cadfael is a pleasant visit to twelfth century Shrewsbury, England. The backdrop is full of the bucolic greens of the farm and forest. Against this setting, Peters introduces us to a number of well-drawn characters who are alive, fresh and real.

The story begins with the monks of the Abbey of Ramsey seeking dona-

tions for the restoration of their monastic home, which has only recently been returned to them after being occupied by outlaws. A stern Sub-prior, Herluin, and his clerk, Tutilo, arrive at the Abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul seeking charity from their Benedictine brothers and the surrounding community. Added to the cast of characters is a French troubadour traveling with his servant and his slave girl on his way to Chester.

Herluin collects all manner of donations; money, jewels, even lumber and craftsmen willing to offer their services. However, before he can return to Ramsey, the Severn River which flows past St. Peter and St. Paul inundates all and sundry in a spring flood. When the waters begin to flow into the church, everyone, monks and guests alike, help take all of the valuables, including the reliquary of Saint Winifred, to a safe, dry place. When the flood waters recede, disaster! The reliquary of Saint Winifred has been stolen. The theft triggers a string of incidents which end in murder. This time, Cadfael needs all

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the help he can get to find the killer, including the assistance of Saint Winifred herself.

The story is extremely well told by a writer who has an easy mastery of both description and character. There is also enough of a puzzle to satisfy the ardent mystery fan, but that is just a bonus. An interesting subplot of the book was the sortes Biblicae (biblical lots) which was used to determine the will of Saint Winifred. Little touches such as this lift the Brother Cadfael mysteries out of the ordinary. A most interesting and diverting story, just like its eighteen predecessors.

—John Aveline

#### A Safe Place to Die

by Janice Law. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. \$17.95.

The problem with a posh, walled private community bristling with security devices is that residents may be sealing themselves in with malevolent neighbors.

Being an outsider in a seemingly idyllic Connecticut compound of mini-estates, Anna Peters—security consultant and part-time sleuth starring in her seventh—recognizes this truth. However, when a 14-year-old girl is found murdered within sight of her home in the enclave, the residents rush to attribute the crime to someone who's managed to breach the gated entry, the walls and the electronic surveillance system.

Peters and her artist husband—he's being honored with a one-man show at the community gallery—are guests in the compound when the girl's body is found. She's hired to investigate the bludgeoning by a resident (and former professional colleague) whose grandson is under suspicion.

Peters readily finds that the community's smug certainties are ill-founded. Beneath the surface civility and such dilettantish facades as the art gallery and madrigal music group lie evidence of all the problems that plague many much less privileged locales: uninvolved parents, promiscuity, simmering resentments, and possible sexual perversion.

A second murder occurs before Peters sorts the case out, in a sane, dispassion-

ate, unflamboyant manner that makes for a relaxed, yet far from bland, reading experience.

Integral issues here are some American sociological tendencies, including the naive assumption that well-heeled suburbia assures freedom from fear and corruption, that money buys entitlement to the good life, and that "stranger" usually links with "suspicious."

Such misconceptions are summed-up in the angry reaction of one resident to the first murder.

"This is why we moved out of the goddamn city. Strangers, violence, fear. I wanted to live somewhere where you could let your kid play outside. Where you could take a walk at night without risking disaster."

The Peters' own apparently solid, loving marriage—tested by the strains of coping with Harry's recent heart attack—serves as a contrast to several "dis-unions" Anna discovers in her sleuthing. Though childless, she also discerns the too frequent fall-out of dysfunctional marriages: emotionally neglected kids.

All these revelations are skeins which interlock to form the mystery's conclusion.

As Law makes clear in her spare style, a walled-off compound does not insure security. On the other hand, she implies, a walled-off state of mind/morality almost inevitably guarantees discontent, or worse, disaster.

—Norma J. Shattuck



#### Sorrowheart

by M.K. Lorens. New York: Doubleday, 1993. \$17.00

In a dark and aging family estate, Elsa Worthing and her stepmother protect their ancestral home against a college which threatens to turn their home into a parking lot. When the unpleasant and much disliked college president who was spearheading the move to have the property condemned is murdered, no one seems too put out. However, there are disturbing clues that this death may be tied to the murders of four women, mysteriously poisoned. Sarah Cromwell and her lover, Winston Marlowe

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Sherman, a professor who also writes mysteries under the pseudonym of Henrietta Slocum, become involved when Elsa, a close friend of Sarah's, becomes a suspect in the crimes. At first Sarah is certain that Elsa, who teaches classes on plants and herbs, is incapable of any violence. To her surprise, however, she finds that there is a dark side to Elsa that no one knows about. Elsa, however, is by no means the only suspect. There is Graham Worthing, Elsa's unfaithful husband plagued by the bankruptcy of his business and who knows of Elsa's infidelity; Jaffer, Elsa's lover whose past is shrouded in mystery and tragedy; and Elsa's stepmother, who may know much more than she lets on.

There is a great deal of tragedy and sadness in this story. Almost all the characters carry some unsavory secrets, and their past is full of pain and sorrow. With perhaps the exception of the college president, each character, however, is fully developed and sympathetically drawn. Very little is black and white. All is told with considerable skill and style and with considerable intelligence, until, unfortunately, the very disturbing and confusing conclusion which explains very little about the motiva-

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tions behind the murders. This is the fifth novel in the Winston Sherman series. The others are *Sweet Narcissus*, *Ropedancer's Fall*, *Deception Island* and *Dreamland*, for which M.K. Lorens has understandably and deservedly garnered quite a following. I very much look forward to her next outing.

—Lorrie K. Inagaki

### **Noble Rot**

by Will Harris. New York:  
St. Martin's Press, 1993. \$17.95

Vinnie Letessier, a charming but rather irresponsible ne'er-do-well who has frittered away his considerable inheritance, is reduced to working on his uncle's vineyard, Chateau Letessier, in the Napa Valley. Things take an ugly turn when a dead body is found in a fermentation tank of Cabernet Sauvignon. Not long afterwards, Vinnie's uncle is murdered. Could his uncle's refusal to sell to the consortium who is buying some land in the area have something to do with his death? Vinnie is intent on finding out and discovers that he is a lot more resourceful

than he thought he was. Surprisingly, he also finds that he has a talent for running the winery, with some help from his partner and a new-found love, a ceramicist who lives down the road.

This lighthearted tale of murder in Napa Valley moves along with considerable ease. One event blithely follows another without much of a break, and everything falls nicely into place. The main characters are all very likable, albeit a bit shallow. This a very happy story, aside from the murders, and all ends satisfactorily as expected. If things are a little too pat and if there is too little development in plot and character, one doesn't notice it too much, considering the tone of the book. It is unlikely you will find any deep truths or thoughts in all this, but the book will provide you with a bit of light diversion for awhile. You may also pick up some facts about wine making. By the way, in case you're wondering, according to the book, "noble rot" is a beneficial mold that increases the quality of wine grapes. Will Harriss has written two other mysteries, *Timor Mortis* and *The Bay Psalm Book Murder*, which won the Edgar Award for Best First Novel.

—Lorrie K. Inagaki

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## SPY

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### **Maestro**

by John Gardner. New York:  
Otto Penzler Books, 1993. \$23.00

John Gardner's latest espionage novel is now in the bookstores. It is devoted almost entirely to a flashback of the life of the book's leading character, Louis Passau, world renowned symphony orchestra conductor—and also a spy. Since Passau is now 84 or 90 years old, depending on how you count, that makes for a long life and a long story.

Gardner is a veteran espionage writer now living in Virginia. He has gone through several phases—the reader must remember the Boysie Oakes books (8 of them), the James Bond novels (13 of them), the Moriarty Journals, the Generations trilogy, a couple of short story collections, three previous novels about Big Herbie Kruger (a hero in *Maestro*), several non-series novels and finally an autobiography called *Spin the*

*Bottle*. He is currently said to be working on a sequel to *Maestro*.

*Maestro* is a long and slowly told story of Louis Passau's life and loves in Europe and America, and, almost incidentally, his espionage work. Passau was an Eastern European Jewish boy who arrived on Ellis Island in the early 1900s and who later became a famous musician. He studied music on the Lower East Side of New York, then became a musician-gangster in the Al Capone days on Chicago's South side. Passau was never to leave those days completely behind since his boyhood pal, Carlo, sought for the rest of his life to murder him for crimes which Louis committed during those speakeasy days.

Passau goes through periods of isolation, of musical composition and study, and of being a Hollywood screen composer until he seizes the opportunity to become a symphony conductor in Los Angeles and then in New York. He soon becomes famous and is in demand for concerts in many countries. Other major characters include Big Herbie Kruger, Passau's confessor and a storied figure at the British Secret Intelligence Service. He is a smart buffoon who stage manages the entire debriefing and almost marries his assistant, Pucky. Pucky Curtiss, beautiful young SIS operative and Art Railton, an SIS leader, are the other major characters.

Each interrogation scene contains certain standard topics. They include the SIS and its previous or present activities, detailed pictures of Passau's reminiscences of the women in his life—his loves, marriages and active sex life. Also, each scene contains examples of the musical loves of Louis and Herbie, thereby enabling the author to show the reader his extensive knowledge of past European and American and classical music and its recordings. Another continuing theme is the romance between Herbie and Pucky.

The book enables Gardner to give a relatively full portrait of a specific individual—Passau, a flawed hero. Such a portrait is only rarely seen in this fictional genre. The big secrets which Herbie expects from Passau's revelations occur only rarely, however, and deal primarily with Passau's espionage work. Louis, Herbie and Pucky travel to



Virginia, Florida and then England as they try to evade their pursuers—the FBI and the Mob.

This story of a man who was at the same time a widely known symphony conductor and a spy for three different countries holds the reader's attention without release until he/she reaches the book's tragic ending.

