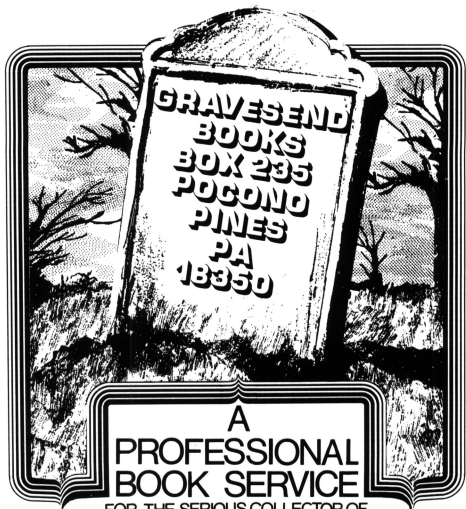


THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE





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The cover illustration portrays the first great armchair detective, Baroness Orczy's *The Old Man in the Corner*, as conceived by H. M. Brock.

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THE UNEASY CHAIR

Probably the greatest change in the history of *The Armchair Detective* will take place with the next edition, when the line on the masthead changes from "Editor: Allen J. Hubin" to "Editor: Michael Seidman."

Starting from now, today, immediately and so on, all manuscripts, letters, reviews, illustrations, and other editorial matter should be sent to Michael Seidman, *The Armchair Detective*, 129 West 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10019. Please be sure to include return postage if you want your material returned if it is not accepted for whatever reason. Subscription queries, renewals, and all matters relating to fulfillment should continue to be addressed to Bob Randisi at the same address. Advertising material should also be sent to this address.

Mike Seidman is an extraordinary addition to the staff of TAD. A book editor for more than a decade, he is now the editor of Charter Books, the mystery

division of Ace. In the short time that he has been in charge of this line (after several years at New American Library), Mike has seen two of his books nominated for Edgars, including Frank Bandy's *Deceit and Deadly Lies*, which won the prize last year. Sean Flannery's *The Kremlin Conspiracy* was nominated this year. And there are, make no mistake, more to come.

In addition to his full-time job at Charter, and the assumption of the editorship of TAD, Mike has sold his first fiction effort to *Mystery* magazine, plans to produce a novel, and is otherwise deeply involved in the mystery genre. Almost against his will, he is starting to collect books and, not unrelatedly, he works in The Mysterious Bookshop on Saturdays.

Al continues to disassociate himself from the many labors of the mystery world by stepping down as editor after nearly thirteen years. However, he will remain connected with TAD as a consulting editor and will also continue to write the book review column, "AJH Reviews."

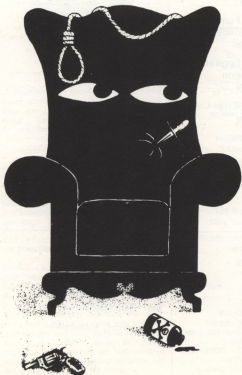
.....

The last couple of issues of TAD have not had Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor's supplement to *A Catalogue of Crime*. This was no fault of theirs. We (editorial we, essentially meaning I) seem to have lost the typescript for a supplement. Since they did not see it published, they felt no great sense of urgency in getting a further supplement into our hands. This has now been rectified, and their valued feature will again appear regularly.

.....

Another regular column begins in this issue, Richard Meyers' view of mystery and detection on the tube—mainly television and with occasional nods toward radio, which is gingerly finding its way back as a medium for mystery. Richard has just completed work on a book devoted to television detectives and stays abreast of whatever is happening that is of interest. (Not to mention some which is of absolutely no interest whatever, but we'll have it here anyway, just for the record.)

OTTO PENZLER





Raoul F. Whitfield, A Star with the *Mask*

○
By E. R. Hagemann



I. Life and Career

The first machine-gun started a staccato clatter from an alley on the right. Almost instantly there was a drum of a second one—from a shuttered window on the left. Metal started to make sound. The chauffeur ran a few feet and sprawled to the street. At that moment, the Chinese sprang from the car, doubled over and ran to a door nearest the car. He disappeared. The other occupants of the car were crouched, out of sight, below the metal sides.

—“Diamonds of Dread,”
Black Mask, 13 (February 1931), 89; a Joe Gar story

Considered by scholars of detective fiction to be a founder of the Hard-Boiled School, Raoul Fauconnier Whitfield today is little known; yet, during his prolific, albeit rather brief, writing career, he was popular, well-paid, and a respected peer of Hammett & Co.¹ And he was a Star among editor Joe Shaw's stable of *Black Mask* stars: W. T. Ballard, William D. Bray, Paul Cain, Raymond Chandler, George Harmon Cox, Eugene Cunningham, Tom Curry, Carroll John Daly, Norbert Davis, Erle Stanley Gardner, Dashiell Hammett, Nels Leroy Jorgensen, Ed Lybeck, Horace McCoy, Frederick Nebel, J. J. des Ormeaux, Norvell Page, Earl and Marion Scott, Stewart Stirling, J. Paul Suter, Theodore A. Tinsley, Roger Torrey, and Thomas Walsh—to call the roll of known and unknown pulp writers; for the focus of this article is Whitfield and *Black Mask*. (His hardback novels require a separate article.)

Whitfield was born in New York City in 1897 (also given as 1898) and educated there.² His family seems to have had some social position and money—Andrew Carnegie's wife was Louise Whitfield, whom he married in 1887. As a youth, Whitfield journeyed, stopping over in Honolulu, to the Philippines with his father, who was attached to the Territorial Government in Manila. The young man was later to put this experience to good use in some of his fiction.

While out in the Islands, he also visited Japan and China. In 1916, there is a chance he had a fling in the movies upon his return from the Far East.³

With the advent of The Great War, he enlisted first in the ambulance corps and then in the Air Service. He trained and soloed at Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas. After commission as second lieutenant with his wings, he went over to The Big Show on the U.S.S. *Louisville* in the summer of 1918. In France, he ferried unarmed American-built DH-4's from Romorantin to forward areas, towed targets at St. Jean de Monts, and briefly saw aerial combat before the Armistice. He was a good but not expert pilot. Aviation figures prominently in his early pulp fiction and in his juveniles.

After discharge, he went to Pittsburgh to “learn” the steel business in 1919, the year his famed relative died. Tiring of laboring in the mills, Whitfield switched to a variety of jobs, chiefly newspaper work, before eventually turning to writing full time. It is said that he sold his first story in 1923. This is entirely possible, but there is no record.⁴ An early story, probably his debut for Joe Shaw, appeared in *Black Mask* in March 1926. The editor later remembered (on one of two different occasions): “When we had the pleasure of his first acquaintance, he was on his way to Florida to hole in away from interruption and settle down to the serious business of making a first-rate newspaperman into a better writer.”⁵

Writer he became, and an astonishingly prolific one, during a period when prolificacy was the necessary lot of pulp and popular fiction writers—Gardner and Max Brand come to mind—in order to survive. From March 1926 through February 1934, Whitfield published at least eighty-seven pieces in *Mask*, sixty-three under his own name and twenty-four under his one known pseudonym, Ramon

Decolta; three hard-boiled novels for Alfred A. Knopf, *Green Ice* (1930), *Death in a Bowl* (1931), and *The Virgin Kills* (1932); and four juveniles, *Wings of Gold* (1930), *Silver Wings* (1930), *Danger Zone* (1931), and *Danger Circus* (1933), all of which are concerned with aviation.⁶ And during this time, 1928 to 1930, a Knopf dust-jacket blurb would have us believe that the man was also pursuing his acting career in the movies. Not for one moment do I believe this. But I can vouch that for at least two years, 1930 to 1932, he was in Europe with his wife, Prudence, and lived in Paris for part of his stay.

Back to his phenomenal output, however.

[He] always wrote very easily and quickly, and with a minimum of correction [states Ellery Queen]. He had a particular talent for starting with a title and writing around it. His wife has said that once he had a title, he had the story. He would place neat stacks of chocolate bars (which he ate by the thousands) to the right of his typewriter, and a picket fence of cigarettes to his left. He wrote and chain-smoked and ate, all in one unified operation.⁷

Shaw had a somewhat different remembrance of Whitfield as writer.

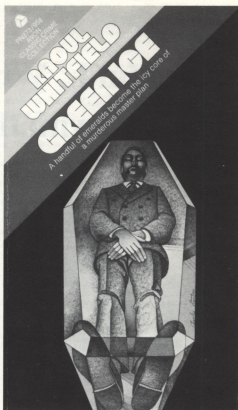
He was a hard, patient, determined worker. His style from the first was hard and brittle and over-inclined to staccato. Later, he became more fluent and went along . . . with the best of them. Earlier, a newspaperman, he wrote from knowledge of men, and women, and their ways. . . . Whit was ambitious. He wanted to invade other fields than that of crime detection and criminal conflict.⁸

Let Queen conclude this discussion.

The fact is, [he] needed very little to start him on a story. An incident which most people would consider trivial, a casual remark by a stranger—these were the fragile details out of which he wove flashing designs.⁹

Some time in the 1920s, when is unclear, Whitfield began corresponding with Hammett, who was living in San Francisco. He allegedly became Dash's champion and wrote letters to editors asking that they take his stuff. Finally, the two writers met and talked shop. "It was terrifying," Mrs. Whitfield recalled twenty years later, "to hear them seriously debate whether a particular story should have seven murders—or twenty-seven!" Seeing Hammett writing "laboriously, alone in a room, with dirty dishes strewn all over the kitchen floor," left an indelible impression.¹⁰ Shaw was aware of and knew of the friendship.

Long and fascinating were the discussions between Whit and Dash. Whit maintained that, given characters and a general plot, it was a cinch to write a detective story. When in a spot, all you need do, is to use the well-known props. A good writer should produce a novel without any of these appurtenances to achieve effect. And Dash's comeback,



"All right, if you want to make it the hard way, try writing a book omitting every word that has the letter 'f' for example."¹¹

Apocryphal? I will pass. It hasn't made the canon of myriad tales about Hammett.

By February 1934, Whitfield's career was nearing the end. He had been credited with the authorship of a story for a movie called *Private Detective 62* (Warner Bros.) starring William Powell and Margaret Lindsay and released in July 1933—his one and only confirmed screen job.¹² A little more than a year before, Shaw in his editor's page in *Mask* had proclaimed somewhat loudly, "As this number goes into print, Raoul Whitfield has hid himself hence to Hollywood on a long period contract with Paramount on terms that take all the press out of Depression."¹³ This is moot. *Film Daily Yearbook*, Hollywood's bible, does not list anything of his emanating out of the iron gates on Melrose Avenue.

In the mid-1930s, Whitfield was stricken with a long, mysterious illness that literally stopped him in his tracks. Speculation about it, although irresistible,

is worthless. Shaw called it a "personal tragedy," and indeed it was, for Whitfield, at the peak of his career, other than two lesser Jo Gar stories for *Cosmopolitan* in February 1935 and August 1937, seems not to have published another word before his death, place unknown, in 1945. No obituary has been found.

They come and they go in any business, especially the detective fiction business, and he who falters is forgotten. Good old Joe Shaw hung in there and tried for old time's sake. On 29 November 1945, he wrote Whitfield's wife:

Dear Prue:

In that Anthology [*The Hard-Boiled Omnibus*] I mentioned, I have included two of Raoul's, including one under the name of Ramon Decolta.

As you will note on enclosed forms, you will get \$100 for the longer one; \$40 for the short. Please sign and return to me.

Have you heard anything further from the Mercury-Ellyer Queen people? "

Three weeks short of one year later, 8 November 1946, Shaw sent her the \$140. Meanwhile, she had been successful in negotiating with Queen to republish her husband's *Mask* stories. In the October 1947 *EQMM* appeared "Blue Murder" (September 1932); by then, Queen was able to call him "a much too neglected member of the Hammett-Daly-Chandler hardboiled school," and made a very decent effort to rectify the neglect by reprinting eight stories in all. Nothing much in the way of posthumous recognition came of it. Shaw had tried, too, in *Omnibus*, with "Inside Job" (February 1932) and "Death in the Pasig" (March 1930). Nothing came of that, either, except irony: the book is now a minor classic, but Whitfield is still buried in the ash heap. Ron Goulart included "China Man" (March 1932) in his *The Hardboiled Dicks*.¹¹ And nothing, nothing.

They come and they go and when they go they are buried—for good—more or less.

II. Pulpeteer

Whitfield's early years on *Mask* were spent writing series grouped about central heroes and geographical locales; they were typical action stories, the kind Shaw was inordinately fond of. They vary vastly in quality. His earliest (1926) concerned Bill Scott (Scotty), a pilot, and Bing Russell, his mechanic, who roam the Border in their dilapidated J.H. 6, looking for crooks, adventure, and air shows. In December, Whitfield began a similar series about Chuck Reddington, a detective, who flies a plane for the Center City police department with his sidekick, Jake Bailey. The stuff is run-of-the-mill, although Whitfield does well with the flying, and today seems downright silly. But incredible as it may seem,

readers in those days "ate it up" issue after issue, as is evidenced in June 1928, when Shaw introduced Border Brand (six segments) with a hard-sell flourish, something else he was fond of.

FIRST BLOOD is the first of a series of amazing stories by Raoul F. Whitfield of a daring Federal officer, a man who knows how to fly a machine when necessary, and their [sic] desperate fight with a gang operating along the Border. There is everything in this yarn that men of action like to read about—thrills galore.¹²

MacLeod, a former wartime flyer, and Ben Breed carry on a running battle with The Wop, Antonio Flores, and in the final installment, "The Sky-Trap" (November 1928), engage him in a dogfight and shoot him down. He dies in the crash.¹³

No more had Border Brand ended than Whitfield launched into "Laughing Death" (nine parts), February-October 1929, wherein Gary Greer, another World War flyer and owner of an airfield in Center City, avenges the death of his prosecuting attorney father, Sanford Greer, rubbed out by gangsters who laughed as they killed—a good scene.

[Greer] had somewhere to go, something to do. As he moved, his eyes were narrowed, staring straight ahead. Only his tight-pressed lips seemed to be laughing. And there was not a pleasant laughter—it was the cold laughter of death. Death to gangsters who had killed with laughter on their own lips.¹⁴

I believe that "Laughing Death" was originally planned as a novel, then abandoned in favor of its immediate and far superior successor, "The Crime Breeders," December 1929-April 1930, the first version of Whitfield's first novel, *Green Ice*, published by Knopf, 11 July 1930. Mal Orney, an ex-con who has done a two-year stretch in Sing Sing for a girlfriend he felt responsible to, goes after what he calls Crime Breeders, the big-time hoods who prey on the small-timers.

Whitfield was now in full stride and would continue until the sudden "silence" in the mid-1930s. He bracketed the three-part serialization of "The Maestro Murder," September-November 1930, published as *Death in a Bowl*, 13 March 1931, with two good tough-guy stories. The first was "Murder by Mistake," August 1930, an initial shy at the private-eye agency-eye genre. Don Burney, a former NYPD dick, solves the murder of gambler-broker Roger Gratten by submachinegun fire in front of a New York speak. The ending is a bit weak, but the dialogue is good and sprinkled with a wry humor. The second was "Murder in the Ring," December 1930, Whitfield's finest for *Mask*, a fight story crowded with crooks, killers, and hangers-on. Gus Monky has a heavy-weight, Giant Pardo, who is headed for a championship bout.¹⁵ However, treachery prevails: Pardo is killed in the ring and Monky is shot and dies alone

(in another good scene) in a lunch wagon. The story is spare, fast-moving, with believable characters. Whitfield knew the fight game and could describe a match with the best of them. The dialogue is the best he ever attained to.

He took a breather and fiddled around with racketeer-crime stories and the trite Skyline Murders (six parts) with millionaire bachelor, sportsman, and clubman Alan Van Cleve as hero and his deadly enemy, Barney Ruys, a shyster, as heavy. Van Cleve explains to Dale Byrons, his fiancée:

That's what New York is for us, Dale—a sort of steel arena. Barney Ruys and I have money—enough to buy death for each other. And we both know that. I haven't any evidence against him, and he knows that. . . . He's shrewd, hard—a killer. I guess he's always been a killer at heart. . . . And now—we're at each other's throats.²⁰

Once shed of this, Whitfield got himself back on the track again with three stories in 1932 about agency-detective Don Free in New York. The pace is uneven, but "Man Killer" keeps moving along. Tim Hammond, agency boss, and Free talk about the dead gambler, Tony Bandor.

Hammond swore gently, then smiled. "How about taking five minutes out—and we'll both weep for dear old Tony Bandor," he said with sarcasm. "He'll be missed at church on Sunday. I don't imagine he spotted out more than eight or ten guys—and he only beat three stick-up indictments."²¹

For the remainder of his time with *Black Mask*, Whitfield experimented with both private- and cop-detective modes, using either New York or Hollywood settings and first-person narrators except for Ben Jardinn, the Hollywood shamus who named the killer of conductor Hans Reiner in *Death in a Bowl*. Jardinn appears in two stories, "Murder by Request," January 1933, and a most unusual one, "Dark Death," August 1933, because of Whitfield's version of the March 1933 earthquake in Los Angeles County. In "Request," somebody asks Ben:

"How's business with you?"

Jardinn frowned. "Terrible," he said. "All the wives are hanging on to their husbands because the lovers' jobs may not last. And all the husbands are hanging on to their wives because they can't afford two girls."²²

But, really, business is good and Jardinn has all he needs in the murder on the lot of director Dave Cameron. Not a bad story at all until the final three or four pages, when Jardinn confronts the reader suddenly with all kinds of dope only he has had access to. Judicious rewriting would have helped immensely.

Sudden death occurs in "Death" as the earthquake strikes. In his office, Jardinn is faced with a hood, gun drawn.

The indirect lighting suddenly was less brilliant. Sound beat into the room. Cracking sound. The light died completely. Outside glass was crashing. There was an explosion. The office was swaying now. Jardinn staggered and then let his body fall sideways and downward. Carrow shouted hoarsely:

"—! Earthquake —"

His gun crashed and Jardinn felt stinging pain just above the right elbow. The gun made only sharp, faint sound against the greater sound of falling material. There were screams in the boulevard, and the shaking was more violent now.²³

On the set, the cameras continue to grind and shoot the violent demise of director Alan McLean by human means. Ben orders a re-run and the murderer is apprehended; the same gimmick was used as a finale in *The Virgin Kills* to discover the killer of Babe Herron, the California stroke, who was put away during the rowing of the Poughkeepsie Regatta.

Whitfield knew his way around Hollywood, and his stories show it; they are of more than passing interest as I write in 1978.

His residence in the Philippines was put to good use when, under the name of Ramon Decolta, he wrote his most sustained series for Shaw: the twenty-four stories featuring Jo Gar, the Island Detective, who has a tiny office above Wong Ling's place just off the Escolta, Manila's main drag.²⁴ A veteran of the Manila police force, Gar solves murder after murder, most of which are committed with a variety of knives. He smokes brown-paper cigarettes, speaks in a "toneless" (one of Whitfield's overused words) voice, carries and uses a .45 Army Colt automatic (he is also skilled with a knife), drinks claret warm or chilled, and prefers a pony-hauled *carromatta* for transportation.

He was a young man, but he looked rather old. His hair was grey; he was medium in size, but because of the loose way he carried himself he appeared rather small. His face was brown—very brown. He had good teeth, a narrow lipped mouth, fine features. His eyes were slightly almond shaped, and they were seldom normally open. They held a peculiar squint.²⁵

Upon occasion he teams with Lt. Arragon, his friend, former comrade, and now rival; together they make a good contrast:

The lieutenant of Manila police preferred action to thought. He was often too anxious. Thus, he had often failed where Jo Gar, proceeding in an almost sleepy manner, had succeeded. Jo suited his action to the climate of the Islands. Manila was not New York, or San Francisco.²⁶

Jo is not necessarily bound to Manila, however. Twice he goes aboard ship for extended voyages, once to Nagasaki to trap jewel thieves and murderers, once across the Pacific (in a "serial" of six "chapters") to San Francisco to regain the Rainbow diamonds

and to avenge the murder-death of Arragon. At the end he muses, "I have all—all the Rainbow diamonds. Now I can go home, after the police come. I hope my friend Juan Arragon—knows."²⁷

The Gar stories are worthy of a revival, as are the hard-boiled items, and either or both would be a reasonable publishing venture in paperback.²⁸ At his best in *Mask*, Whitfield was very, very good; at his weakest, he was infuriatingly bad. The weaknesses can be laid to speed and pressure of deadlines. Fifteen times he appeared twice in the same issue as Raul Whitfield and Ramon Decolta. In other words, he wrote too much too quickly, and when he was in a spot he fell back on what he had warned Hammett against—"the well-known props." He was what I have called him, a Pulpeter, and a damned good one. Despite the passage of some forty years since he ceased writing, he is not embarrassing to read, which is certainly not so with some of the *Mask* contemporaries. It is a shame that he has been forgotten, for he deserves better.

Notes

1. The reader is forewarned that the biographical sketch which follows is often conjectural and second-hand, and the author apologizes therefor; but, when reliable, verifiable data are lacking, and they are, one does the best one can with what is in hand. Conversely, the reader is assured that bibliographical and publishing data are accurate throughout.
2. The main biographical sources are Joseph T. Shaw's discarded Introduction to *The Hard-Boiled Omnibus*, written in 1946, and in *Special Collections*, University of California, Los Angeles, to whom the author expresses thanks for permission to quote from it; three issues of *Black Mask*, November 1926, August 1930, and June 1932; dust jackets to Whitfield's *Death in a Bowl* and *The Virgin Killer*; and headnotes to four of Whitfield's stories reprinted in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, hereinafter *EQMM*, October 1947, May 1948, February 1949, and March 1949.
The birth year is given here as 1897 because Whitfield in *Mask*, November 1926, said he was twenty-nine years old.
3. The movies surface several times in limning his career, but nothing is definite except a credit for an original story. Certainly he had the looks and physique. He was six feet tall and had a dark handsomeness with a pencil mustache. In his day this was known as the Latin look.
4. It may have appeared in *Mask* before Shaw took over the editorship in the summer of 1926. The problem here is that even UCLA's superb run lacks copies at crucial points. I can find no stories by Whitfield in such popular pulps as *Detective Fiction Weekly*, *Dime Detective*, etc., which suggests that he published exclusively, or almost, in *Mask*.
5. *Black Mask*, 15 (June 1932), 123. Shaw adds that Whitfield's first story for *Mask* was in April 1926; he meant March.
6. There were twelve stories in *Silver Wings*, all but one of which appeared in *Boy's Life* beginning in 1927; five are set in World War I. This volume and *Danger Zone*, another war collection, are autobiographical. I have never seen a copy of *Danger Circus* nor a review, but I assume that it, too, concerns wartime flying.
7. *EQMM*, 10 (October 1947), 16. Queen's source was correspondence from Mrs. Prudence Whitfield.
8. Discarded Introduction to *The Hard-Boiled Omnibus*.
9. *EQMM*, 13 (March 1949), 81.

10. *EQMM*, 11 (May 1948), 40.
11. Discarded Introduction to *Omnibus*. Shaw gives no source.
12. His name was consistently misspelled "Whitefield" in the credits; the original story was "Man Killer," *Black Mask*, 15 (April 1932). Rian James was the adaptor and dialoguer and Michael Curtiz directed.
13. 15 (June 1932), 123.
14. Joseph T. Shaw Correspondence, Special Collections, UCLA; permission to quote has been kindly granted by Mr. Brooke Whiting, Head.
15. Los Angeles: Sherbourne Press, 1965; reprinted by Pocket Books, 1967. In his Introduction, p. xiv (paperback), Gouart describes Whitfield as a writer "who turned out tough, wisecracking stories about an assortment of hard-boiled detectives."
The most peculiar revival gesture was in August 1974, when *The Black Mask: A Magazine of Smashing Stories, Rare and Uncollected*, was issued out of New York, edited by Keith Deutsch. Reprints included Whitfield's "The Magician Murder" (November 1932) and "Scotty Scous Around" (1926, a story for which I have no record). I don't believe this "exact reproduction" of *Mask* ever got past Vol. 1, No. 1.
16. 11 (June 1928).
17. Like most pulp writers, Whitfield had no qualms about using racial and ethnic epithets and slurs abundantly; such was perfectly acceptable fifty years ago.
18. "The Carnival Kill," *Black Mask*, 12 (July 1929), 60.
19. Pardo bears an amazing resemblance to Primo Carnera two and one-half years before he beat Jack Sharkey for the title.
20. "Steel Arena," *Black Mask*, 14 (October 1931), 29.
21. *Black Mask*, 15 (April 1932), 16; the other two stories are "Walking Dynamite," May 1932, and "Blue Murder," September 1932. Free now has his own agency—Hammond turned out to be a crook, and Free killed him—and, believe it or not, a Jewish secretary, Beth Limer.
22. *Black Mask*, 15 (January 1933), 27. These are the only two stories with Jardinn.
23. *Black Mask*, 16 (August 1933), 8. The quake struck 5:45 p.m., 10 March 1933; the aftershocks continued for a long time; the seventh tremor hit at 7:55 p.m. Damage was widespread.
24. Under his own name, he published two more Gar stories in *Hearts' International-Cosmopolitan* in February 1935 and August 1937.
25. "West of Guam," *Black Mask*, 12 (February 1930), 52; this was the first Jo Gar story.
26. "Signals of Storm," *Black Mask*, 13 (June 1930), 49.
27. "Diamonds of Death," *Black Mask*, 14 (August 1931), 54.
28. At the moment I am writing an extended analysis of the Gar stories and will present it at the April 1979 Popular Culture Association meeting, Pittsburgh.