—John F. Harvey

### Hostile Intent

by Clive Egleton. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. \$18.95

As every espionage novel reader knows, the cold war is not over. They simply do things differently now. Some of the rules have changed, but the world's secrets are still up for grabs. This is a smoothly written spy novel with a large cast of characters and a variety of locations. Clive Egleton is a former British Army officer with experience in intelligence who lives in England. He has written twenty two previous novels, including *Missing from the Record*, *Double Deception*, *Last Act* and *In the Red*.

*Hostile Intent* is a novel about an elusive Russian, attractive Starshii Leitenant Galina Kutuzova, of the Russian Army, and also about British middle-level SIS (Secret Intelligence Service) spy, Peter Ashton, a desk officer of proven reliability. But no, there is no romance between them. Ashton pursues Kutuzova across both Europe and the United States for what Russian military secrets she knows, and for her knowledge of what Russian military intelligence is doing in the period after the wall came down and the two enemies became friends, supposedly.

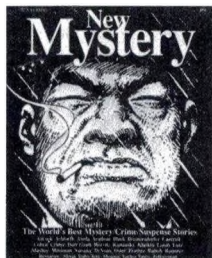
The story is complicated, hard to follow, and switches back and forth between London and Berlin with side trips to Leningrad, East Germany and eventually even to Phoenix where the action reaches its climax. Two of the protagonists are killed there and one is crippled. Meanwhile, Ashton is in trouble with his bosses for making what appears to be a minor episode into something bigger, but he persists and finally convinces all of them that he is right.

Certainly the leading characters

include Ashton and the flat-for-sale problems with his co-owner, a former girlfriend; Starshii Leitenant Galina, an arrogant sexpot with a Swiss bank account and a French passport who creates havoc everywhere; Tony Zale, a mild-mannered American intelligence operative; and Victor Hazelwood, Ashton's division chief who backs him in many questionable situations and who also favors Burmese cigars. Each one is given extensive and separate attention for a longer or shorter period of time.

Author Egleton, a veteran suspense novelist, handles his material well. He moves the reader from one scene and set of characters to another frequently in order to sustain interest. The characters are drawn sharply and distinctively and include several who easily engage our interest and support. Egleton's knowledge of parts of Germany, Russia and the US is obviously intimate, as is his knowledge of the ways of intelligence units in several army and civilian groups. Altogether a satisfying performance!

—John F. Harvey



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### Blue Hearts, A Novel

by Jim Lehrer. New York:

Random House, 1993. \$20.00

This is a spy novel about the CIA and KGB (who else?) which is set in Washington, DC where its author lives. Jim Lehrer is well known for being part of the McNeil/Lehrer Public Television news team. During the 1992 Presidential race, he moderated the first and third debates between the candidates. He is not as well known, however, for the fact that he has written and published eight previous novels. This is the first one to be concerned primarily with crimes and spies in a District of Columbia setting.

There are two main characters, both in late middle age: Charlie Henderson, who is now a bed and breakfast inn proprietor; and Bruce Conn Clark, an expensive international political consultant. Both are former American CIA agents long ago retired. Further, both were covert operators, and in fact the two collaborated on the search for Russian involvement in the Jack Kennedy assassination. Bruce travels in important Washington political and social circles, while Charlie is well connected in West Virginia and lives near the Chesapeake and Ohio Suburban Railroad line which runs along the Potomac River to serve parts of Maryland and West Virginia.

Aside from minor CIA staff members, both active and retired, plus Charlie's wife Mary Jane and Bruce's brother Duane and his staff assistant, there are no other characters which the reader needs to hear about here.

The story being pursued increases in seriousness as the novel proceeds. First, it appears that Bruce is trying to kill Charlie, or is it only that he fears Charlie and is trying to get Charlie's respectful attention? Later, we move into even deeper waters in South Carolina and after that in the District. The question soon becomes, what will Charlie do about this situation, if anything?

The bulk of the book is taken up with two major parts of the story: the continuing life or death conflict between

Bruce and Charlie; and the fifty page flashback in the middle which describes the attempt by CIA agents Bruce and Charlie on November 22-23, 1963 at the CIA Director's request, to determine whether or not the USSR was behind Jack Kennedy's assassination.

What are the strong points of the novel? The plot is hardly its chief attraction, but the characterization of the two middle-aged men is insightful, especially that for Bruce. Also, the inside-the-Beltway insider gossip and terminology passed out gratuitously is worth the price of the novel itself. Lehrer is good at name-dropping and insider terminology and locations in the CIA spook world. Apparently, the book was aimed at Washingtonians and the large number of persons who have lived in or near the District of Columbia. And that includes many of us!

—John F. Harvey

## GENERAL

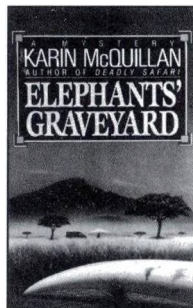
### Elephants' Graveyard

by Karin McQuillan. New York:

Ballantine Books, 1993. \$19.00

Poaching in Kenya has reached such a state that the few remaining elephants huddle for safety around tourist camps. However, the animals have one powerful ally. Emmet Laird has devoted his life to elephant research and to combating the international ivory trade. With ample funds to back him, he has proved a formidable foe to those who for their own personal gain would destroy Africa's precious heritage.

Any number of people—from local poachers to Hong Kong businessmen to filthy-rich Arab emirs who profit from the illicit trade—would like to see him dead. So when Laird's body turns up with a bullet through the heart, his friends, though grieved, are not surprised. Even within his family there are those not overly saddened by his demise: Alicia, his third and present wife, who does not share her husband's passion for wildlife but who does have a passion for luxury; Garret, his feckless



son by a previous marriage; and Kim, his estranged daughter.

Inspector Omondi of the Nairobi Police takes charge of the case. Though he's an intelligent investigator, he's hampered by government corruption and lack of resources. In the meantime, his friend—and a close friend of the murder victim—Jazz Jasper, carries out her own inquiries. After a failed marriage, Jazz has been trying to make a go of it by conducting safari tours. But widely publicized crimes—poaching, and the killing of scientists and animal rights activists—have put the kibosh on the tourist business. She has the time, and with the backing of her friend Mikki (who was Laird's lover) the wherewithal, to track down the person or persons responsible for Laird's death. The trail leads her to the dreadful slums of Nairobi and into the countryside, where she witnesses the slaughter of a herd of elephants and is kidnapped by poachers.

*Elephants' Graveyard* has all the trappings of a good mystery novel—the murder of a wealthy American, numerous suspects with equally numerous motives and alibis, an amateur sleuth with a Police Inspector friend, exotic setting, plenty of action and suspense. By book's end the mystery has been solved and the culprit brought to (in this case poetic) justice. But the real crime—the murder of elephants, and indeed, the destruction of all of Africa's wildlife—is not so easily solved.

—Edward Lodi

#### The Dog Hermit

by David Stout. New York: Mysterious Press, 1993. \$18.95

Here's a book to read if you want to sit up all night, a tale that will concern you long after you turn the last page.

Millionaire Richard Brokaw's nine-year-old son, Jamie, has been kidnapped over the Thanksgiving weekend and the Bessemer Gazette sends out veteran reporter Fran Spicer to cover the story. Spicer is killed in what appears to be a drunk-driving accident, so Executive Editor Will Shafer, who is enjoying a peaceful holiday with his family, takes over the assignment in Long Creek.

Special Agent Gerald Graham with the FBI, a long time friend of Shafer's,

asks Will to give his conclusion of the ransom notes and fills him in on news not given to the rest of the reporters. The two ransom notes are pasted letters from different newspapers and Will concludes that the second note was put together by someone more educated than the first. Graham demands that Will refrain from reporting this information in the Bessemer Gazette.

Not feeling comfortable with Fran Spicer's accidental death, Shafer visits the hospital where the reporter was taken, involving a nurse in his investigation. He noses around the small town, uncovering numerous inconsistencies.

Meanwhile, a small boy is buried in a large tube, deep within the forest, while the kidnappers keep making demands for more money. Special Agent Graham believes that the child won't come out of this alive. Will prays he's wrong, even though time is quickly running out. But, when a hermit and his dog discover the boy and dig him

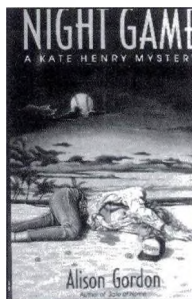
up, things begin to change.

Intriguing and well-written, this novel will keep you guessing until the last page. *The Dog Hermit* glows with warmth and compassion. It's no wonder Stout won an Edgar Award, the tension builds until you want to scream. Great novel and another Edgar! I loved it!

—Catherine M. Nelson

#### Night Game

by Alison Gordon. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. \$18.95



Lest any chauvinist sports fans out there wonder why a woman is writing baseball mysteries, suffice it to say that Alison Gordon is qualified to do so. Not only does she have the background credentials, having covered the Toronto Blue Jays for five years for that Canadian city's *Star*, but she also describes the ambience of the baseball scene convincingly. *Night Game* is Gordon's third novel featuring Kate Henry, her fictitious alter ego.

Henry is in Sunland, spring training

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home of the Toronto Titans, doing the baseball beat for the Toronto *Planet*. While she is fleshing out stories about the Titans' new manager and the team's players, voluptuous local reporter Lucy Cartwright is found murdered near the condo complex where many of the players and their families reside each spring. Lucy's uninhibited sexual mores made her a possible victim of any number of present and former sexual companions.

When rookie Domingo Avila is arrested for the killing, a group of players turn to Kate for help since she is known to have found the killer of two players in Toronto (in one of Gordon's earlier novels). Henry, who turns 42 during the story, is the lover of Toronto police staff sergeant Andy Munro, which gives her a special interest in homicide cases. Henry, local reporter Cal Jagger and attorney Esther Hirsch team up to investigate the case, find the real killer and, of course, free the innocent "Dommy" Avila.

An interesting subplot develops around the lifestyle and family of Lucy Cartwright, focusing on her sexuality

and the influence of born-again but backsliding Christians, such as her stepfather. It is this that provide Kate Henry with a major clue.