An Annotated Raul F. Whitfield Black Mask Checklist

- A. Hard-boiled and Crime Stories
- "Scotty Troubles Trouble." 9 (March 1926), 82-90. Bill Scott (Scotty) and Bing Russell, aviators, on the Border.
"Delivered Goods." 9 (November 1926), 68-73. Aviation.
"Ten Hours." 9 (December 1926), 51-66. Chuck Reddington; first in series.
"Uneasy Money." 9 (January 1927), 108-117. Aviation.
"White Murder." 9 (February 1927), 98-107. Chuck Reddington.
"Sky-High Odds." 10 (March 1927), 41-50. Chuck Reddington.
"South of Savannah." 10 (May 1927), 120-28. Chuck Reddington.
"Bottled Death." 10 (June 1927), 116-28. Chuck Reddington.

"Live Men's Gold." 10 (August 1927), 26-36. Chuck Reddington.

"Sixty Minutes." 10 (October 1927), 9-23. Buck, a pilot; first-person narrator in the vernacular.

"Red Pearls." 10 (November 1927), 86-93. Lou Kyle, police dick.

"The Sky's the Limit." 10 (January 1928), 119-28. Chuck Reddington.

"Soft Goods." 10 (February 1928), 26-34. Little Benny, a hood and killer, and Charlie Harmer, detective, in Center City.

"Little Guns." 11 (April 1928), 30-39. Gangsters and police in Center City.

"Black Murder." 11 (May 1928), 72-80. Greyhound racing and crooks.

"First Blood." 11 (June 1928), 5-22. MacLeod and Ben Breed; first in Border Brand series.

"Blue Murder." 11 (July 1928), 38-51. Border Brand.

"High Death." 11 (August 1928), 49-60. Border Brand.

"Red Wings." 11 (September 1928), 32-42. Border Brand.

"Ghost Guns." 11 (October 1928), 78-88. Border Brand.

"The Sky-Trap." 11 (November 1928), 109-20. Border Brand; last of series.

"On the Spot." 11 (February 1929), 11-24. Gary Greer; first in Laughing Death series.

"Out of the Sky." 12 (March 1929), 35-46. Laughing Death.

"The Pay-Off." 12 (April 1929), 54-65. Laughing Death.

"High Odds." 12 (May 1929), 79-89. Laughing Death.

"Within the Circle." 12 (June 1929), 98-107. Laughing Death.

"The Carnival Kill." 12 (July 1929), 50-60. Laughing Death.

"River Street Death." 12 (August 1929), 78-87. Laughing Death.

"The Squeeze." 12 (September 1929), 101-11. Laughing Death.

"Sal the Dude." 12 (October 1929), 117-34. Laughing Death; last of series.

"Murder by Mistake." 13 (August 1930), 36-56. Don Burney, agency dick.

"Murder in the Ring." 13 (December 1930), 7-32. Heavyweight boxer, gambling, and racketeers; reprinted in *Black Mask Detective*, May 1951.

"About Kid Deth." 13 (February 1931), 92-115. Joey (Kid) Deth; gangster.

"Face Powder." 14 (April 1931), 6-32. Ben Annon, police dick, in Pittsburgh.

"Soft City." 14 (May 1931), n.p. Center City corruption and racketeers; issue wanting in UCLA.

"For Sale—Murder." 14 (June 1931), 78-107. Sequel to "City."

"The Sky Club Affair." 14 (August 1931), 6-27. Alan Van Cleave; first in The Skyline Murders series.

"Red Terrace." 14 (September 1931), 50-71. Skyline Murders.

"Steel Arena." 14 (October 1931), 29-47. Skyline Murders.

"Van Cleave Calling." 14 (November 1931), 60-82. Skyline Murders.

"Unfair Exchange." 14 (December 1931), 102-21. Skyline Murders.

"Skyline Death." 14 (January 1932), 12-34. Skyline Murders; last of series.

"Inside Job." 14 (February 1932), 8-31. Tim Slade, private eye; reprinted Joseph T. Shaw, ed., *The Hard-Boiled Omnibus* (New York, 1946), pp. 255-99.

"Man Killer." 15 (April 1932), 6-28. Don Free, agency eye in New York.

"Walking Dynamite." 15 (May 1932), 6-26. Don Free.

"Blue Murder." 15 (September 1932), 6-22. Don Free; reprinted *EQMM*, 10 (October 1947), 16-36.

"Dead Men Tell Tales." 15 (November 1932), 8-26. Jay Cameron, hard-boiled city editor of the *Press*; reprinted *EQMM*, 11 (May 1948), 40-61.

"Murder by Request." 15 (January 1933), 8-30. Private eye Ben Jardinn in Hollywood.

"Dark Death." 16 (August 1933), 6-30. Ben Jardinn and 1933 Los Angeles-Long Beach earthquake.

"A Woman Can Kill." 16 (September 1933), 6-28. Dion Davies, partner in agency, Dancer & Davies, Ltd., New York.

"Money Talk." 16 (October 1933), 54-73. Dion Davies.

"Not Tomorrow." 16 (November 1933), 60-76. Tough Irish lawyer, O'Roy, and Rollo, his assistant; New York.

"Murder Again." 16 (December 1933), 60-80. McCoy and Eddie Rex, L.A. County dicks, in Hollywood.

"High Murder." 16 (January 1934), 52-69. Ash Evans and Chink Chaddon, L.A. County dicks.

"Death on Fifth Avenue." 16 (February 1934), 56-70. Ben Carey, agency eye, in New York.

B. Serializations

"Outside." 12 (December 1929), 27-45. Mal Gurney in "The Crime Breeders"; later published as *Green Ice*, 11 July 1930.

"Red Smoke." 12 (January 1930), 37-50. "The Crime Breeders."

"Green Ice." 12 (February 1930), 88-108. "The Crime Breeders."

"Oval Face." 13 (March 1930), 96-114. "The Crime Breeders."

"Killers' Show." 13 (April 1930), 107-28. "The Crime Breeders"; last installment.

"Death in a Bowl." 13 (September 1930), 35-71. Ben Jardinn, private eye in Hollywood; Part I; published as *Death in a Bowl*, 13 March 1931.

"DeathinaBowl." 13 (October 1930), 90-119. Part II.

"Death in a Bowl." 13 (November 1930), 76-113. Part III; last installment.

C. Jo Gar, The Island Detective; under pseudonym, Ramon Decolta

"West of Guam." 12 (February 1930), 50-57. First Gar story.

"Death in the Pasig." 13 (March 1930), 49-56. Reprinted Joseph T. Shaw, ed., *The Hard-Boiled Omnibus* (New York, 1946), pp. 97-111.

"Red Hemp." 13 (April 1930), 33-44.

"Signals of Storm." 13 (June 1930), 41-52.

"Enough Rope." 13 (July 1930), 25-36.

"Nagasaki Bound." 13 (September 1930), 103-14.

"Nagasaki Knives." 13 (October 1930), 26-37. Sequel to "Bound."

"The Caleso Murders." 13 (December 1930), 92-102. The spelling is *RW*'s; the acceptable spelling is *caleso*.

"Silence House." 13 (January 1931), 33-44.

"Diamonds of Dread." 13 (February 1931), 80-91. First of six sequential stories; reprinted *EQMM*, 13 (February 1949), 82-96, as "The Rainbow Murders Begin"; in a headnote, p. 81, *EQMM*, which reprinted the entire sequence, insists that the tales "do not constitute a serial; each tale stands on its own feet"; this is debatable, to say the least.

"The Man in White." 14 (March 1931), 111-22. Reprinted *EQMM*, 13 (March 1949), 81-94, as "White Duck."

"The Blind Chinese." 14 (April 1931), 112-22. Reprinted *EQMM*, 13 (April 1949), 37-40, as "Yellow Death."

"Red Dawn." 14 (May 1931), n.p.; issue wanting in UCLA. Reprinted *EQMM*, 13 (May 1949), 65-77, with same title.

"Blue Grass." 14 (July 1931), 78-89. Reprinted *EQMM*, 13 (June 1949), 52-64, with same title.

"Diamonds of Death." 14 (August 1931), 46-54. Reprinted *EQMM*, 14 (July 1949), 81-91, as "The Rainbow Murders End."

"Shooting Gallery." 14 (October 1931), 100-11.

"The Japanese Mask." 14 (December 1931), 49-60.

"China Man." 15 (March 1932), 93-103. Reprinted Ron Goulart, ed., *The Hardboiled Dicks* (New York: Pocket Books, 1967), 133-50, under *RW*'s own name.

"The Siamese Cat." 15 (April 1932), 39-49.

"The Black Sampan." 15 (June 1932), 95-105.

"Climbing Death." 15 (July 1932), 88-100.

"The Magician Murder." 15 (November 1932), 88-96. Reprinted *The Black Mask*, 1, No. 1 (August 1974), 57-66; ed. Keith Deutsch.

"The Man from Shanghai." 16 (May 1933), 115-24.

"The Amber Fan." 16 (July 1933), 99-109. Last Gar story in *BM*.

D. Jo Gar Addenda

"The Mystery of the Fan-Backed Chair." *Hearst's International-Cosmopolitan*, 98 (February 1935), 56-58, 169-72; under *RW*'s own name.

"The Great Black." *Hearst's International-Cosmopolitan*, 103 (August 1937), 62-64, 122-25; under *RW*'s own name.

Note to the Reader: As with any checklist, the above is tentative. Earlier in this paper (note 4), I mentioned that issues are wanting in the UCLA files, e.g., only two issues for 1923, four for 1924, and three for 1926 are available. Issues for March 1931, May 1931, March 1934, August 1934-March 1935, and June 1936 are also wanting. Therefore, you are encouraged to "fill in the gaps."

The Playful Mysteries of Peter Dickinson

By Earl F. Bargainnier

The mysteries of Peter Dickinson have received much praise in the past decade. Writers in the genre as different as Ross Macdonald and Edmund Crispin have expressed their admiration. The latter said in *The Sunday Times* that Dickinson is "the best thing that has happened to serious, sophisticated, witty crime fiction since Michael Innes." Critics have also offered praise. A *Time* review stated that "he packs his books with such old-fashioned virtues as mood, character and research," and the *New York Times Book Review* commented of his work: "sensitive, different, yet with the conventions of the genre." (That statement can serve as a thesis for this essay.) Numerous other examples could be given. The most obvious illustration of Dickinson's success is his back-to-back winning in 1968 and 1969 of Gold Daggers of the British Crime Writers' Association for his first two mystery novels.

He came late to mystery writing. Born in 1927 in Livingstone, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), the son of a colonial civil servant, Dickinson came to England with his parents at age seven, attended Eton, and received his B.A. from King's College, Cambridge in 1951. From 1952 to 1969 he was assistant editor of *Punch*. Since the success of his first works, he has devoted full-time to writing. Though there are some exceptions, his output has been principally divided between mysteries for adults and fantasies for young people. In the latter group are such acclaimed works as the "Changes" trilogy: *The Weathermonger* (1968), *Heartease* (1969), and *The Devil's Children* (1970); *Emma Tupper's Diary* (1971); and *The Blue Hawk* (1976). Though apparently intended for adolescents, *The Blue Hawk* has been released as a science fiction paperback for adults in this country (Ballantine 25759). It is not science fiction, but one of the most imaginative of the recent flood of adventure/fantasy novels, and it exhibits many of the same concerns as Dickinson's mystery novels. As of this writing (1979), those novels number ten, the first five employing Superintendent Pibble of Scotland Yard.¹

It is an over-simplification to characterize any author's work by a single adjective, but *playful* at least provides an approach to Dickinson's mysteries, and is less constraining than those which have been most often used: bizarre, antic, zany, ingenious,

fantastic, raffish, witty, and outlandish—though all of these apply in one way or another. His playfulness is exhibited most clearly by his staying within the formulas of the classic British detective novel and of the thriller, while incorporating into those formulas a mass of diverse, incongruous, and often wildly comic elements, from an alternate British royal family and corpses pickled in homemade vodka to a teenaged witch doctor named Robin and a beautiful terrorist in a sultan's harem. Whatever interests Dickinson—and his interests are obviously many—is material to be packed into or around the frame of mystery-detection, creating a stylish, if occasionally somewhat overstuffed, final product. One minor example is his indulgence of his love of words, which must send many readers to their dictionaries to find the meanings of *zarebas*, *hypnagogic*, *dendropsychists*, *clepsydra*, *hypocaust*, *spokeshave*, *fulvous*, etc. It is as if he wishes to see just how much he can cram into the formula without its either exploding or collapsing.² He plays with the conventions, stretching and twisting them, but never allowing them actually to break. This ability simultaneously to stay within the genre's limits and to add other disparate elements, often unlikely ones, to enrich it is evident in both the five Pibble novels and the five later non-series mysteries.