Since the story takes place in the early days of spring training, there is very little actual baseball in it, but many of the players are significant characters and add to the novel's general appeal. Gordon tells a nice story and provides an excellent variety of interesting and/or appealing characters.

-Douglas G. Simpson

### The Shrine of Murders

by C. L. Grace. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. \$17.95

For a slim book, this mystery set in 15th-century England offers the near equivalent to an all-you-can-eat experience: a helping of medieval history, manners and customs; a taste of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; and a side-order of the feminist sensibility, circa 1471.

The sleuth-by-chance here is Kathryn Swinbrooke, a Canterbury physician

and apothecary who's tapped to help apprehend a serial poisoner of seemingly random male pilgrims to Thomas A. Becket's Canterbury Cathedral shrine.

It's a time of disruption and loss of life from royal wars—York had just beaten Lancaster for England's throne—and from epidemics and squalid social conditions. So why would a handful of deaths-by-calculation in Canterbury arouse a stir?

Their threat to the city's cash-cow! "Yes," Newington admitted, "there's the profit. Our shops, our stalls, our taverns, meeting-houses, indeed the whole city thrives on the pilgrims' trade. Can you imagine, Mistress Swinbrooke, if this news begins to spread?"

Such an over-used central motivation might have elicited a ho-hum in the absence of a less appealing formula of mystery, history and sociology, enhanced with the seeds of romance between the heroine and the triumphant Yorkist king's soldier-emissary, Colum Murtagh.

A creative twist is that physician-

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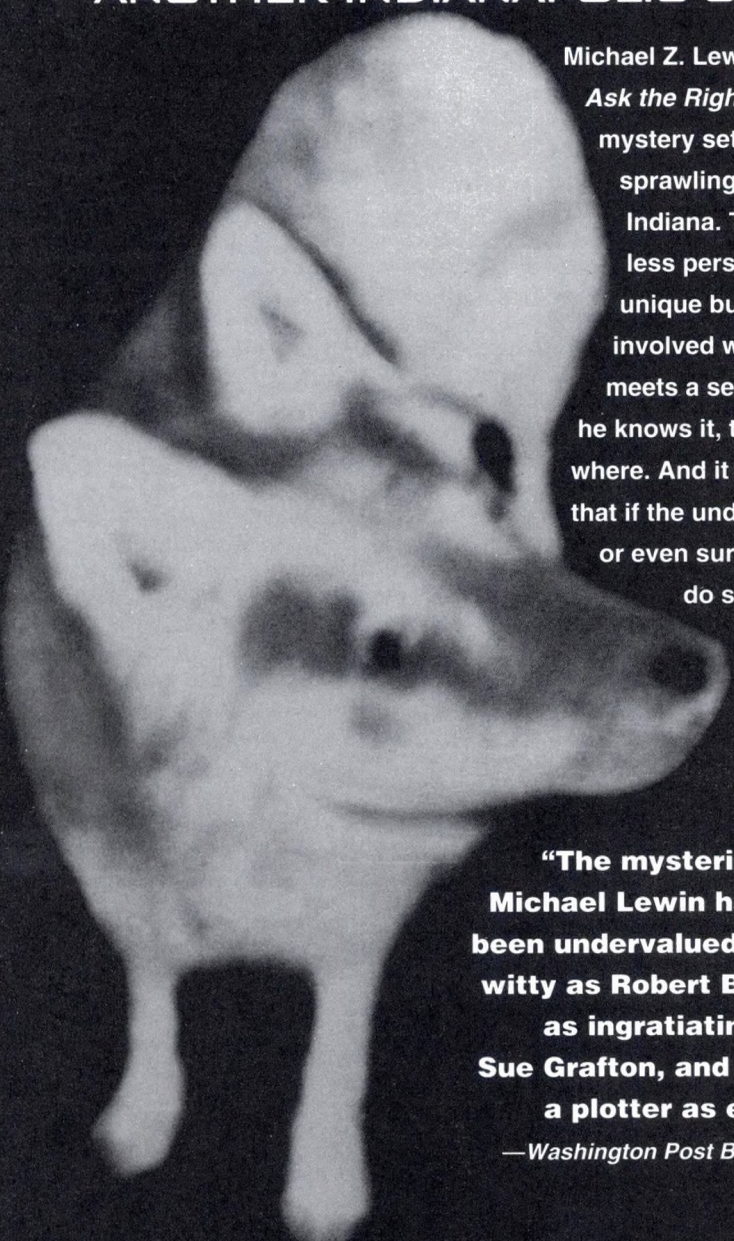
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sleuth Swinbrooke finds the key to the murders in the pages of the *Canterbury Tales*, from which the poisoner—assumed to be one of Swinbrooke's fellow physicians—borrows references and rhyme-scheme to forecast his killings.

Certain contemporary feminist issues—careers, marital fidelity, spousal abuse, choice of surname at marriage—are evoked through the picture of Swinbrooke's professional and personal status in medieval society. In a sub-plot, she's menaced by a blackmailer who claims to know that her young husband, Alexander Wyville—thought to be among the war-dead—was really murdered because of his alcohol-fueled abuse of her.

Though the take-no-prisoners strategy of Swinbrooke's shrewd, determined servant, Thomasina, the blackmailer is foiled. Yet a crucial question remains: is Swinbrooke a widow or not?

"Is it Wyville?" Thomasina asked. "Are you still worried about what happened to him?"

"No, my feelings about him are numb. God forgive me, I couldn't care if he lives or

dies...If he returns, I will seek an annulment in the Church courts."

Not surprisingly, considering the extent of this book's detailing of period English life, the author (who uses C.L. Grace as a pseudonym) is an Oxford Ph.D and specialist in medieval studies. He's written other historical mysteries under the names P.C. Doherty and Michael Clynes.

His pursuit of authenticity in period details and speech, while it adds texture and depth to the whole, also exacts a certain price. That is, some descriptive passages and segments of dialogue seem a bit cumbersome and contrived. Also, the occasional lurking cliché ("chattering like a magpie") does leap out from the page.

—Norma J. Shattuck

### Still Explosion

by *Mary Logue*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1993. \$18.95

The abortion controversy—a contemporary issue so volatile that it practically invites sensationalism—is treated here in a sensitive, low-key manner.

Yet the result is still a brisk read, right

from page 3, when a bomb is triggered inside a St. Paul family planning clinic, with reporter Laura Malloy an eyewitness and near-victim. The alleged bomber, killed in the incident, is later identified as a likable, but unfocused, young man who'd actually accompanied his girlfriend to the clinic for her abortion.

Laura's dangerously intimate view of the act of violence and its result—she'd arrived at the clinic to interview the director for a feature story—sharpens, yet threatens to compromise, her focus on the subject. She finds her reporter's objectivity being tested with each interview or bit of data she collects on the dead man; on his hard-to-fathom family; and on the leader of the anti-abortion movement, his eerie wife and ex-wife.

An unexpected distraction is thirtysomething Laura's stirring interest in the dead man's older brother. He's entered her life when she's just split from her lover, a married cop, and is dependent for companionship on a pet ferret, Fabiola, and a funny best friend and fellow reporter, B.T. Hobbs.

Such biographical details succeed in making Logue's Minneapolis-St. Paul reporter an appealing character, free of the hard-edged, casually profane qualities of many mystery novel femmes. She's a plausible reporter, too. Except, perhaps, for being blessed with a bit too much time between deadlines!

Logue shows skill, also, in creating secondary characters. The gnomish joker, B.T., is clearly someone who'd wear well in a Laura Malloy series; and certain women who make only brief appearances in the story, such as Laura's editor and the clinic director, suggest interesting nuances.

No matter how skillfully crafted, however, no character is allowed to bog down the plot-spinning momentum established by the author early-on.

As in life, though, certain key puzzles are never totally solved. The most intriguing question mark is Tom Chasen, button-downed, briefcase-toting leader of the anti-abortion group initially suspected as being behind the clinic bombing. Laura's research reveals that Chasen had been a seventies student radical, with possible involvement in an anti-war bombing on campus.

The novel's weakest aspect is the con-

clusion—the author's too facile and unconvincing use of insanity as explanation for the actions of two key characters. Though it might be comforting to think so (particularly in a society which has suffered the horrors wrought by cult leaders David Koresh and Jim Jones) dangerous zealots are not always insane.

Despite this flaw, however, the author has succeeded in crafting an involving plot based on a very timely, emotion-laden subject. That she's done so without stooping to sensationalism is even more to her credit.

—Norma J. Shattuck

#### **Fool's Gold**

by Albert DiBartolomeo. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. \$18.95

The story opens with third-rate Benny Bean, a worker for a Philadelphia loan shark, heading to the Jersey shore. He burglarizes a summer home in Longport and takes \$30,000 in coins. But on the way out, he becomes the victim. The rest of the story is a fast-paced, non-stop action sequence involving Bean in his attempt to recover what never was his at all.

It involves a woodworker, Paul Fante, who unknowing was a victim of Bean ten years earlier, and Claire Lawrence who pays a debt for her father. Plus a traumatized street kid, Tut, who seems to be everywhere and gets sucked in.

The novel by DiBartolomeo is really one about the streets of Philadelphia. He provides realistic insight to the characters that make up the life of crime in one city. They include the whale, a loan shark who philosophizes about his life; Gus, the enforcer for Whale; Rick, Paul Fante's uncle who has mob connections and favors to call; and Ernest Malio, the underworld boss who is never predictable on purpose. It's all there with lots of Philadelphia and South Jersey color, spicy dialogue, and one of the best plots that I've seen in a very long time.

This is the second book by DiBartolomeo...the first being *The Vespers Tapes*. The colorful characters are similar. And the final payoff pulls it all together giving the reader one last insight into the ways of the South Philadelphia mobsters.

—Dustin A. Peters

#### **Hard Evidence**

by John T. Lescroart. New York: Donald I. Fine, Inc., 1993. \$21.95

The belly of a dying shark is opened revealing the severed hand of a man. Thus begins a long and powerful mystery involving Assistant District Attorney, Dismus Hardy. As he seeks to uncover the critical elements of this suspected murder, the reader begins to understand Dismus' own unusual lifestyle and present circumstances. Indeed, he is a character of the locals, set in San Francisco, California.

As the drama unfolds, the plot gets very complicated. The body of billionaire businessman Owen Nash is washed up on the beach. His lover, a Japanese call girl, is accused of the murder. This results in a first trial where Hardy is with the prosecution. But a second one finds him in an entirely different role, as defense attorney for his ex-wife's father, a prominent judge.

Clearly, *Hard Evidence* is a seductive and absorbing novel that has the reader engrossed in a creative plot that never fails to please. The character of Dismus Hardy is very believable and interesting. You learn of his previous marriage, his new found family, his indiscretions, and most of all his determination to prove his worth as a lawyer. This courtroom drama is filled with twists and turns, good dialogue and an exciting conclusion. Mystery readers of the genre will have to go far and wide to find a better novel.

—Dustin A. Peters

#### **One Dead Judge**

by Preston Pairo. New York: Walker and Company, 1993. \$19.95

*One Dead Judge*, the second book in a lively series featuring attorney/beach bum Dallas Henry, has moments when it reads as if John MacDonald's Travis McGee has entered a Donald Westlake or a Carl Hiaasen novel—a reluctant hero who has turned his back on the traditional trappings of success, surrounded by a supporting cast of lunatics, bringing his own private form of justice to right wrongs. I mean that comparison as a compliment: Pairo has moments of sheer brilliance in his writing, moments that make the reader laugh or wince with empathetic pleasure or pain.

But my praise of this book is tinged

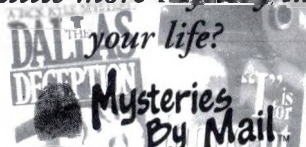
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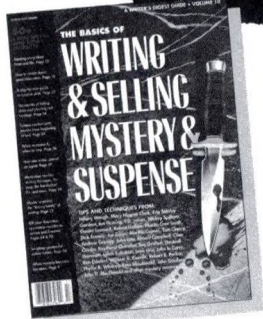
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with a warning that Pairo's talent isn't quite developed enough to keep the entire book at the level of the above authors; the brilliant sections and interesting plot twists of *One Dead Judge* often are followed by passages (and plot developments) that cry out to be rewritten or simplified.

Dallas Henry runs his occasional, definitely part-time, law practice out of a run-down motel that he owns, a motel that serves as his refuge from the real, adult world. A state bar convention in town threatens to bring attorneys to his motel. You see, Dallas hates lawyers—just about all lawyers—and some of the best jokes in the book lambast attorneys.

But once in a while the real world manages to intrude into Dallas' motel. A call from retired Judge Crenshaw brings the attorney to Crenshaw's house, where the judge tells Dallas that someone is trying to kill him and gives Dallas a box to be opened in the event that he dies suspiciously. Knowing that Crenshaw is a famous practical joker, Dallas doesn't take him seriously, but a few hours later, Crenshaw's dead body is found and Dallas becomes a favored suspect. Then Crenshaw's attorney—who happens to be an ex-girlfriend of Dallas'—announces a strange bequest in Crenshaw's will that provides \$50,000 to Dallas for investigating his death. And when someone tries to shoot a local celebrity attorney (named "Mack Trial") filming a commercial outside of Crenshaw's funeral, Dallas begins to take the judge's last request more seriously.

Dallas grudgingly interrupts his surfing and volleyball (but not his drinking) to begin checking on the events leading to Crenshaw's death. He soon narrows his search to focus on a local developer, who (in addition to being possibly the worst golfer in America, certainly on the East Coast) is trying to buy a nearby beach front land to build a new golf course. But the owner of the property, Roland Gunderson, doesn't want to sell, and when Dallas learns the recalcitrant seller is Crenshaw's ex-law firm partner, he figures he's on the right track, although he's not exactly sure where the track leads.

Pairo definitely kept me guessing as to the final solution of *One Dead Judge*, partly because the plot became so complicated that I could barely remember who was who and who did what by the end. Everyone turns out to be connected to everyone else, and while that occasionally happens in real life, rarely to the degree it does here, I suspect.

On the positive side, Pairo's use of locale and setting is outstanding, he masterfully creates the atmosphere of this ocean community so that readers feel the breezes and smell the marshes just as Dallas does. He creates marvelous supporting characters and uses them well. A golf game between Dallas and the developer includes some of the funniest scenes I've read in ages. And Pairo's witty attacks on the legal profession are simply hysterical.

I wanted to like Dallas more than I did; I've always had a weakness for the Don Quixote type who tilts at his or her own choice of windmills, but some of Dallas' traits—which are clearly supposed to be endearing—simply irritated me. We're supposed to admire his care-free approach to life in which he relates well to kids and young adults by being on their level, but when we see him providing a constant supply of free liquor to underage kids and runaways and keeping a 24-hour-a-day party going for these same kids, it's hard to think of him as an admirable figure instead of an overgrown clown. Dallas simply tries too hard to be endearing; in future books, Pairo should feature fewer immature traits and concentrate on the man himself. Adult foibles are more interesting to read about, anyway!

I'll give Presto Pairo and Dallas Henry one more try, if only to see if the brilliant moments in *One Dead Judge* occur more often in his next book. If so, I predict this series could garner a few loyal fans.

—Liz Currie

## PRIVATE EYE

### **The Devil Knows You're Dead**

by Lawrence Block. New York: Morrow, 1993. \$20.00

Lawrence Block has, at least for now, made it. Made it bigtime. Each new Matt Scudder book is greeted with rave



reviews, big sales, and cheers from his fans. Much of his earlier work is either in print or being brought back to that state. He is on a roll, writing a Scudder a year, and I understand that he has a new Bernie Rhodenbarr book coming up, the first in nearly a decade. All this, to me, is a Good Thing. At his best, Block has few equals—and when he's not, only a few more.

In the twelfth of the Scudder novels a lawyer acquaintance, half of a young couple he met through his ex-call girl friend, Elaine, is gunned down at a street phone in a seemingly senseless act of violence. In short order a street person, an emotionally disturbed Viet Nam veteran, is arrested for the crime. The arrested man's brother, who had met Scudder at an AA meeting, calls him and asks his help in proving him innocent. Though Scudder thinks it likely that he is not, he agrees to look into it.

Scudder had not liked the victim, feeling always that there was some hidden agenda operating when they hap-

pened to meet. As he begins to peel back the layers of the man's life, he starts to understand why.

*Devil* seems to me a departure from earlier books in some ways, and in others of a piece with them. It has little of the often graphic violence and brutality we have become accustomed to in the Scudder series, and indeed is more of a real *detective* novel in many ways. Though Scudder's stories have always been more introspective than most, here the focus is almost equally divided between his uncertain personal path and the case he's investigating. His relationship with Elaine seems at a crossroads, and an old lover from previous books comes back into his life in an unexpected and disturbing way. During the course of the story he is often forced to look into mirrors that reflect unwelcome images.

On the other hand, all of the qualities are still present that make a Block novel what it is. The very personal and yet somehow distanced first-person narrative; the constant reminders of

Scudder's alcoholic vulnerability; and the sharply drawn images of the supporting players, some returning from previous stories, but usually at least one exceptionally vivid new one. Here, it is a transsexual prostitute (if you were expecting an accountant, you don't know Scudder's world) named Julie, who was a witness to the crime. The black street kid who has appeared in recent books, TJ, leads Scudder to Julie, and continues to grow as a character himself.

The book comes to a somewhat surprising though quite undramatic (and some may feel anti-climatic) end, and there are changes portended to Scudder's life that will be interesting to watch. "Undramatic" is a good word for summation. This is a quiet book, a contemplative one, giving full rein to Block's skill at characterization while moving at least temporarily away from the violence of past tales. It is, withal, an excellent book from a writer whose norm has come to be no less.

—Barry W. Gardner

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### Death by Station Wagon

by Jon Katz, New York:  
Doubleday, 1993. \$17.00

In *Death by Station Wagon*, Katz introduces his readers to The Suburban Detective, Christopher (Kit) Deleew. Kit is the most modern of suburbanites, having recently lost his well-paid job on Wall Street and coming to realize that he must let his wife, Jane, re-establish her career in order to maintain the payments on the house and ancient Volvo. He is adjusting quite well to the new duties of being the suburban mother-substitute, responsible for driving children to play dates and extra-curricular activities. Kit even has the perfect family: 1 father, 1 mother, 1 son (Ben), 1 daughter (Emily) and 1 dog (Percentage). Katz is masterful in weaving daily life among the suburbanites of Rochambeau and the investigation of a gruesome murder with humor and definite traces of experience.

The tale begins when the quiet community of Rochambeau is shocked by the gruesome discovery of the bodies of two local teenagers, apparently strangled while sitting in the boy's Volvo station wagon. The local police investigate and declare the incident an open and shut case of murder/suicide. However, several local boys who knew the two teenagers well insist the police are wrong, pool their monetary and family resources, and hire Kit to prove Ken Dale did not murder Carol Lombardi and then commit suicide. Kit is not convinced the police are wrong but he agrees to look into the case before telling the boys that the police are right. He changes his mind when another

murder and several bizarre incidents occur with mysterious connections to a 19th century series of murders which ended in execution by hanging of a 19th century Rochambeau resident.

Katz has written an excellent tale of murder and mayhem, but the book is also an excellent critique of modern suburbia. Modern Rochambeau is contrasted, both favorably and unfavorably, to the early 19th century Rochambeau and the fortunes and misfortunes of two prominent families. One family was related to the hanged murderer while the other family acquired most of the land owned by them. Both families have descendants still living in 20th century Rochambeau.

The obsession of suburbia with status (the country club is important), children (Kit is struggling to be a concerned parent), and shopping (Kit's office is in the local mall) are thoroughly explored and commented upon by Katz through the eyes and thoughts of Kit Deleew. Even the current teenage craze for the "ultimate" tennis shoe appears throughout the book.