The novels in which James (Jimmy) Pibble is protagonist established Dickinson as mystery writer. In a recent essay Dickinson has provided a biographical sketch of Pibble, including his background and cases (most of it written as if by Mike Crewe, one of Pibble's sergeants). Of Pibble's genesis, Dickinson states, "I simply wanted a detective who was not at all James Bondish, was unsexy, easily browbeaten, intelligent, fallible."³ Dickinson succeeded in his purpose. On Pibble's first appearance, he is described as "aging, unglamorous, greying toward retirement," but with a "reputation for having a knack with kooky cases" (AN, 1). In his mid-fifties, he has been a policeman for thirty-five years. His social background is one of his principal burdens. His father Willoughby Pibble (same first name as Dickinson's father) was gassed in World War I, and the family existed in respectable but grubby circumstances. One result is Pibble's social inferiority, well expressed in the statement that he lacks "the deliberate, unsweat-

ing, willed social expertise, which all the world's Pibbles long for, are ashamed of their longing for, and know they will never achieve" (SS, 85). When he reflects on his life, he thinks dispiritedly of himself as "quiet, easy-going Jimmy Pibble, whose main achievement in life had been to lever himself out of the upper-lower-middle class into the lower-middle-middle, despite the handicap of an over-refined wife" (PH, 41).

That over-refined wife Mary never appears in the novels, but Pibble makes telephone calls to her, and he is continually thinking of her reactions to his activities. Her great love is Greece, to which they make six trips, and she is constantly showing off her slides. Since her "ritual lunch" consists of prunes and Fruiti-Fort, when he is sacked from the Yard, he does not go home to lunch "to prevent Mary's hydra-headed guilt feelings from forcing her to cook him yet another square meal" (SB, 43). When there is a chance that she may assist him on a case, he thinks, "Why, she might stay content with her lot for two whole weeks together!" (SS, 95) His attitude toward her seems to be a mixture of sympathy, fear of disapproval, and exasperation. At the point of being killed in *A Pride of Heroes*, he summarizes their relationship: "She thought him weak, unambitious, wasteful of his cleverness (which she absurdly overestimated), selfishly neglectful of her. . . . Poor Mary Pibble, she'd had a small, sour life. . ." (173). Though he is apparently faithful in the physical sense, he can become quite infatuated with women he meets on cases, two examples being Anthea Singleton in *A Pride of Heroes* and Tony d'Agnello in *The Lizard in the Cup*.

Though a millionaire friend bluntly tells him, "you are short on glamour" (SB, 99), Pibble is not totally dull. Dickinson gives him an original, even quirky mind. His favorite expression is "Crippen!" He imagines his name in Greek: Tzaimy Pimpel, and he considers the possibility of constructing an English sentence wholly from Greek, but fails: "Analyzing the physiognomy and psychology of synchronous saurians. . . Hell!" (LC, 83) When caught in what he calls a "double helix of deception" in *The Sinful Stones*, he expresses himself as follows: "No more likely they'd think he thought they thought he believed them—but that meant they didn't mind his knowing they knew he knew. . ." (80). The most distinctive aspect of his original thought is the number of similes, metaphors, and analogies which are continually running through his mind. They may be strictly unnecessary, but they contribute both to his personality and to the playfulness of the novels. On meeting a young woman, he thinks, "Her voice had the sharp reasonableness of a career business-woman in a B film" (AN, 29). When a lion eats a general in *A Pride of Heroes*, Pibble hears "a busy snuffing, as of a terrier rooting in a compost heap"

(137). Among many other choice examples are the following:

Perhaps they were just frightened of authority, dreading the unknown element as a child dreads the jelly it finds in the cavities of cold meat (AN, 160–61).

It was a hulking, muscular wine, tasting of old cavalry boots, but Mr. Singleton seemed determined to show it who was master (PH, 160).

The total effect was as if some minor hall at the Victoria and Albert had been commandeered and redecorated to be an airlines terminal (SB, 2).

It had a Canadian accent as strong as cheddar cheese (SS, 3).

. . . [A] fresh shower of grit fell over the back of his head and down inside of the collar of his habit, coating his sweat-dewed neck like sugar on a ripe strawberry (SS, 126).

. . . [A] plum or pear tree, in the few years before it dies, fruits with over-generous foison, and in the same way the appeal of certain women increases in the last few seasons before they pupate into old ladies (PH, 17).

Just as the toad, squat by the ear of Eve, exploded into the Demon King at the touch of Ithurriel's spear, so started up, in his own shape, Mr. Vivian Costain, firebrand president of the South London Preservation Society (SB, 25).

Similar examples are found in the non-Pibble novels, but they are most effective here in illustrating the imaginative quirkiness of Pibble's mind.

The dominant trait in Pibble's character is his self-deprecating introspection. Only partially the result of his sense of social inferiority, it is actually at the core of his personality. He does not just worry about the impression he makes on even the least important of persons, but views himself as "baffled, inadequate Pibble" (PH, 45). When he is asked, "You a gentleman?" his response is "Not even in a technical sense" (PH, 25). He disbelieves most compliments, but needs ego support. He is elated when he discovers that the government used three men for two months to investigate him for security reasons; to him, this is a true compliment, a sign of his significance. Such boosts to his ego, however, seldom occur. After being forced to retire from Scotland Yard, he can only say humbly, "I don't think they were necessarily wrong. I seemed to be becoming sort of accident prone" (SB, 86). His despairing attitude about himself and his role as policeman is easily illustrated:

He was suddenly sure that the whole business was going to end in misery (AN, 137).

. . . [H]onest Pibble honest Iago Pibble to nose around like a maggot in the glass-sided ants' nest with his scholarly inquisitiveness. . . (AN, 180).

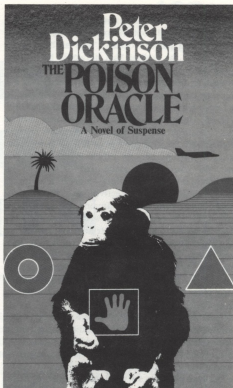
. . . [O]nce again the intellectually stimulating and cheerful surface of his job had suddenly rotted away, leaving only the wicked skeleton (AN, 170).

Jimmy Pibble, a bit sensitive, highly strung, you might say, never had the basic drive to make a top-flight officer, clever but quirky, wouldn't put it past him... [to commit suicide]. ... [H]e longed to know that they would put it past him (PH, 172).

... [T]hat unbanishable recurring dream in which he received the Police Medal from the Queen Mother with his shirttails twitching around bare thighs (SB, 24).

It is not surprising that, with such self-views, Pibble seems willing to accept the blame whenever events go awry. In two cases he even agonizes because he "causes" the deaths of murderers. Over and over, he expresses some version of "It's all my fault." Unfortunately, his sense of personal responsibility and the resulting insecurity are not lessened by the actions or words of others. In *A Pride of Heroes*, the situation seems to be getting out of hand, and Pibble's thought is, "He needed horribly to be told that he had done, was doing, right" (152). But when he calls the Assistant Commissioner, he is told that "we'll need you as a scapegoat if things go wrong" (184). He is rejected by everyone at the end of *Sleep and His Brother*. He is denied credit for saving one of England's great men in *The Sinful Stones*—indeed, he loses his job—that personage ending the novel with "... and then he damned near drowned us all. ... I knew his father. He was a busybody, too" (201). As unfair as this valedictory may be, it indicates what Pibble has to endure.

Pibble is no super-detective in the Holmes or Poirot mold; he is literally and figuratively a little man, with anxieties, fears, weaknesses, and problems with others. But in spite of all of his troubles, he is a success as a detective. Though active for his age—especially in *A Pride of Heroes* and *The Sinful Stones*—he is basically ratiocinative. Aside from his introspective self-questioning, his major qualities as detective are his honesty, caution, efficiency, persistence, and pity. Crewe describes him as "a bit obsessive about honesty": "I sometimes used to think that he got a weird satisfaction out of being bullied or used, as if he was continually needing to prove to himself that he was so dead honest and incorruptible that even when he was being cheated he wasn't going to cheat back" (SP, 180–81). His honesty extends to his approach to cases: "He'd never impose his own views on a case" (SP, 180). When he finds himself being prejudiced in any way, he is disturbed. For example, in *Anis's Nest*, "His lust to nail Caine was unsettling the whole case, besides being irresponsible, inefficient, and immoral" (98). Similarly, "The trouble was that Pibble so much wanted the second explanation to be true that he suspected its plausibility for that very reason" (SB, 103). His distrust of hunches is the result of this desire for personal integrity: "If they work once, you start to look for them after that, and then the wildest fancy becomes an article of faith"



(SB, 22). A direct effect of the honesty is his caution in judging people or ascribing motives to them. He can say of his wife, "I don't know what it's like to be her," and then add, "People are like weather forecasting. Observation of past patterns..." (SB, 139). Those past patterns are the detective's only guide, but those patterns can vary so greatly that one can never be sure which pattern is present. The same is true of motive. Pibble says that "if you'd done thirty-five years of police work, as I have—you'd know that any motive is credible" (SS, 106). At the same time, he realizes that motive is complex; he does not believe that "any of us ever acts from a single motive—the smallest fidget rises from a choice between several drives" (SB, 82). In a sense, Dickinson makes Pibble an amateur psychologist as well as a professional detective—perhaps the two cannot be separated.

Though cautious, Pibble is efficient. He has the ability to size up a case quickly, decide what must be done, and give clear and appropriate orders. All of his cases are completed swiftly, in three instances within one day. Once he is on a case, he is persistent. His thoughts in *Sleep and His Brother* are indicative: "He had a moral duty to explore further; not to do so would be a sin against Holy Knowledge, as bad as

book burning" (106). His persistence is also related to his self-honesty. When he knows that he can bow out of a case gracefully but without knowing the truth, the following passage occurs: "But as he trudged dispiritedly . . . he realised that he would have to go on. If he'd been sure, either way, he could have dropped it; but living another twenty years, and not knowing—knowing only that he'd been too scared to find out—what sort of a calm old age would that be?" (PH, 98) He *has to know*, and he continues until he does—whatever the consequences. A character trait often at odds with his persistence is his pity for those involved with murder. Of Pibble in the *Ants' Nest* case, the comment is made that "Always a bit deficient in the hunting instinct—more of a herbivore than a carnivore, as detectives go—this time he simply didn't care whether anyone was arrested or not" (138). His sympathy for wrongdoers and even those prepared to kill him is striking evidence of his humanity. However, though never vindictive, he is not a patsy. In *Sleep and His Brother*, he says to a murderer, "I've never believed in retributive justice. But I believe in deterrence" (213), and he proceeds to make plans to prevent that murderer from continuing his activities.

These five qualities of Pibble constitute his principal detectal traits, but his ability to put clues together is, of course, a part of his success. An anthropologist in the first novel says, "He would have made a sound scholar" (170). In *A Pride of Heroes* he realizes by page 96 what has happened to the disappeared admiral, and in *The Lizard in the Cup* a flash of insight presents the solution to him. Because of his successes, his colleagues' reservations seem almost inexplicable. He is told by an intelligence agent, "When I checked with London they were a bit funny about you. Chap I talked to, every sentence started off with a pat on the back for you and finished with a *but*. Anyway, he said you definitely had a sort of knack" (LC, 124). Pibble does have "a sort of knack," and it is his personality rather than his ability which prevents his receiving his due recognition.

The analysis presented of Pibble may seem to negate the concept of Dickinson's playfulness. In spite of his quirkiness of mind, Pibble himself is not a particularly playful character; rather, his introspective personality is used as a contrast to his odd cases. It is the nature of those cases which provides opportunities for play. In Pibble's first case, a minor criminal says, "Kinky little case like *vis*. Vey wouldn't send one of ver big boys out on it . . ." and Pibble thinks, "Yes, kinky and little, just Pibble's line. . . . Ah, well, it suited his talents, whatever Mrs. Pibble might say" (127-28). The kinky, kooky cases with which Pibble is faced are so because of the settings, the Dickinsonian plot devices which enliven the crime and its investigation, and the characters.

To say that Pibble solves cases twice in London, at

a country estate, in Scotland, and in Greece gives no real idea of those settings. *Ants' Nest* takes place in the home of the Kus, a New Guinea tribe transferred to London by an English anthropologist, who is also a member. Needless to say, the cultural differences provide a test for Pibble—and many possibilities for Dickinsonian play. The other London case is at the McNair Foundation, a home for cathypnic children. There Pibble must confront not only a slick con man, a hostile executive secretary, and a murderer, but also the cathypnics, nicknamed "dormice," children with a sleeping sickness which makes them telepathic. In the course of the novel, the building—"a gloriously typical example of High Domestic Grandiose" (SB, 26)—goes up in flames, and Pibble has to escape by shinnying down a tree from the roof. However, that is a mild adventure compared to what happens to him in *The Sinful Stones*. It occurs on Clumsey Island in the Hebrides: "an island of idiots, and a paradise of thieves" (51). A brutal pseudo-religion, The Faith of the Sealed (whose rich founder, named Hackenstadt, is in Tibet with a half-caste actress), is headquartered there. Pibble has to escape in a boat up the Firth of Lorne with Sir Francis Francis, a ninety-year-old winner of two Nobel prizes, who is only lucid at four-hour intervals; a drunken nurse; and a teenaged schizophrenic. If that is not enough, Pibble's knowledge of sailing is nil. Also dangerous for him is Herryngs, the country estate of *A Pride of Heroes*, with its roaming lions, duel ground, and working scaffold. It has been turned into a British version of Disneyland, but one much less safe than the American original. The final novel takes place on the Greek isle of Hyos. The most significant structure on the island is the Monastery of St. Soporophore. The saint was a beautiful Christian boy desired by a Roman emperor. The boy prayed to be saved, was given beak and feathers, and transported to the island. One of the multiple plots is an attempt to steal the entire mosaic in the saint's chapel piece by piece.