In his earlier novel, *Sign Off*, Katz choose to expose the foibles of television network news. In this novel, *Death by Station Wagon*, he is equally up to the task of taking on modern suburban lifestyles. Both this novel and the soon-to-be-published second Suburban Detective novel, *The Family Stalker*, should be must reading for anyone looking for an excellent tale well told.

—Christine E. Thompson

### The Iron Hand of Mars

by Lindsey Davis, New York:  
Crown Publishers, 1993. \$20.00

Marcus Didius Falco returns in *The Iron Hand of Mars*, his fourth Roman adventure, with his wit intact and his sights set on earning the status that will win him the hand of his love, Helena Justina. To add to the near-fortune he must acquire, Falco ventures off to barbarian Germany on a dangerous and lucrative (he hopes) mission for Titus Caesar—who seems quite smitten with Helena himself.

As in all of Lindsey Davis' novels in this series, the strength of *The Iron Hand of Mars* lies in its characters. Marcus Didius Falco wrestles his way through

the absurdities of ancient Roman life in much the same way we face life in our times: with a smile, a dash of sarcasm, and a guarded but open heart. Helena Justina, the senator's daughter, has the courage to flout convention and a temper born to keep Marcus Didius Falco in line. They are, in short, human, painfully so, with enough flaws to make them both extraordinarily compelling. Devotees and first-time readers alike will find it difficult to resist them.

Davis never sacrifices her characters for the sake of making them more accessible to her audience. Marcus and Helena are our windows into Vespasian's Rome, and to compromise them would be to compromise the period she renders so skillfully. Falco may curse himself for being born unworthy of a woman of Helena's stature, but he never once questions the class system that has deemed him unworthy. Though Helena is eons away from being the good matron her parents had hoped her to be, she is still a woman of her time, negotiating the far reaches of the empire with a bit more ease than her less privileged contemporaries, but there is no talk of her striking out on a venture of her own. She is Falco's equal, but only because she is extraordinary. In the hands of a writer as gifted as Davis, Marcus and Helena are the perfect blend of past and present sensibilities—their politics foreign, their personal intrigues all too familiar.

The mystery itself proves slightly more labyrinthine than Falco's previous cases, but the foray into barbarian land makes it well worth the effort. The journey is peppered with Davis' usual mix of rowdy misfits and miscreants and revisits some old favorites as well. Falco once again must fight to keep Helena. Those who are familiar with the series know what entertainment that alone can be. Those unfamiliar with the series should go to the nearest bookstore and set aside a weekend to get acquainted with an irascible pair from a bustling old town in Italy.

—Jodi Lustig

### Blood Sacrifice

by Gary Alexander, New York:  
Doubleday, 1993. \$17.00

Few authors have a better record at

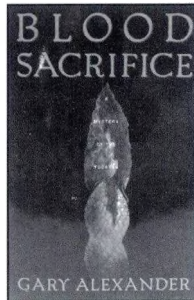
cultural diversity than Gary Alexander. The author of six novels featuring Bamsan Kiet of Luong has a new protagonist in *Blood Sacrifice*, a full-blooded Mayan names Luis Balam.

The tourist industry in Cancún is seriously threatened by a serial killer—aptly nicknamed Gilbert, after the hurricane that devastated Mexico's paradise resort—who has been stabbing young women to death in their hotels with a Mayan sacrificial knife. When an American missionary is seen running from the latest victim's room with blood on his hands, the police are sure they have found the murderer.

Ex-police officer/sometimes tour guide Luis Balam is hired by his lawyer-friend Ricardo (Ricky) Martínez Rodríguez to investigate on behalf of the missionary organization, Tropical Language Scholars (TLS). Luis would like to exonerate his people, who have been linked to the crimes by the murder weapon, but he does not believe that Proctor Smith, the taciturn missionary, is the culprit.

The plot thickens as a UFO enthusiast who tries to help Luis is killed, a Dallas lawyer for the TLS shows up to plea bargain, a supposed expert on Mayan artifacts turns out to have doubtful credentials, and Luis' family is threatened by goons. Teaming up with Ricky, police inspector Hector Salgado Reyes, and especially Denise Lowell, the sister of Gilbert's latest victim, Luis tries to solve the mystery, even at the risk of his paycheck and perhaps his life.

The author maintains a perfect balance between the genuine tension of the plot and a sardonic humor. There are lots of gags about Luis' driving, his daughter Rosa's sharp hearing, Ricky's womanizing (but never with a woman who swears, like Denise), the Lone Ranger and Dallas lawyer W.W. (Lard) Ringner's adventurous mishaps offstage. The best lines (some unquotable here) come from the supporting cast. In a nice character note, Denise's first words to the sometimes reckless Luis are: "We insure drivers like you." (She's an insurance investigator.) Lard spins off thirty good ones in the space of a single chapter.



Beneath all this is an understated but effective commentary on the contrasting lifestyles, ethics, and values of those who live in, visit, and exploit the land of Luis Balam's ancestors.

All this bodes well for the second Luis Balam mystery, already in the works.

—John Benson

**The Cleveland Connection**

by Les Roberts. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. \$19.95

Milan Jacovich (pronounced MY-lan Y-acovich), the narrator of Les Roberts' excellent *The Cleveland Connection*, is a private eye specializing in industrial security. He sums up a future obituary as: "Born Cleveland, Ohio. Kent State. Vietnam. The police force. Private security agency. Smoked Winstons, drank Stroh's. Married, two children, divorced, retired, died." There is, of course, much more to Milan, a well-rounded, totally believable character, as are all the characters in this book. Even after finishing the book, my mind

kept going back over characters, relationships and situations that Roberts had created.

In the beginning, Milan is approached by Joe Bradoc, a high school friend who is now living with Milan's ex-wife and his two sons. Joe asks Milan to help Danica Paich, the sister of Walter Paich who was a year behind Joe and Milan in high school. Milan meets Danica, who wants him to find her grandfather, Bogdan Zdrle, who has been missing for a week. He often takes off for several days at a time, traveling to Toledo and other cities, visiting the Serbian communities, but he has always called his daughter, Danica's mother, to tell her where he was. This time, however, no one has heard from him.

Milan agrees to try to find Zdrle, partly because he likes Danica, and partly because of what he refers to as the "Cleveland Connection," the connection of people of Slavic heritage who live in and around Cleveland. Most of the characters in the book are of Yugoslavian descent, if not from Yugoslavia itself.

Milan begins with the bar that Zdrle

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often hung out in with other Serbians, and then moves on to the missing man's friends. He also looks into Zdrle's past, and finds out that during World War II he had been in the Yugoslav army, and had spent two years in a German concentration camp. Milan doesn't seem to be making any progress when first Zdrle's van is found in a mall parking lot, wiped clean of fingerprints, and then his body is found by the police, shot in the back of the head, execution style. Milan now wants to find out who killed Zdrle, even though Danica wants him to drop it. Various possibilities are followed. Is it the mob? Is it something from Zdrle's past, especially the Nazi concentration camp where 70,000 Serbs were killed? Or is it something else?

At the same time, Milan gets involved with his friend, newspaper columnist Ed Stahl, who has been getting death threats, including a dead rat in his mailbox, after he has written a column about James Dosti, better known as Jimmy "Sweets," who controls garbage collection in Cleveland. After Milan goes to speak to Dosti, he is attacked. Is it because of Ed Stahl, or because of Bogdan Zdrle?

The ending of the book is very good, and very tough, but then the entire book is very good. The characters and the Cleveland backgrounds are well-drawn. Milan's relationship with his sons, his feelings about being divorced, make him a feeling, breathing human being. In fact, all the characters are extremely well-drawn, so that the reader wants to continue on to find out not only what happens with the mystery, but with the characters' lives. Les Roberts has written an extremely good novel that is well worth reading by all, not just mystery lovers.

—Martin Friedenthal

## REFERENCE

### What About Murder (1981-1991):

A Guide to Books About Mystery and Detective Fiction

by Jon L. Breen. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993. \$39.50

What can I say about Jon Breen that I haven't said before—except that this

review will probably embarrass him. I've praised his very funny parodies, and his novels, while flawed, come closer to the Golden Age puzzles than almost any other current writer. He is probably the soundest reviewer since Anthony Boucher, and readers of his columns in *TAD* know how good he is in writing about the mystery.

Now, Breen has published a supplement to his Edgar-winning *What About*

### TELL TALE TONGUE



*A Gossipy witch was  
Miss Quack;  
Her tongue stabbed her  
friends in the back.  
Now her body's  
been found,  
And the suspects abound;  
Of mourners, there's  
somehow a lack...*

—DIXIE WHITTED

*Murder* (still available from Scarecrow, P.O. Box 4167, Metuchen, NJ 08840 for \$20.00), adding ten very active years of mystery scholarship. This book is 377 pages, considerably longer than its predecessor which covered 140 years. It could have been even longer had Breen not had the discipline to leave out writers like Graham Greene, G. K. Chesterton and Isaac Asimov, whose main literary reputations were earned outside the mystery. I, for one, would not have omitted Norman Sherry's Edgar-winning biography of Greene, but then my feeling about reference books is: the bigger the better.

Breen approaches the more than 350 titles he discussed wearing many hats simultaneously. As a scholar-librarian, he is able to judge books for their usefulness and accuracy. Breen the fiction writer is especially useful in evaluating fourteen technical manuals, by authors as varied as Lawrence Block and James Corbett, on writing mysteries. As a critic, Breen is not afraid to make value judgements on books, frequently discussing the quality of the writing. Finally, Jon Breen could not write so well about the mystery were he not a great fan who clearly loves them.

It has almost become a cliché to call reference books "indispensable," but for readers of mystery fiction serious enough to be reading *The Armchair Detective*, this book is indispensable.

—Marvin Lachman

### Hawk's Author's Pseudonyms for Book Collectors

by Pat Hawk. Southlake, TX: Hawk, 1992. \$49.50 hardcover; \$39.50 paperback

*Hawk's Author's Pseudonyms for Book Collectors* consolidates key published source books of pseudonyms in the mystery, science fiction and romance fields, together with data for some mainstream authors. The primary sources used for the mystery and detection entries are Allen J. Hubin's monumental *Crime Fiction, 1749-1980, with Supplement through 1985*; *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection* (1976) by Steinbrunner and Penzler; and *Olden's Mystery Index* (1977). Unfortunately, an indispensable and more current source, *Twentieth-Century Crime and Mystery Writers*, edited by John M. Reilly, was not consulted.

Hawk's guide is nearly 600 pages of computer-generated listings. The first half is alphabetized by author and list author, pseudonym, and source of data or comments. The thirteen primary sources, including the three mystery sources, are listed by number in the comments column; the data for certain authors is supplemented by brief comments based on personal letter and interviews. The second half of the guide is alphabetized by pseudonym and lists the same information in the first half of the guide.

A problem exists when an author allows another writer to use his name or pseudonym for a limited purpose. The "Nick Carter" house name creates a very long listing of authors and great confusion. The "Ellery Queen" pseudonym of Dannay and Lee was used by Edward D. Hoch, Talmadge (sic) Powell, Theodore Sturgeon and John Holbrook Vance, among others. Robert L. Fish is not really Jack London; Fish merely completed *London's Assassination Bureau, Ltd.* Similar confusion exists, for example, in the beyond-the-grave collaboration of Craig Rice and Ed McBain, and the more recent (1987) Cornell Woolrich and Lawrence Sanders collaboration is not listed at all. Most of these unusual situations and entries could have been clarified by brief explanatory comments.

Relatively new mystery writers John Camp, also writing as John Sandford, and Parnell Hall, also writing as J. P. Hailey, are not included in the guide, perhaps because the mystery sources used to compile the data are, at best, nearly a decade old. The mystery figure behind the K.C. Constantine pseudonym is shown as "Carl Kosak," without elaboration, even though Constantine's real identity has been the subject of much speculation over the years. Otto Penzler's "Collecting Mystery Fiction" column in *TAD* Volume 25, Number 3, cites the reclusive author's refusal to reveal his true identity. Further comments are both desirable and necessary.

Some minor errors in the guide may cause confusion. Three entries for Isaac Asimov, for example, apparently result from misspellings in either source or compilation. Kenneth Millar, who achieved immortality as Ross Macdonald, has sometimes been confused with John D. MacDonald and other writers with various spellings of the same last name. Hawk's guide uses an all-capitals type font in the unbound pages that I reviewed, so the reader is unable to readily distinguish correct last name spellings. The entry for author Paul Cain lists the Peter Ruric pseudonym, actually, both are pseudonyms of George Sims, as noted in Hubin. And author Robert Markham used the "Ian Fleming" pseudonym for one book, but the reader must know that Markham is

itself a pseudonym to determine from the pseudonym listing that Kingsley Amis is the ultimate author.

*Hawk's Author's Pseudonyms for Book Collectors* conveniently summarizes existing information from many, somewhat dated, sources. As noted above, additional descriptive and clarifying comments would be helpful for some of the more unusual listings. Perhaps later editions of the book will consolidate newer information not included in the first edition.

—Ronald C. Miller

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## THRILLER

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### Mortal Memory

by Thomas H. Cook. New York: Putnam's, 1993. \$21.95

As the title suggests, this is a story tracing a long-past crime through memory. Steve Farris is the only survivor of a horrific family mass murder. His father murdered Steve's mother, sister and brother and managed to escape.

Farris is haunted by the realization that his father waited after the killings for Steve to return. Only accident kept him from also being a victim of this inexplicable horror. After suppressing his knowledge and feelings for many years, Farris meets Rebecca Soltero, who is writing a book on men who murder their families. She forces Farris into a profound self-analysis and an investigation of the 35-year-old crime.

The novel follows Farris' reconstruction of his memories from age nine and of the clues his father left behind. Together, Farris and Soltero examine the facts of the crime and the incomprehensible motivation behind it. The process forces Farris to realize how he is cast in his father's mold. His own family life begins to crumble as he becomes absorbed by the tragic past.

Cook is a careful and evocative writer, especially good at describing disturbed states of mind and feeling, the process of unveiling a catastrophic past. The story develops Farris' character plausibly, and the family murder is described in almost "true crime" language. The story at the end follows a major twist, and each reader will have



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to decide if the denouement follows the logic of memory and revelation Cook posits.

—William J. Schafer

### Hard Aground

by James W. Hall. New York: Delacorte Press, 1993. \$22.00

Hap Tyler leads an uncomplicated life as a tour guide and part-time sailboard builder in southern Florida—until his brother Daniel is murdered. U.S. Senator Garnetta Rawlings and her journalist daughter Marguerite, members of one of Miami's oldest and most aristocratic families, become intricately involved in Tyler's search for his brother's killer, a legendary treasure, and resolution of a century-old murder.

The lure of treasure stirs the blood of any adventurer, especially when, centuries ago, an unlucky treasure-laden ship may have run aground near the Miami coastline during an unexpectedly vicious storm. The \$400 million in gold and silver, emeralds and rubies, and other rare jewelry would make a man cry out in joy—or murder in greed. It is a tale reminiscent in some respects of Mel Fisher's real life quest for the *Atocha* that brought him not only fabulous wealth but also great personal sadness. Tyler's search resurrects crimes and passions and family skeletons, long dead and buried.

James W. Hall's *Hard Aground* is a treasure of a book that will dazzle you with its language and grace and bewilder you with its labyrinthine plot. Hall's earlier books, *Bones of Coral*, *Tropical Freeze* and *Under Cover of Daylight*, should not be missed.

—Ronald C. Miller

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### Beat Not the Bones

by Charlotte Jay. Adelaide:  
Wakefield Press, 1992. \$12.95

This is a paperback reprint of a 1952 crime classic, the very first Edgar winner. Jay, an Australian writer, sets the story in Papua New Guinea, and a great deal of the book focuses on characteristics of antipodean culture—ancient and modern.

The novel is reminiscent of Conrad or H. Rider Haggard, a kind of anthropological study in the exotic and uncanny. It follows Stella Warwick, a young Australian, who flies to New Guinea to find out how and why her husband has been murdered. She is pulled into a morass of greed, racism, superstition and fear among people who had gone into the jungle with David Warwick.

Jay evokes the feeling of the primitive land powerfully, making the same basic point that Conrad pursues in *Heart of Darkness*—that the real brutality lies not in the dense tropical jungles but inside the purportedly civilized whites who are exploiting New Guinea and its inhabitants. David Warwick has, it is assumed, committed suicide after some wrenching crime. The news of his death kills Stella's father. She strives to piece together what actions and motives could cause two violent deaths.

Stella discovers that her husband and several associates had gone deep into the jungle and had, it seems, been cursed or bewitched. Some mysterious fate seems to operate that Stella can only understand by retracing her husband's passage.

Jay conjures the feeling of the time and place accurately, creates adequate characters and does a fine job of developing Stella Warwick and her psychology. The atmospherics of the novel, however, are most remarkable and memorable and probably explain why it garnered the Edgar. The story holds up very well and is far more than an historical curiosity or museum piece. American readers may feel it as a precursor to the Tony Hillerman tales, especially those that investigate the worlds of magic and belief in his territory.

—William J. Schafer

### I'll Be Seeing You

by Mary Higgins Clark. New York:  
Simon & Schuster. \$23.00

Mary Higgins Clark's new thriller, *I'll Be Seeing You*, will undoubtedly prove to be highly popular with her many fans and the book will probably become another enormous best-seller. The novel contains all of the elements that have made her fiction so successful: A love interest, a substantial dose of tension, a complicated, multi-layered plot, and a homicidal psychotic. The tale is a thoroughly satisfying suspense thriller. But there is more.

Meghan Collins, a television reporter, finds herself increasingly personally involved in a routine story about the questionable operations of an "assisted reproduction" clinic which eventually leads her to explore the hidden and twisted realities of her own family. Her investigations reveal the presence of her father's dual life, his second "wife," and her secret half-sister. The plot also involves a stalker who works as a garage attendant at the television station and whose obsession with Meghan increasingly threatens both her sanity and her life.

Although much of this will sound familiar as the format carefully worked out by the author in so many of her novels, *I'll Be Seeing You* does some interesting things through pursuing Meghan's quest to understand her father's strange life and ultimately her parent's marriage. All of which finally forces her to examine her own sense of self. The sub-plot, which uses the stalker, deals with the delusions we seem to have about celebrities, especially those who appear on television. Bernie, the garage attendant, literally lives a subterranean life in the basement of his crippled mother's home among the flickering shadows of his hidden television set and his collection of videotapes of Meghan. Escaping his smothering mother's excessive protectiveness, he sits alone and fantasizes over the images he watches night after night. The combination of fear and attraction which eventually surfaces when he tries to actualize his fixation destroys him and



exposes to Meghan the dangers of "fame" in contemporary America.

The novels of Mary Higgins Clark have all too often been grouped under the heading of "women-in-distress," a label which does not explain very much, but does much to undermine the importance of fiction directly primarily at a female readership. Although her writing does conform to the conventions of the suspense novel, first popularized in this century by Mary Roberts Rinehart, Clark also extends that tradition in her fiction to confront the fundamental issues of women in modern society and to question the exploitation and struggle against powerlessness of her central characters. All too often in the world of the crime novel, characteristics of vulnerability and dependency receive little attention, overshadowed by the need for strength and self-sufficiency. Such a broadening of traits, especially in the creation of her heroines, makes them all that more engaging.

*I'll Be Seeing You* is written in a wonderfully smooth style which along with the pace of the story does much to circumvent the novel's more obvious generic tendencies and contrivances. Finally, like her others, this novel is a good read and perhaps the best to date.