These settings are all of the closed-circle type: within a limited space and with a restricted number of suspects. Although *The Sinful Stones* is a thriller, the other four are traditional British detective stories. In them, Dickinson provides all necessary clues and leaves no loose ends dangling, but he also adds distinctive and playful elements. In *Ants' Nest* alone, he employs such varied narrative techniques as stylistic parodies, a hospital chart, and, most effectively, Pibble's stream-of-consciousness delirium from concussion to explain the case. He audaciously opens *The Lizard in the Cup* with this first line: "We could always have him murdered for you," said Pibble." In the same novel, Dickinson invents the lizard of the title, calls it a "samimithi," and explains that "If it runs across your food you get very ill, and if it drowns in your milk you die" (32). The rituals of the Kus, the cathypnic dormice, the psychotic cult,

and the legend of St. Sporophore are typical examples of the oddities made a part of the mysteries. Perhaps *A Pride of Heroes* has more such elements than any of the others: the stately home as amusement park, a tiger-pit decorated with a huge eighteenth-century pornographic frieze, a man-eating lion named Bonzo, the macabre deaths of two British heroes—of one of which Pibble thinks, “There could be a grand state funeral of the unconsumed portions” (166)—and, most of all, Pibble’s being saved by a Texas Minuteman, who has him pose for photos on the scaffold from which, a few minutes earlier, he was to be hanged by a murderer. Indeed, Pibble’s cases are kinky.

The strangeness of many of the people Pibble meets in the cases matches the events and settings. In *Ants’ Nest*, besides the Kus with their Biblical names, there are Billy Youbegood, member of a criminal family; Nancy Hermitage, a garrulous call girl; Sir Cyril Blight, a land developer; Mr. Evans-Evans of Lackadaisy, Lackadaisy & Squill, estate agents; and Robin Ku, a teenager who agrees to become the tribe’s witch doctor so that he can play the drums like Ringo Starr. *A Pride of Heroes* provides the eccentric Claverings who own Herryngs; Mr. Waugh, a drunken Wodehousian actor-butler; “Rastus,” an escaped black American convict, who plays the role of ancient gardener; and Calhoun Chanceley, the photographer-Minuteman from Dallas. The sect of *The Sinful Stones* includes Brothers Providence, Patience, Hope, Tolerance, etc., as well as Brother Love, a Great Dane, and Brother Bruce, forger of T. S. Eliot’s “Fifth Quartet: Stoke Newington.” Prowling among the cathypnics of *Sleep and His Brother* are Superintendent Callow; an arrogant “mad scientist”; and Dr. Rameses Silver, alias Goldsmith, Nicholl, and Irons. Of the last, Dickinson allows Pibble to indulge in the following outrageous wordplay: “Presumably he’d called himself Steele at some point, or even Copper. Michael O’Lybdenum? T’ung Sten, the Chinese acupunctureist? Shiek Al Um n’Um?” (79) (Dickinson’s playful use of names should be evident by now.) Also, appearing first in this novel is Athanasius Thanatos, who returns in *The Lizard in the Cup*. An Onassis-like millionaire, he has an overwhelming personality, and though he is crude, he is also likeable. He seems to live on Bloody Marys, art, and electrical gadgetry. In *The Lizard in the Cup*, his girlfriend is Tony d’Agnello, alias Anna Lazlo, the Bomber Queen, responsible for a supposed Folger Shakespeare Library explosion, in which eight First Folios were lost. Other assorted characters are Butler, a homosexual secret agent; Sir Thopas Jones, a pedantic scholar; Buck Budweiser, a legless physical culturist and art expert; the dirty and drunken Fathers Polydore and Chrysostom of St. Sporophore; and Hyos’s group of sickly fantastic expatriates. Such are the people who inhabit the five novels, who provide

much of those novels’ playfulness, and who threaten, exasperate, amuse, and bemuse Pibble.

Of his ending the Pibble series, Dickinson has said, “You can’t go on creating somebody when he’s already created. Five books is a lot to live through. If he wasn’t solid by then he never would be” (SP, 182). He has also said, “Pibble’s getting on, you see. I’d have to check, but I think he’s sixty-four. I can’t say definitely that I shan’t write about him again, but if I had to bet on it, I would say it wasn’t likely.”⁴ One can only assume that Pibble’s fifth case was his last, but in his five appearances he established himself as a worthy representative of Scotland Yard detection, even though his colleagues—and often he himself—did not always think so. He and other possible “kinky little” cases are missed.

Since Dickinson’s abandonment of Pibble, he has written five other mysteries, but has not attempted another series detective. Rather he has used amateurs who find themselves inadvertently caught up in murder and conspiracy. In three cases, the protagonists are scientists: a mathematician (*The Green Gene*), a psycholinguist (*The Poison Oracle*), and a behaviorist psychologist (*Walking Dead*). In *The Lively Dead* and *King & Joker*, women are the central characters: Lady Lydia Timms and Princess Louise respectively. With the exception of *King & Joker*, these novels are more in the thriller mode than that of the detective story. Because of the variety of techniques and materials, each requires separate examination.

The Green Gene is an amalgam of the thriller, science fiction, and socio-political satire. Its basic premise is that nearly all people of Celtic blood have—and always have had—green skin. As a result, Great Britain is torn by racial prejudice and terrorism. Though Dickinson’s tone is one of detached amusement, he attacks all sides. His view is expressed by a character who says, “We are a brutalised people . . . we are all brutalised” (163). Politicians and their propaganda receive most of the satire. The Anglo-Saxon establishment plans PNPC (Post Natal Population Control), i.e., genocide, and already imposes curfews, creates zones (ghettos) for “greenies,” and performs executions in Conciliation Camps. The United States is not much better; there Celts are called “Pickles”; of course, the children are “Pickleninnies.” Zachariah Zass, the “drunken American hog” of an ambassador is replaced by a tame green envoy to England, an example of tokenism. The mindless violence and infighting of the Celts are also satirized. Of the Celtic Independent Socialists and the Independent Socialist Celts, who are bitter enemies, the statement is made that “You’d need a year’s schooling to understand the ideological difference” (149). The madness of this world is founded on lies and hypocrisy, which breed hatred; as another character says, “People keep telling us we

live in an age of communications, but they always leave out that communications only work if they're true" (60).

Into this maelstrom, Dickinson introduces that old device of satire: the foreigner. In this instance, he is an Indian mathematical genius named Pravandragasharatipli P. Humayan, familiarly known as Pravi or Pete. Brought to England because he has solved the mystery of the green gene, he is appalled by the savagery he encounters. When his English hosts are destroyed in a bomb blast—set to conceal the murder of a spying maid—he comes to the realization that he "had been treated as a naïve idiot by practically every Saxon with whom he had had any dealings" (134). He then proceeds to get revenge, using his knowledge of computers. Humayan is hardly the typical hero; he is physically small, almost perpetually in a state of sexual excitement, and avidly desirous of publicity: "This had always been an ambition—to be a scientist of such calibre that when he announced a press conference the press actually came" (100). Naturally, his cultural differences are emphasized. He is a firm believer in witches, spells, and horoscopes: "If you could read my horoscope you would see it says I am not superstitious" (121). His answer to the laughter at such a statement is, "My horoscope is just as true as most of the idiocies you Westerners believe" (148). He has an Eastern acceptance of death in the abstract mass: "what a lot of fuss they were making about their problems: 2,197 deaths last year, enough for one moderate-sized Madras riot" (87), but though not brave, he can turn on a guard attacking a helpless man, crying, "You are making yourself an animal. . . . You are diminishing your soul" (146). The reason for the apparent contradiction is that this gentle, funny little genius has "no experience of merely physical brutality, one man deliberately hurting another as much as possible" (146).

Humayan and the political satire are surrounded by such improbabilities as electric bagpipes; a Maoist-Monarchist; two repulsive "Booger" dogs named Want and Ought; Oghan, an outlawed druidic alphabet; a rock group performing Yeats's "Easter 1916"; and Humayan's Indian friend, Mr. Palati, who has wardrobes of women's clothes for his erotic revels. Humayan must also contend with Glenda Glistler, a teenaged witch, who makes him wear a dog collar on his wrist with "Must" written on it. She describes herself as "a latter-day Satanist, though I still have to attend school prayers. I sing the hymns backwards" (27). He believes that she has made him impotent, except in the shower, and so he visits a large prostitute for what becomes a hilarious sex-in-the-shower scene. (In fact, throughout this novel sex, and there is considerable sex, is always presented as comic.) However, at the end after Glenda has lost her family, and despite his fear of her and his considering her ugly, the two of them are planning to go to South

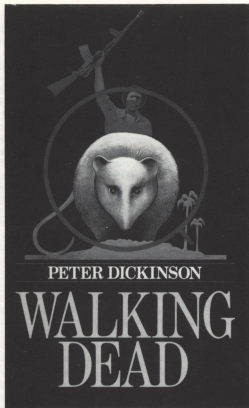
America as mind readers. What is astounding is that Dickinson pulls all of the threads together so that Humayan solves the murder and disrupts the political tyranny.

At their first meeting, Foxe is asked by the prime minister, "What if we are only rats, and somewhere above us there is a scientist, timing us and taking notes?" Foxe replies, "If there is a God like that he's running a very messy experiment" (23). This passage of dialogue provides a key to each man. Both are described as "empty," but Dr. Trotter's emptiness is that of an inhuman tyrant, while that of Foxe is a more extreme form of Morris's "tepidness." He resents being involved in other people's sufferings: "Foxe hadn't had many shocks in his life, because he'd taken trouble not to let them happen" (76). Rather, he considers his ability lies "in thinking like a laboratory animal" (64). Gradually he comes to realize that he is an emotional zombie, hence the punning title:

Foxe... considered the possible combinations of spirit, flesh and clothing. There are seven in all, one with the set complete, the living man, three with one element missing and three with two. They had names, moreover, even the two-combinations: spirit and clothes were the ghost; spirit and flesh were the savage; clothes and flesh the corpse—no, you'd got the corpse already, as a one-combination. Clothes and flesh were the walking dead (132).

After engineering an escape of natives from The Pit, the Trotters's prison, an experience which shatters once and for all his emotional detachment, he undergoes self-horror, and only the love of a native girl brings him to an acceptance of his humanity. In mythic terms, the novel is an account of Foxe's descent into hell and rebirth; that such an interpretation is not farfetched is made abundantly clear by the nature of the prison and the escape from it.

Though less playful than any of the other novels, *Walking Dead* still has its share of the fanciful. There are Foxe's laboratory rats, with such names as Lionel and Ladyblossom. Their presentation includes the following description: "The nude tail dangled, looking vulnerable and ridiculous: like an attempted obscenity which has somehow got misdirected and become an absurdity instead" (19). The most important of the rats is Quentin, who serves a function very similar to that of Dinah in *The Poison Oracle*. Quentin is a "nutter," an aberrant who does as he pleases. As Foxe's companion in adventure, he becomes to the natives a figure of terror and can induce automatic trances when pointed at them. He aids in the escape, ironically does much to humanize Foxe, and is eventually killed saving Foxe's life. Quentin's ability to lighten the tone can be seen in his action when Foxe has to sign the agreement to serve the Trotters: "Foxe wrote his name in an angry scrawl. Captain Angiah added his, slow and clear but



surprisingly florid. As if adding a seal Quentin excreted neatly onto the paper. Quite right. That was about what it was worth" (124). Other fanciful elements include the various island superstitions, the Igloo Bar of a Caribbean hotel, an ancient Rube Goldberg steam traction-engine, Foxe's fishline hooking a frogman with an underwater microphone attempting to eavesdrop, and the Magic Marxists, the island revolutionaries, whose names read "like a cast-list for *Watership Down*" (151): Cedar, Lobelia, Cocoa Bean, Hibiscus, Lettuce, Mace, Cactus, Vine, Plantain, etc.

The second scientist is Wesley Naboth Morris of *The Poison Oracle*, who is both a psycholinguist and zoo-keeper for the Sultan of Q'Kut. Morris is the owner of Dinah, a chimpanzee whom he is teaching to communicate via symbols. Dinah sees the murder and becomes the chief witness against the murderer. Before the murder the reader learns the history of Q'Kut and the relationship of its Arabs to its marshpeople; is presented with the complexities of the marshpeople's language, which naturally fascinates Morris; and is given a tour of the Sultan's palace,

which is an inverted ziggurat with the zoo at the top—a zoo which includes the polar bear closest to the equator and a monkey cage with metal trees which extrude oranges and bananas. Characters range from Prince Hadiq, who is learning English from Batman comic books, to Akuli bin Zair, Q'Kut's prime minister, who spends much of his time making home porno movies. Also, into this mixture of the modern and the primitive comes a sexy feminist plane hijacker named Anne—much like Tony d'Agniello of *The Lizard in the Cup*—who becomes a member of the Sultan's harem and calls him Bruce: "I always call my blokes Bruce. It keeps them in their place. In fact I know an Anatolian village where they now think Bruce is the English for 'darling'" (49).

With his "tepid nature," Morris is an unlikely figure in such a bizarre setting. But after the murder, he must enter the poisonous marshes to prevent war between the Arabs and the marshmen, and there he undergoes a trial for witchcraft. As introspective as Pibble, but less appealing, Morris does not like the formlessness of modern civilization, refuses to accept his place in it, isolates himself from close friendships, and decides "to be a quietist and wash about where the tides drifted you" (57). At the same time, his profession has made him an excellent detective: "Reason is king, he thought. To connect cause with effect is to drive out fear" (126). His analysis of the events enables him to realize that all of the strange circumstances are simply the result of greed and to discover, with Dinah's aid, the murderer. (Again, Dickinson is scrupulous in first preparing for everything and then accounting for it. A notable example is the parallelism between the nature of Morris's witch trial and Dinah's revelation of the murderer.)

Dr. David Foxe is the third scientist. In *Walking Dead*, he is sent by The Company to Hog's Cay in the Southward Islands in the Caribbean to run a series of experiments on rats. Hog's Cay is ruled by the Trotter family, one member of which appears in *The Lizard in the Cup*. (They and their island seem to be based vaguely upon the Duvaliers and Haiti.) Dr. Timothy Trotter is the half-wit president, his brother Dr. Onesiphorus Trotter is the real ruler as prime minister, and their mother is feared for her voodoo powers. Her motto is "The Lord give, and then He rob you blind with His free hand" (137). Most of the novel is concerned with Foxe's being dragged into the prime minister into shifting his experiments to native prisoners—to find a means of making them permanently "good." As it turns out, everyone involved is double-crossing everyone else. There is an unconnected and unintentional murder—another maid—but the emphasis is upon how Foxe will get out of his predicament with the Trotters.

The final two novels have female protagonists and take place in London. The single murder of *The Lively Dead* has already occurred before the opening

THE GREEN GENE

Peter Dickinson



of the novel. Mrs. Newbery, housekeeper of the Livonian government in exile and mother of Procne Newbery, one of London's more famous call girls, is the victim. The Livonians have their embassy on the top floor of Lady Lydia Timms's townhouse. Lydia's husband has had a mental breakdown and her son is dyslexic, but she is a cheerful, fiercely independent young woman. A socialist, she is also anti-communist, embarrassed by her title, and vaguely worried about possibly being a lesbian. Her political views are not clearly established; as her husband says, "You spend half your days fighting social systems and the other half constructing new ones" (18). A partial reason is that "Lydia's main mode of thought was action" (126). She can tackle dry rot (used symbolically in the novel) in renovating her house, design her dream car, and plan another baby with equal enthusiasm. A warm, loving woman, her basic philosophy is "The only possible way to behave is to take people as they are now—they're part of your life and you're part of theirs, and you've got to accept that. It doesn't matter what they were or what they've done" (91).

This attitude is severely tested by those with whom

she must deal. These include her various tenants; her seductive half-sister Lalage; her irascible father; Jack Ambrose, an enormous Indian mobster; a Russian secret agent; and Superintendent Austen, C.I.D. Even though she and her son Dickie are attacked viciously by Ambrose and later she is nearly killed by the Russian agent, Austen is her major enemy. He suspects her of murder, and she despises him. To Lydia he is "just the sort of official she most detested, giving nothing, secretive for secrecy's sake, a servant of the system, indifferent to the individual people whom the system chumbled about" (115). Her dislike of Austen is far greater than that towards her would-be killer; in her confrontation with the latter, she can say, "This is an absurd situation. It is like a sort of French farce for moral philosophers" (182), and after his arrest she wishes to visit him in prison—of course, Austen refuses permission.

Aside from the playfulness in the presentation of Lady Lydia, which dominates the novel, other elements which also contribute are the national hero of Livonia pickled in "Varosh," that country's vodka; Mrs. Pumice, a tenant, and her nasty infant Trevor; Dickie's military mania; Procne Newbery's insouciance; Mrs. Newbery's body turning up in the Timms's rosebed; and much of the dialogue. All in all, *The Lively Dead* is Dickinson's most overtly comic mystery.

If *The Lively Dead* is the funniest, *King & Joker* offers the most unusual setting and family for murder: Buckingham Palace and a British royal family—not the present royal family, but an alternate one, descended from the Duke of Clarence, Victoria's grandson, who did not die in his twenties. Dickinson provides a supposedly unpublished fragment of "King Victor I," by Lytton Strachey, and a genealogical chart to show the descent. The present king is Victor II, great-great grandson of Victoria and a frustrated physician. His queen is Princess Isabella of Spain, who affects "h's" for "w's" and names her dogs after prime ministers. Their son Prince Albert is a shaggy, animal-loving vegetarian, who names his toad after Idi Amin and declares, "I'm hairier than your hairiest Trotskyite, and a good deal further to the left, if the truth were known" (13). The protagonist is Princess Louise, who is actually illegitimate, being the King's daughter by his mistress Anona (Nonny) Fellowes, who is also the Queen's secretary. The Queen concurs in the conspiracy of silence, her terror of transmitting the Spanish royal family's hemophilia being the principal reason, but she is also very fond of Nonny. At thirteen, Louise wishes to give up "Princessing": "I'm going to start a Princesses' Lib movement—I'll write to all the cousins and order them to join" (24). This desire becomes even stronger when she discovers her illegitimacy. The royal menage is completed by the reactionary Russian mother of the King. Then there are such strangely

named retainers as Sir Savile Tendence, Captain Tabard, Commander Tank, and Pilfer the butler, the last the victim of an exploding gong. The King's "twin" cousin Mr. McGivan is the first victim—murdered sitting on the throne. Finally, as solver of the murders is Miss Ivy (Durdy) Durton, royal nanny for three generations, now bedridden in her nineties. Of her, the Dowager Princess of Wales says, "Without that woman this country would have been a republic by now" (76). Durdy is a formidable old lady who spends most of her time reminiscing about her royal "children" and her one early lesbian affair, which resulted from her attempt to protect a young maid from the attentions of Edward VII. Though her mind wanders, she is determined not to die until after she has saved the royals again, and she, with the help of Louise, succeeds.

The two murders are entwined with a practical joker who disrupts palace routine, Louise's gradual discovery of her true birth, her being confronted by an exhibitionist in Kensington Park, Mrs. Henry Kissingher spilling borsht on Sir Savile, the Otorhinolaryngologist Royal, and the royal family's having to cut down on expenses and still, to use their term, "put on a show," as when they face an airport crowd "half what the Osmonds had last time they flew in" (205). Of course, when the first murder takes place, the palace press office is thrown into a dither: "Cats went unbrushed, children unbathed, neighbours uncockolded" (135). It is mainly the desire to protect the family by all concerned that complicates the investigation of Detective Superintendent d'Arcy. Dickinson is completely fair in laying out the clues, but he uses the practical jokes, the royal adults' concern for Louise, her own identity crisis, and the physical "identity" of the King and McGivan to baffle the reader, for in spite of its varied elements, *King & Joker* is structurally that Golden Age favorite: the closed circle murder-in-the-family-mansion mystery.

These five novels, from *The Green Gene* to *Walking Dead*, while multivariuous in specific emphasis and detail, share at least three qualities in common. First and foremost is that no matter how diverse the materials, Dickinson is scrupulous in supplying clues and relating all apparently unrelated events. Second, all five combine the comic to some degree with mystification, without ever degenerating into the silly. Third, as with Pibble, Dickinson elaborately delineates the psychology of his protagonists, all of whom are unlikely detectives. Other similarities among the novels are the clash of differing cultures (*The Green Gene*, *The Poison Oracle*, *Walking Dead*), the significant use of animals (*The Poison Oracle*, *King & Joker*, *Walking Dead*) and children or teenagers (all but *Walking Dead*) and servants as principal victims—three maids, two bodyguards, and a butler—the Sultan of Q'Kut being the major exception. Finally, as might be expected,




the actual murders are much less important than their effects on the protagonists.

In his ten novels, Dickinson has extended the range of British mystery fiction as to materials which can be employed within the basic formulas of the genre. And in so doing, he has written stylish, sophisticated works, which blend the comic in its many forms with murder and thrills. Both in the Superintendent Pibble works and those without him, Dickinson has evidenced an original, imaginative, and wide-ranging talent as mystery writer. In the late 1970s his novels are a major indication that the British mystery novel is not only still alive, but in a most admirable state of active vigor. Since the novels give the impression that Dickinson is having fun writing them, it is my wish that he will continue to enjoy himself so that readers will be provided many more of his playful mysteries.

The second scientist is Wesley Naboth Morris in *The Poison Oracle*, who is both a psycholinguist and zoo-keeper for the Sultan of Q'Kut. Morris is the



Notes

1. The editions of Dickinson's novels used for this study are listed below. All quotations will be cited in the text, using, where needed, the abbreviation given after an entry.
 - The Glass-Sided Ants' Nest*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968 (English title: *Skin Deep*). (AN)
 - A Pride of Heroes*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1969 (U.S. title: *The Old English Peep Show*). (PH)
 - The Sinful Stones*. New York: Harper & Row, 1970 (English title: *The Seals*). (SS)
 - Sleep and His Brother*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. (SB)
 - The Lizard in the Cup*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. (LC)
 - The Green Gene*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1973.
 - The Poison Oracle*. New York: Avon, 1977 (orig. 1974).
 - The Lively Dead*. New York: Avon, 1977 (orig. 1975).
 - King & Joker*. New York: Avon, 1977 (orig. 1976).
 - Walking Dead*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.
2. Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor have pointed out the danger of Dickinson's method in their criticism of *A Pride of Heroes*: "The author's unquestionable power of imagination leads him into the fatal trap of cluttering. So much is told... that motives and murders sink into relative insignificance... and one gets thoroughly annoyed with the whole pudder and cabodde long before the protracted denouement" (*A Catalogue of Crime*, New York, 1971, p. 162). While not agreeing with their assessment of this novel, I can understand its basis. However, the "clutter," which is even more prevalent in such later novels as *The Poison Oracle* and *King & Joker*, is a—perhaps the—major element in making the works distinctly Dickinsonian.
3. "Superintendent Pibble." *The Great Detectives*, ed. Otto Penzler, Boston, 1978, p. 181. Subsequent quotations will be cited in the text, using the abbreviation SP.
4. Quoted in *The Great Detectives*, p. 176. Dickinson makes a similar statement in his essay "The Lure of the Reichenbach," *Murder Ink*, ed. Dilys Winn, New York, 1977, p. 65: "I myself stopped writing about James Pibble after five books, but I wasn't bored with him. I liked—and like—the old boy, and I owe him a lot. . . . Now he feels to me something like a colleague I spent a lot of time with almost every day but because of a change of jobs have scarcely seen for several years; to meet again might be delightful, might be embarrassing, but it seems not to happen."



NIGEL MORLAND—

Fifty Years of Crime Writing



By Pearl G. Aldrich

A man whose nurse had her medicine mixed by Dr. Crippen; who found himself lined up at a bar one afternoon with the great detective, Fabian of Scotland Yard; John George Haigh, who became the "acid bath murderer"; Neville Heath, who became a sadistic murderer, ripping his victims to death, and his first victim, Margery Gardiner, whom Heath had only just met; who lived next door to Heath's second victim; whose American aunt introduced him to Madeleine Smith and Lizzie Borden's sister; and who grew up practically at Edgar Wallace's knee—this man had his fate sealed. He could never be anything but a crime writer.

That man is Nigel Morland, an English crime writer, whose works and vast knowledge about factual and fictional crime are known throughout the English-speaking and reading world, although less in the United States than he deserves.

Last year, Morland celebrated fifty years of writing—over 300 novels, almost as many factual books, and uncountable short stories and articles about real cases. In addition, he has written several textbooks, such as *Fingerprints* and *An Outline of Scientific Criminology*, and edits *The International Journal of Forensic Dentistry*, *The Criminologist*, and *Forensic*

Photography. Also, as a labor of love, he publishes a quarterly called *Current Crime* in which he reviews new novels and runs an annual survey for the best English crime novel of the year. As part of the recognition for his long career, a collection of short stories entitled *Mrs. Pym and Other Stories* was published by Aidan Ellis, with an affectionate introduction by Eric Ambler.