—Charles L. P. Silet

### The Animal Hour

by Andrew Klavan. New York: Pocket Books, 1993. \$20.00

*The Animal Hour*, Andrew Klavan's tenth novel (half of which were written under the name Keith Peterson), is a strange and fascinating mystery. The author carefully weaves together several apparently disparate strands into a plot so complex that it defies easy summation. And seldom has an author so skillfully, graphically and accurately described the schizophrenia that plays a crucial role in the story's resolution.

The narrative encompasses just one day in the lives of three main characters, Nancy Kincaid, Oliver Perkins and his brother Zachary, whose stories begin as seemingly unrelated chapters. The sections devoted to Nancy (at least that's who she *thinks* she is) are at first almost annoying in their portrayal of her confusion" too many phrases like "this isn't real" and "this isn't happening." But

soon, Nancy's problems become simultaneously surreal and convincing. She goes to work one morning at the office of her employer (Fernando Woodlawn, the likely next governor of New York), only to find that no one there believes she's Nancy. She keeps getting hung up on phrases like "Why don't you just shoot him?" (then she finds a gun in her purse) and "8 o'clock is the Animal Hour." Her adventures in the subway, culminating in her commitment to and escape from Bellevue Mental Hospital, are fast and far-out.

Oliver Perkins, a poet who hasn't written a good poem for two years, is first seen protecting his neighbor Avis Best from her abusive husband. But Oliver is no angel: His wife left him when she found him sodomizing a boy. He is also, not coincidentally, the author of a collection called *The Animal Hour*.

When Zachary first appears, he is trapped in his apartment by cops who think he did something bad during a drug deal. The Perkins boys' mother died young and their father abandoned them. They were brought up by Nana, their grandmother, a cranky but appealing minor character.

The plot starts to come together once Oliver and the police discover the beheaded body of a woman in the Perkins family's former home. Zachary is implicated, and he tries to divert the blame to his brother. Only with the solution of this crime does the meaning and unity of the plot become clear. And lordy, is this one complicated!

The novel abounds in pithy, often

gutwrenching, sometimes amusing, phrases that capture the mood of the situation. For instance, Oliver describes his brother's girlfriend as "a simpering Scarsdale debutante gone mystical fem." Police detective Mulligan plays a small but crucial role, explaining the incredibly complex sequence of events in

which Zachary is the chief suspect. Mulligan is also the recipient of the novel's best barb: "Somehow this strange little man [Mulligan] had brought [Oliver] into his soulless office...and had then proceeded to beat a confession out of himself" (p. 105). Avis Bes, the hapless neighbor, turns from bumbler into a subplot heroine in one of

the novel's most tragic and graphic scenes.

Incredibly, the author pulls all of this off. By novel's end, we understand the ghastly nature of the original crime, the murderer's attempt to exculpate himself, the cause of Nancy's schizophrenia (and her true identity) and the relationship among the main characters. No mean feat.

—John Benson

## TRUE CRIME

### The Murder of Bob Crane

by Robert Graysmith. New York: Crown, 1993. \$20.00

*Hi, diddle-dee-di, An actor's life for me—*  
Oh, to be a handsome, rich, famous actor who gets lots of different lovely women for sex every night! It's an adolescent male's dream.

It's also a good way to get yourself

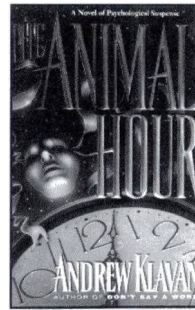
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killed, by jealous boyfriend, hubby or kinky psycho—and that's what happened to Bob Crane, the likeable star of TV's popular series, Hogan's Heroes, found murdered in his sleep at his Scottsdale, Arizona apartment June 29, 1978. His skull had been crushed by two powerful short blows of a blunt instrument, and a black cord tightly tied around his throat, a combination of weapons, says Robert Graysmith in *The Murder of Bob Crane*, "almost unheard of" in homicide history.

Missing from the room was Crane's white photo album of girls he'd had sex with, their names written below their pictures.

Right at the start, the killer got a break. The small Scottsdale police department had no specialized homicide investigator, and some serious mistakes were made: possible suspects roamed through the apartment, placing their fingerprints over the scene, and taking away objects they claimed as theirs (Crane's business manager, Lloyd Vaughan, and Crane's son Bob, Jr. took away two full suitcases)—mistakes police Lt. Ron Deal would later deeply regret.

High spots of the book include the identification of the murder weapon fourteen years later by Phoenix criminologist Ray Giesz; Crane's girlfriend, playing amateur psychic, reading his palm just a few hours before his death and telling him his life will be brief; the business man who stole a hundred grand from Crane; and police reaction to the video tapes Crane made of his sex parties. At a meeting called to discuss suspects, the County Attorney's men, complained Officer Dennis Borkenhagen, "were more interested in seeing Crane's sex tapes. In fact, they just watched those and didn't speak to us for the rest of the meeting."

The first third of the easy-reading book details the 1978 investigation, the second, Crane's career and character, the third, the on-going case (the Scottsdale police kept at it), its effects on Scottsdale politics and the final arrest of a suspect for murder.

The book's one major flaw is that it stops here, with no mention of trial or verdict, as if the last chapter were somehow missing.

Between the lines is another mystery:

how, as Crane's years of work came together in fame and fortune, his marriage, family and life fell apart.

—Frank D. McSherry, Jr.

## POLICE PROCEDUAL

### Lieberman's Choice

by Stuart Kaminsky. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993. \$18.95

Stuart Kaminsky introduced his fans to Abe Lieberman, Jewish cop and devoted family man, and Bill Hanrahan, his hard drinking Irish partner, in *Lieberman's Folly*. The rest, as they say, is history. The sequel, *Lieberman's Choice*, is as riveting as the first novel. It is in fact the kind of excellent reading that fans of Kaminsky have come to expect. He won the Edgar for *A Cold Red Sunrise* and is the author of three series featuring excellent detectives: the 1940s private eye Toby Peters, the contemporary Russian cop Porfiry Rostnikov, and this 60-year-old Chicago cop, Abe Lieberman.

In *Lieberman's Choice*, Chicago cop Bernie Shepard kills his wife and her lover, a fellow officer. He then escapes to the roof of the apartment building where they live and barricades himself, armed with various weapons and a charge of explosives powerful enough to destroy an entire section of Chicago. His only demand is that he be allowed to meet with Captain Alan Kearney and he threatens to go on killing until he is allowed this face-to-face meeting. After a police helicopter crew fails to talk him down from his rooftop arsenal and two citizens are killed in a rescue attempt, the mayor and police chief hire an expert thief to help. However, the job of talking Shepard down ultimately falls to Lieberman and Hanrahan.

The reader is taken into the world of Lieberman, Hanrahan, the Chicago police department, and the Chicago mayor's office before an inevitable but still unexpected conclusion to the Shepard case is reached. Kaminsky obviously has an appreciation and understanding of the details and intricacies of police work and is skilled at telling his story with an attention to



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those details. He also understands that police do not work only on one case at a time so, a second case involving domestic violence is being investigated by the two partners as well. Before the end of the book, the Shepard case has been brought to conclusion but the domestic violence case is only partially concluded. Another sequel for Lieberman and Hanrahan? If so, be sure to read it as well as *Lieberman's Folly* and this one, *Lieberman's Choice*. They are excellent.

—Christine E. Thompson

### Gravestone

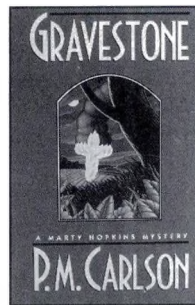
by P.M. Carlson. New York: Pocket Books, 1993. \$20.00

Should Martine "Marty" Hopkins, quit her job as deputy sheriff in Southern Indiana, she might easily headline for Barnum & Bailey. She's that good a juggler. In P.M. Carlson's *Gravestone*, Hopkins itches to get the same kinds of investigative assignments as the male detectives, when there's a brutal, apparently Klan-related killing. But she has to make do with checking out the incoherent ramblings of a bedridden, dying old man named Denton whose young daughter disappeared several years before and whose sons appear eager to begin dividing up the estate. Someone's killing him, he raves. His lost daughter is killing him.

Besides keeping her workload in the air, Hopkins delicately juggles her family's needs. Her more-or-less husband Brad wants her to sell the house and move to Alaska where he's sure this time he can get a fresh start. Their daughter Chrissie is torn between the two, falling under the spell of her father's dreams and at the same time wanting the family to be together.

Hopkins' non-case takes an unusual turn when a remark from an offbeat college biology professor leads her to the missing girl's body—years old—and seemingly impossible links with the recent Klan crime.

Writer Carlson nicely renders all her characters, including Sheriff Wes Cochran, who is afraid at first to give Marty her head, then is compelled to



when felled by a heart attack, and Professor Wolfe, a dangerous female of the species who has no telephone, spends a lot of time in caves and knows more than anyone should about what's going on.

—Bernard A. Drew

### The Apostrophe Thief


by Barbara Paul. New York: Scribner's, 1993. \$20.00

This is the twentieth good book in a row by my second favorite mystery author. While not quite up to *The Fourth Wall*, the one I'm gnashing-teeth envious of, it is still the best mystery I've read this year and, like Paul's other best books, it involves the theater.

Sgt. Marian Larch, having just killed a man in defense of Curt Holland, her FBI associate and, now, lover, is upset, depressed, and just plain fed up with the NYC Police Dept. Not with her job, which she loves, but with her colleague, Foley, a vicious, jealous, incompetent detective; with her superior, glory-grabbing Captain DiFalco; and with the ponderous bureaucratic system that makes her chosen work difficult to do well and efficiently. The killing is a watershed for Holland too, who leaves the FBI to become a private eye. (If this foreshadows future books about this team, good.)

While giving serious consideration to resigning from the department, for some badly needed aid and comfort Marian calls her friend, actress Kelly English, who is starring on Broadway in a new play, *The Apostrophe Thief*. Kelly needs aid and comfort too; along with the props and costumes, all the actors' scripts have just been stolen from the theater, as well as a bunch of apparently unrelated personal items belonging to the actors. The troupe is dismayed and discouraged, wondering how they'll be able to perform that night, so Kelly calls on Marian to find the thief and restore the stolen goods.