Among the thousands of characters Morland has created, including detectives, newspaper reporters, criminals, and members of the general population, the one whom the reading public adopted, loved, and cheered on to successful conclusions of dozens of cases for Scotland Yard was Palmyra Evangeline Pym: outrageous and incredible, memorable and heartwarming, the rough, tough, and tender Mrs. Pym, the only woman Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard. She got there by way of an apprenticeship as a detective-sergeant in what Morland calls "the surprised ranks" of the Shanghai Municipal Police Force in the 1920s.

How did Mrs. Pym, an English matron, who looked as though she spent her days dominating the Women's Institute, harrying the villagers, and worrying about the Vicar's health, start her career in

the police force of an exotic, swinging Shanghai? To understand this, you have to know something of Morland's background, and the story of his life is almost more adventurous than the plots of his novels.

Morland started his writing career at age 8, met Edgar Wallace at 10, and set off for China alone at 14 to become a newspaper reporter, covering crime and writing weekly short stories for newspapers that carried fiction.

Morland recalled, "I very much wanted to be in writing because the first thing I ever wrote was published. That was in 1913 when I wrote a little poem about a film star, and I sent it to a magazine called *Picture Girl*. To my astonishment, they sent me a postal order for 5 shillings. That was my very first published story and, of course, that set me off. From then on, I've never ceased from writing. When I got to China, of course, the very first thing I did was



Editor of *Current Crime*, Nigel Morland

seek out a job at a newspaper."

When Morland's mother met Edgar and Ivy Wallace, "there was an instant rapprochement among the three of them. They became the most devoted friends, and from that moment on, Mother became the closest friend of the family until Edgar died. She was a kind of general factotum, helpmeet, housemother, and everything, remaining so even after Ivy and Edgar divorced and Edgar remarried. She was great friends with Ivy after the divorce, too, because she was a kind of middle ground to which they all turned. When the second Mrs. Wallace died, she made Mother executor of the estate. That's how close they were."

Wallace had a great influence on Morland, "doing a lot of training of me in writing and everything when I was younger," Morland said. "Then in 1919, Mother had to go to China on a visit and, when she was out there, I suddenly decided I would like to go there, too. So I wrote, Mother agreed, but I missed the boat and went on the next one. In the meantime, she started for England, and we met in the Red Sea. We had established contact by wireless, and the captains brought the ships as close as they dared. I saw her from the deck of the ship as we passed, and we managed to wave to each other in the Red Sea as we went through."

Once in Shanghai, Morland got a job as a cub reporter on an American newspaper and, before long, he was writing short stories as well as covering the crime beat. "There were no authors out there at all," he said. "I was writing short stories and articles for everybody in sight by the dozen. The first book I had published was in 1925 or '26. I'm not sure which it was. It was called *The Sibilant Whisper*, all various types of crime stories."

Of his many adventures in the East, Morland recalls two in particular—when he fell down on the greatest news story that ever happened and when he saved Mao Tse Tung's life.

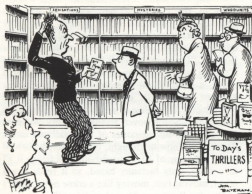
Morland was among the people who helped with rescue work following the 1923 earthquake in Japan. "I was between 17 and 18 in 1923," he said, "and to a kid who had never seen beyond the ordinary crimes of Shanghai, it was horror to the first degree. I had been on holiday to Yokohama and was aboard ship on the way back to Shanghai. The whole sky was coppery, and the sea was almost as if it was made of liquid fat, with great waves, but none of them breaking. The captain had news of an earthquake in Japan, so we went back, and the whole of the Yokohama waterfront was crowded with people trying to get out, standing up to their waists in water. It was like nothing I've ever seen, with great fires all over the horizon. Well, for the next five days, I worked like a dog, pulling people out of ruins, helping mothers through childbirth, rescuing babies, feeding people, dodging fires and falling buildings. It

was really the worst thing, but the main point is that I was working all that time, doing all this, and when it was over, and I was back on the ship, heading towards Shanghai again, it suddenly struck me, like a blow with a hammer, that I had forgotten to file the story. One of the greatest stories that ever happened, probably the worst earthquake in this world, and I had forgotten to involve my paper by wireless. My editor finally forgave me because of all the eye witness stories I did, but he said if I hadn't done all that, he was going to throw me out on my neck for falling down on a good story."

Morland didn't know who the "pleasant, round-faced, chubby, little Chinese" man was when he prevented his being shot, but has since wondered what would have happened had he not restrained an angry Shanghai policeman.

In the course of a murder investigation, Morland and a sergeant from the Shanghai Municipal Police Force visited the scene of the crime in a hotel in Yangtzeppoo, the city's factory district. "The officer was a big, tough, red-headed, very rough looking man, what I call a knock-about-third-degree-type of policeman. As we went into this hotel, there were a few people in the lobby, including a little, round-faced, chubby Chinese with some friends. He bowed and smiled. The policeman went ahead, and as he did so, the little Chinese stepped in his way. The sergeant pushed him violently aside. Unlike most Chinese, the little fellow came back and started arguing, and the sergeant, whose face was growing red, and I could see was beginning to burn up with temper, opened the holster of his revolver and started pulling it out. I was scared stiff because I thought he was going to shoot the little Chinese, and I sort of pulled his arm and said, 'Look, let's get upstairs. I don't want to get involved in anything.' He cursed and swore at the Chinese, but we went upstairs. I later learned who he was. His name was Mao Tse Tung. I saw him several times afterwards, and he always bowed and smiled at me. I've frequently wondered what would have been the story of China if that sergeant had shot him."

Morland left Shanghai because he learned that he was number three on the Japanese death list. "At that time," he said, "I was writing for several newspapers, and being a young, brash idealist, I wrote vigorously about the dangers of the yellow peril, the Japanese, and I was warned to get out by people who knew what they were talking about. In 1925, one of the experts on the Japanese situation, who was in and out of Yokohama all the time, came to me and said, 'Nigel, go home.' I wanted to know why, and he said, 'Well, I happen to know what's going on, and on their death list, the first three names, yours is the third.' So I got out quick because a few years later the Japanese invaded China and took over Shanghai. I could have been shot, if not worse, for my virulent anti-Japanese writing."



THE CRIME FAN WHOD NEVER HEARD OF MRS PYM !

Back in England, Morland continued writing for several newspapers and a variety of magazines, but turned his attention more seriously to fiction than he had in the East. He remembers that two writers, "two great masters showing me how to write well," helped him develop into a writer of 300 best selling crime novels, including those featuring Mrs. Pym. The writers were Edgar Wallace and Powys Mathers, who, under the name of Torquemada, was an influential reviewer of crime novels for the London newspaper *The Observer*.

"When I got back from China, I dumped all this stuff, all this fiction, on Edgar Wallace's lap, as it were, and he looked through some of the stories and said, 'Nigel, this is dreadful. You're writing yourself out before you've even started.' He said, 'I'm going to impose a penance on you. You just don't write any more for a year or two and, in that time, you read and think, read and think, but you write not a single word. Give yourself a chance to mature, to catch your breath, and to learn something about style. You are a born crime writer, but what you've got to do in the time you've got this kind of sabbatical is think about the detective. Now, let's think about the detective for you. What shall we have? I've just been reading a book about a Cromwellian soldier named Pym, John Pym. I like that name. Think about that. We'll call him Pym. No, we won't! We won't! We've got a better idea.' Incidentally, Edgar was always fond of using that regal 'we.' He said what we'll do is change the sex to a woman. 'Let's think of a woman detective, a tough, hard-boiled woman, not a private detective, but a real detective of Scotland Yard. Take that away and brood over it, and that figure will mature in your mind. When you come to write the book, you'll find it will come out like nobody's business.'

"And a few years later, that's just what I did. I wrote the book and sent it to Desmond Flower of

Cassell, the publishers. Flower was on the phone in twenty-four hours, saying he'd buy it. It was a very bad effort. Howard Spring, one of our most famous writers in the London *Evening Standard*, tore it to little shreds. He said it was one of the worst crime books he'd read in his life, but that the character of Mrs. Pym comes through like a shining light. She's wonderful, but the book itself is lousy. So I sat down and wrote another book, which was also not very good, and then I went to have a chat with a very, very famous English critic who wrote in *The Observer* under the name of Torquemada. He said, 'Your books are very promising, and Mrs. Pym is a gem of a character. Now, let's sit down and talk over how to write your book.' He said not to waste time telling the readers what the characters are thinking. 'Cut that clean out,' he said. 'Get on with the action. The other thing to cut out is the "he said" and "she said." Run your stories so that you have a line of dialogue. Put in the name of the character now and again so that the readers' ears get in tune to the character talking. That way, you will find that your dialogue will come over in the way your character talks.' After the next book, which was called *The Clue of the Bricklayer's Aunt*, Mathers wrote, 'I've never read a book that more exemplifies Edgar Wallace at his very best than this book.' And I thought, 'I've done it! I've pulled it off! That's two great masters showing me how to write well.'

Like many prolific writers, Morland wrote novels under a variety of pseudonyms, which sometimes landed him in paradoxical situations. One concerns a review of two of his books. Morland said, "Edward Shanks, of the old *John O'London*, reviewed two books, one by Norman Forrest, which was me, and one by John Donovan, which was me. He reviewed them both on the same page, and he said, 'I have read various books this week, and the one that sticks out in my mind is a really good book, one by John Donovan.' Then he went on and a little later, he said, 'I read another crime book this week by an author called Norman Forrest, who is new to me, and really, it's a very poor book, but when Mr. Forrest has learned to write as well as Mr. Donovan, he will be on the way up.' And poor Nigel Morland, who was both, didn't know what to do about it."

Morland also wrote under the name of Mary Dane. He tells how he made that switch. "The publisher had a gap for a woman writer, and he said he wanted a mystery, but he couldn't find one. And so I said, 'Well, I know a book. I'll get it for you,' and went away and wrote this mystery, *Death Finds the Killer*. I brought it back to him, he read it and said, 'I like this. Can you have Miss Dane come along and sign the contract?' I said, 'Sure, she's right here.' He said, 'That's you?' and I signed the contract. Unfortunately, the firm wound up shortly after that, so I never wrote another Mary Dane book."

Many books and many years later, the Morlands—wife Jill, the only child still at home, sixteen-year-old Ruth, and a magnificent Burmese cat—live in Bognor Regis, half a block from the sea on England's south coast.

Some women dread their husbands' retirement because he'll be home for lunch every day, but with Jill Morland, the opposite is true. She wouldn't feel right if her husband weren't home for lunch every day. Morland has always worked at home, and the sounds of his typewriter, his voice on the phone, his feet pounding up and down the stairs are the normal accompaniment to life. "I can write any time, anywhere, anyhow," Morland said. "Sometimes my children are up in my study, playing, or arguing, or putting on the tape recorder, or something like that, and I'm just typing. You see, I write straight onto the machine. I don't write the first draft in longhand or dictate. I was so used to working in a newspaper office that I could work while the kids were making a hell of a lot of noise. The only thing I insist on—I must work by artificial light. I cannot work in daylight. I always worked in artificial light in a newspaper office when I was a kid, and it has never left me. My study is so arranged that my desk and everything to do with it is kind of barricaded in the corner where it is pitch dark. You can't see where you are unless you put the light on."



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Among Morland's recent publications is a short story in the current Crime Writers Association anthology, a collection of 26 articles about true crimes that appeared last October, and he is three-quarters through an anecdotal biography of Edgar Wallace. "I'm trying to get it finished next year, and it's not a biography so much as a, I think you might call it, a biographical memoir. Instead of writing a kind of book with every date and every fact underlined, rather like a catalogue, I'm trying to write a non-fiction novel, telling the story of Edgar Wallace from his memories of his childhood in the River Basin, how he thought, how he acted when he was a little boy of 10 or thereabout. I'm telling it all as a story, only factually based, so it reads like a novel, moving fast, moving like a crime novel. That's really what I'm doing. The title is *Edgar!*"

An appreciative portrait such as this should end with a comment about the "Grand Old Man of Crime Writing," but that would be misleading. It suggests a portly gentleman with beard and paunch, pontificating his days away, and that's not Nigel Morland. True, he currently wears a beard, but is as spare and wiry as the 14-year-old kid who went off to China alone, and he doesn't pontificate. He is known throughout the crime writing world as its kindest, most unassuming, and most generous person. All over London, people say, "Ring Morland. He'd know." Or "Put her on to Nigel. He'll get her in, if any one can." A total stranger dialing his telephone number will be welcomed, advised, and helped beyond his or her wildest hopes. Many researchers owe their welcome into archives or family homes, where there are valuable documents to be read, to Morland's help. That touch of authenticity in the second act of a West End play or a book whose whole foundation of accuracy are based on Morland's encyclopedic knowledge about crime and his generosity in sharing it. All this is in addition to his own work because he still writes at the same pace as ever. When you consider that, at 73, he can wear out people half his age, and that Jill Morland is an accomplished hiker whose major complaint is that she doesn't meet many people her age on the trails, you get an idea of their personal ambience.