*The Apostrophe Thief* is as unlikely a title for a mystery, particularly a police procedural, as one could imagine. The natural questions arise: What is an



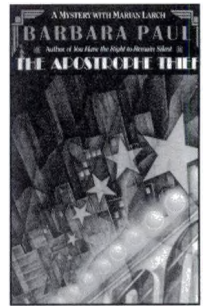
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apostrophe thief? How does one steal apostrophes? Why would anyone steal apostrophes? And how does this relate to the story other than being the title of the play Kelly English is in from which the scripts, etc. have been stolen? These questions are actually asked of Abigail James, the play's author, and her deep popular-philosophical answer is the one calculated to please the reporter who asks it. James had previously told Marian the true answer as she knew it, but that answer is not, in the context of the story, necessarily right. This is not a paradox within the story but, to the reader, the title of the book has a strong connection to the story that will become clear as the book is read, and is a useful inductive clue to solving the mystery before Marian does. Incidentally, I missed the clearly presented clue and didn't realize it until I finished the book.



Like any good mystery, the plot is involved and convoluted, leading to surprising and unusual people and places. There is also a good deal of fascinating information about collectors of theater memorabilia, typical of the bonuses I've come to expect in Paul's books. Marian's logic, intuition, and good standard police work solve the case in a tightly-plotted, step-by-step conclusion and bring the story to a satisfying end for all the good guys and a deserved end for the bad guys and the creeps. All is done in a civilized, reasonable manner, with wit and humor

and not without some danger, but without unnecessary shootouts, car chases, or ankle deep blood, nor with improbable voluntary confessions at the end that seem to be the preferred way to end so many mysteries today. Highly recommended.

—Herbert Resnicow

#### **Final Appointment**

by Roy Hart. New York:

St. Martin's Press, 1993. \$17.95

Roy Hart takes us to Appleford, a Dorsetshire village near Dorchester where Inspector Douglas Roper must solve the bizarre case of a decapitated motorcycle rider, who turns out to be ex-cop Gerald Pope. Working as a private detective, Pope had contacts with several Appleford families, but after his death, none would admit to knowing him, though body language suggested they did.

With the assistance of Detective Sergeant George Makins, Roper soon learns that Pope, dating back to his days on staff, had been systematically blackmailing people who had been responsi-

ble for accidents, usually telling them they were responsible for more serious injuries or damage than first believed. In their guilt and anxiety not to be punished, they were hooked by the unscrupulous Pope. Now, however, someone has apparently taken action to put an end to it.

Inquiries lead Roper closer and closer to two families—Nicholas and Vanessa Chance and Martin and Dagmar Craven—and Hughie Lee, a suspicious gypsy. When someone strikes Mrs. Craven on the head, the actions and reactions of the others create all sorts of questions that must be resolved before Roper can nab his killer.

*Final Appointment* is a well-plotted village cozy with interesting characters and some clever twists in the story line. Hart's series of six Inspector Roper mysteries is one that merits a look for those who enjoy British village mysteries.

—Douglas G. Simpson

#### **The Rage of Innocence**

by William D. Pease. New York:

Viking, 1993. \$22.00

This procedural follows both the police and legal processes in a brutal murder case. Detective Sergeant Christine Boland of the Maryland State Police must delve into a case with roots in the dark days of McCarthyism. It begins with the execution-style murder of Marian Avery, wife of wealthy property developer Cooper Avery. She is found shot through the head, with her oldest child, Ned, catatonic beside her.

Cooper Avery becomes the prime suspect, but Detective Boland feels he is being set up and stubbornly refuses to believe he is guilty. She becomes obsessed with the intricacies of the case, almost wrecking her relationship with sculptor Alex Trigorin and putting her career in jeopardy. Gradually, she uncovers the unsavory role Cooper's father, a senator, played during the height of Tail-Gunner Joe McCarthy's terror and its relation to the present homicide.

Pease is a skillful and meticulous writer, detailing the steps of a criminal investigation and the elaborate preparations the prosecution must make for a murder trial. He deftly intertwines the separate strands of the State Police

investigation, Cooper Avery's past, Christine Boland's tangled personal life and the central mystery of the murder itself. He also develops Boland as a believable character, a woman hard-driven in what has been viewed as a man's world.

*The Rage of Innocence* is short on slam-bang action but long on analysis and step-by-step detail. The intricacies of the case fit as neatly as jigsaw pieces by the time we reach the conclusion.

—William J. Schafer

#### **Winter Rules**

by Barry Cork. New York:

Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993. \$20.00

Scottish-born London police officer Angus Straun, in his fourth appearance, finds himself involved in two passions, golf and exotic automobiles, in *Winter Rules*. The title phrase means adoption of different standards in extraordinary circumstances (in golfing or in crime solving).

At a relatively fast clip, as the story opens, a red-haired car thief bests Straun and steals his expensive, beloved Maserati. (He can't afford the car on his policeman's salary; his earnings from outside writing go toward that.) Then he's enlisted to play bodyguard to a visiting dignitary who wants to set up a golf course in his African country. Since Straun knows golf—he's a former amateur medalist—he gets the job.

The visitor wants to play a round at England's most exclusive club, The Rogues. There's an attempt on his life when he does. His canary yellow Rolls Royce is stolen. And Straun finds himself drawn into a confusing web of a stolen car export ring.

August "Gus" Aligar, the visiting ruler of the new nation Chakra, invites Straun to visit his golf-course-in-the-making. The Home Office insists that the policeman go. And the intrigues grow.

*Winter Rules* is invitingly and wittily written. Straun is a well-portrayed character given a little more to heart than mind, in some circumstances. The storyline, which takes its time getting started, races to a whirlwind conclusion in a generally satisfactory puzzler.

—Bernard A. Drew



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### Dark Summer

by Jon Cleary. New York:  
Morrow, 1993. \$20.00

The hot summer day doesn't start well for veteran New South Wales homicide Inspector Scobie Malone in his newest case, *Dark Summer*. His middle child Maureen races into the bedroom to inform him and his wife Lisa that there's a dead man floating in their swimming pool.

The victim is Scungy Grime, one of Malone's snitches in an investigation of a major Sydney drug dealing operation.

The killing is a little too close to home for Malone. His wife is obviously upset, the children are treating it like an event. And except for the use of a rare drug injection as a murder weapon, the policeman hasn't much to go on.

One trail leads to Jack Aldwych, a retired crime boss whose son Jack Jr. is guiding the family's now-legitimate enterprises. A second death, by the same unusual means, of a madam leads Malone and his solid right hand Russ Clements in another direction, to drug king Danny Pelong.

As the detectives work their way inevitably toward a solution, the reader can make a few guesses, maybe even a few correct guesses, but writer Jon Cleary definitely saves some surprises for the end in this tangled, engaging puzzler. (The only thread left dangling, to a non-British Empire resident, is what on earth are the rules for cricket?)

Cleary's characters are depicted with sufficient detail to make them interesting, from a hooker hoping to kick a drug habit to a not-too-bright muscleman for a key crime figure.

Surrounding the crime case is a look at relationships: The ones between Malone and wife and children; between Malone and his retired dock-worker father, who has forever been embarrassed by his son's occupation; between Clements and his new girlfriend, coroner Romy Keller, recently arrived in the country with her ex-German policeman father; and between the old crime boss Aldwych and his son and Jack Jr.'s new girlfriend, social services worker Janis Eden. All add richness to the book.

—Bernard A. Drew

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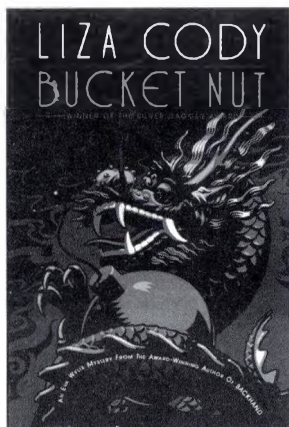


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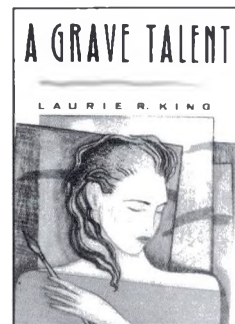
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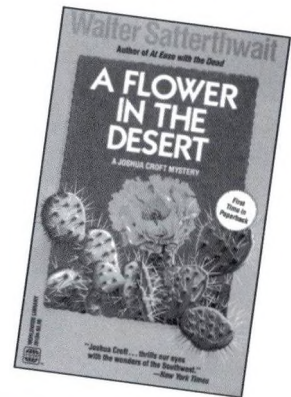
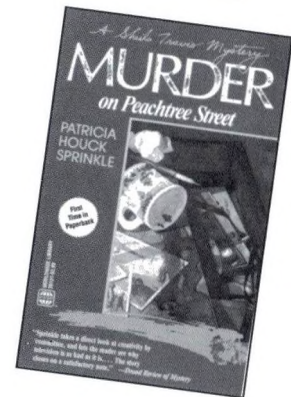
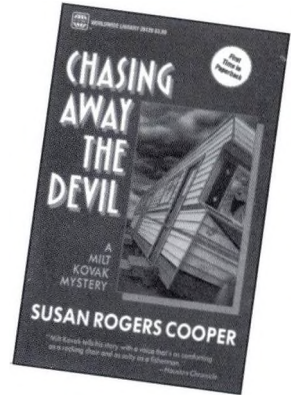
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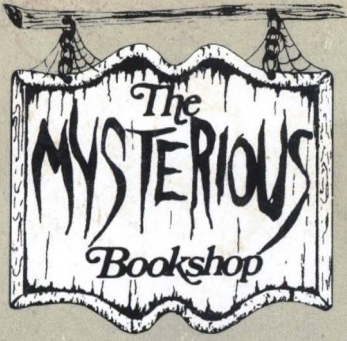
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