Morland has several items going in addition to *Edgar!* "I have the *Who's Who in Crime Fiction* to complete this year, a compilation of *Victorian Crime Stories*, a crime novel demanded under a contract, and *A Little Casebook of Crime and Detection*, which I have just promised. These, plus *Current Crime*, *The Criminologist*, and *The International Journal of Forensic Dentistry* seem to comprise enough to make me wonder where I'm going to get in my usual hours of sleep."

Well, the first fifty years are only the beginning.

* Written in early 1978.

AJH REVIEWS

Short notes on the current crop. . .

In *Caper* (Putnam, \$10.95) by Lesley Adress, "one of our best-selling novelists, writing under a pseudonym," we meet Jannie Shean, best-selling mystery novelist under a stable of pseudonyms. But Shean, unlike Adress, has run dry: her (sleazy) paperback publisher rejects her latest effort for lack of realism. On sober reflection, Jannie agrees. Her solution for increased authenticity: plan a real heist down to the last detail, assemble a gang of hard types, and take it right to the brink of the job. Target: a Manhattan jewelry shop. Jannie has some good ideas, but she's quite a transparent innocent, and so the expected and the unexpected go wrong. . . This is a neatly plotted tale, with a humorous and terrible inevitability about it. Alas, Adress thinks she must provide gobs of mattress gymnastics, but at least we are spared the details.

The People Exchange (Carlyle, \$1.95) by Robert F. Baylus is a pleasant if somewhat unfocused crime novel set in the New York of year 2086. Cade, recently returned



Allen J. Hubin, Editor-in-Chief.

Photo: Robert Smull

from the ineffective "rehab" on Mars, puts into motion his plan to swindle the financial world out of enough money for a long and luxurious retirement out of the reach of extradition. A murder or two later, Cade is ready; his vehicle is a process now in use for forming joint ventures. Various difficulties arise having to do with plastic surgery and overly perceptive financial investigators, one of whom is the heroine of the caper, Robyn O'Rourke. So more murders are in order. . . Baylus has some fun and wit—also a bit of sharp perceptiveness—with his future history; a little more discipline in the telling would have been helpful.

The mole, the agent who blends into the background for years awaiting activation, has been the subject of several good novels in recent years. *The Sleeper* by Eric Clark (Atheneum, \$11.95) is another, although the fact that the protagonist is a sleeper agent for the Russians is less central to the plot than in most other tales of this kind. Here British Intelligence becomes persuaded by evidence from American counterparts that the chief advisor to England's new Prime Minister is feeding secrets to Moscow. So, unbeknownst to the P.M., a plot is hatched first to

determine if said advisor is guilty, and later, when things get sticky, to make sure he is. To keep their skirts a bit cleaner, Intelligence uses a man known to them as a Russian sleeper to carry out surveillance. He's James Fenn, who thinks he's working for his eastern masters. Misjudgment piles on misjudgment till disaster, personal and national, looms. . .

(Lord) Bertie Denham's debut in our field, *The Man Who Lost His Shadow* (Scribners, \$8.95), is smoothly written and satisfying, but Americans will probably find the plot's pivot (a violation of canine quarantine laws) incompletely persuasive. And I suspect that to most readers the identity of at least one of the villains will be overly apparent. The House of Lords moves toward considering a proposed bill to legalize marijuana. Strong views are held on both sides; the most crucial in opposition are those of Sir John Elton. Friends of Elton are concerned about his recent behavior, and young Viscount Derek Thyrdre is asked to see if he can gain Elton's confidence and find out what's the



matter. At first the only explanation seems to be that Elton's beloved golden retriever has disappeared. But Derek digs deeper, and matters quickly get more complex and deadly... Very enjoyable and convincing view of the Lords at work in chambers here.

Scottish university administrator and crime writer Dominic Devine returns after eight years with his twelfth novel, *Sunk Without Trace* (St. Martin's, \$8.95). The scene is Silbridge, a town in Scotland to which Ruth Kellaway returns for vengeance. She has had her suspicions of illegitimacy confirmed at her mother's death and now yearns to identify the father who never acknowledged her. Singlemindedly she pursues her course, creating in her wake fear among those she touches—fear about what public knowledge of illicit sex would do to a cresting political career, fear concerning Ruth's references to

election fraud. No wonder Ruth disappears... Solidly readable.

Anyone who has read Peter Dickinson likely expects dazzling displays of imagination, and this expectation is satisfied—at least in part—by his latest, *One Foot in the Grave* (Pantheon, \$8.95). James Pibble served as Scotland Yard superintendent, and then retired sleuth, in Dickinson's first five novels. Now he returns, but under most unusual conditions. Though only about sixty years old, Jimmy Pibble is here a patient in a geriatric hospital, an enfeebled, frequently befuddled patient at that. But one who summons his reserves of strength to attempt suicide to avoid loss of his last vestige of pride... and in so doing stumbles across a fresh corpse. The body relates to the case of an aging criminal, hidden at the hospital while he tells all to the police. And also, it seems, someone is hastening the demise of certain of



Pibble's fellow patients. These little matters revive—just a bit—Jimmy's lagging mind and spirit, and he solves his last (?) cases. Imaginative, this novel, yes, and very clever in integration of past and present, but the mysteries prove not so interesting when revealed, and the telling is not so richly comic as Dickinson's earlier work.

The Reinhard Action (Morrow, \$8.95) by Hershey Eisenberg is not particularly compelling, wholesome or directly in our field. This is a holocaust tale, coming to the present to see the evil effects on survivors, both Jew and German. David Davidowitz, a prodigy at piano, lost both his parents to the Nazis and was forced to play a terrible role at Auschwitz. Later, in contemporary Los Angeles, David is a successful manufacturer when the past resurrects itself in the form of a necklace stripped from his butchered mother decades before. David is determined to secure the necklace from the jeweler—a devout Jew—who is offering it for sale, and to track its path to that jeweler. David's unwelcome probing looses the devils again...

For a very finely wrought historical setting, try *Aristotle Detective* by Margaret Doody (Harper & Row, \$10.95). Boutades, a good man, is uncommonly killed—by arrow—in

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Athens three centuries before Christ. Philemon, already exiled for manslaughter, is accused. To Stephanos, son of Nikiarkhos, once student of Aristotle and a cousin of Philemon, falls the obligation to defend the absent man. Slowly the legal process of the time churns on; the prospect becomes bleaker as evidence is presented that Philemon is also a traitor. Stephanos is young, untutored in law and fine speech, judged by Athenians to be guilty by association, and pressed by a usurious creditor of his recently dead father. He turns to his old tutor, who analyzes and deduces and advises, all the way to a telling courtroom denouement.

I doubt I have to say much about Stanley Ellin's short stories for TAD readers. Let me observe only that his tales are fiendishly clever and inventive, and that he has maintained awesomely high quality since his first story appeared in EQMM shortly after the war. This makes Stanley Ellin's *The Specialty of the House and Other Stories*: "The Complete Mystery Tales, 1948-1978" a magnificent reading experience and doubtless The Mysterious Press's premiere volume to date (35 stories, 557 pages, \$15).

Dick Francis's first re-use of a principal character (he has indicated

Dick Francis WHIP HAND

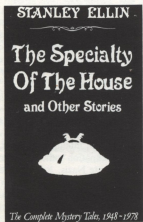


elsewhere that this is a one-shot departure from past practice and not a change in strategy) occurs in *Whip Hand* (Harper & Row, \$9.95), which I think a superb tale of suspense, of conspiracy, greed, fear and courage. Sid Halley lost a hand, a wife, and a career as a steeplechase jockey in *Odds Against* (1965). Now, with an artificial hand and a small neurosis to match, he's a private investigator. On his plate, in quick succession, come several cases: his ex-wife, who loathes Sid, has been sucked into a charity fraud and her father—whom Sid respects greatly—asks him to get her out; Lord Friarly, a friend for whom Sid had ridden, feels a horse-owning syndicate he's part of is being used for unwholesome purposes, and asks Sid to have a look; the head of security for the Jockey Club wants Sid to investigate—with great care!—the possible dishonesty of his chief deputy; and the wife of a well-known trainer comes to Sid, in terror and in disguise, to beg his help in keeping an already heavily guarded horse safe. Francis brews his plot wondrously, telling a fine story while showing us much about Sid Halley and what happens to a man when all he has left, and all he is, is desperately imperiled.

Does the world need another private eye, another British private eye? About half way through Mike Fredman's *You Can Always Blame the Rain* (St. Martin's, \$8.95), I would have voted "no," but Willie

Halliday and his lusty and so far unrequited secretary and the Austin-Reeves affair grew on me, and I think I can bear the second and third Halliday capers we are promised. Willie's a bit unusual, as is of course de *rigueur* for private peepers: nondrinker, nonsmoker, into Eastern religion. Mrs. Austin-Reeves, slinky and left a pile of money by her husband, hires Willie to see if her daughters have endangered their inheritances by loose living. But her real agenda turns out to be just a deadly tad different, and several other nasties are also part of the plot...

I've commented very favorably about past novels by "Bartholomew Gill" (Mark McGarrity) about Chief Inspector Peter McGarr of the Irish police. But the fourth, *McGarr at the Dublin Horse Show* (Scribners, \$8.95), seems muddled. Gill wanted, I think, to convey some of the Irish character by using horses, and he does; he wanted to further portray the tensions, IRA and social, of Ireland, and he does. But somehow this tale of the murder in Dublin of the mother of a promising young pianist, and the intrigues this leads McGarr into, remains fuzzy and obscure in the telling. Involved are a priest with surprising financial resources; a successful industrialist with a mania for horses and less money than appearances indicate; a crippled horse breeder whose paral-



ysis stems from a racing "accident"; and, not least, a killer with a strong taste for his craft.

Rupert Grayson's *The Murders at Impasse Louvain* (Walker, \$8.95) somehow contrives to make little of fairly promising ingredients—a Paris setting at the turn of the century; a pair of deaths which are clearly anything but as advertised; various political and social intrigues; a persistent and perceptive policeman in Inspector Gautier. Madame Hassler, who entertains all manner of males despite an (aging) husband, claims disguised robbers killed said husband. This story has the odor and tightness of Swiss cheese, but Gautier's masters are curiously disposed to accept her word as gospel. . .

Colonel Charles Russell's retirement from Britain's Security Executive continues to be eventful in William Haggard's *Visa to Limbo* (Walker, \$8.95)—as Joe Beholden of Israeli Intelligence tells him while trying to talk him out of a visit to his country: "You're accident prone." So it proves, in this agreeable tale of multilevel Middle East intrigue, oil, airline hijack, and an aging Israeli admiral who suffers from Hero's Disease. Russell's role is small but catalytic; the outcome seems overly tidy.

I know I'm supposed to wax sublimely enthusiastic about *Innocent Blood*, P. D. James's first effort sans Dalgliesh (Scribners, \$10.95). It does offer thoughtful, in-depth exploration of character—

I know I'm supposed to wax sublimely enthusiastic about *Innocent Blood*, P. D. James's first effort sans Dalgliesh (Scribner, \$10.95). It does offer thoughtful, in-depth exploration of character—that of Philippa Palfrey, daughter of a murderer; of Maurice Palfrey, the coldly analytical sociologist who adopted her; of Hilda, his wife, confident of nothing; of Mary Ducton, the murderess, released from prison; and of Norman Scase, father of the child Mary killed, who has lived only for revenge for the ten

years of her imprisonment. But 311 pages devoted to this, as Philippa turns her back on her adoptive parents to learn to know—and possibly to love—her mother and Scase devotes himself to his life's work, move very slowly indeed. And none of these people really engages the sympathies.

Roderic Jeffries moved to Mallorca in 1972 and, not surprisingly, has set a series of detective novels on this Spanish island. His Inspector Enrique Alvarez is here faced with an over-ripe corpse, an unprovable suspicion about the cause of death, a most unlikely coincidence, and an invisible lover, not to mention an intolerably superior specimen of British policeman. William Heron came to Mallorca to die, and die he did, of impeccably natural causes. His "wife" Betty furnishes the malodorous corpse some weeks later. It seems she was being unfaithful downstairs while Heron was dying upstairs, but who—among a very short list of candidates—can that lover have been, and has he done murder? Competent storytelling, with a neat and fairly clued plot twist.

I would direct your attention to Scott Keech's *Ciphered* (Harper & Row, \$9.95) and make a rash prediction about it: I've read but a small portion of 1980's output, but I suspect that when the votes for best first novel are tallied, this Californian's delightful and imaginative debut will be right about at the top of the list. We here meet Jeff Adams, police inspector in the university town of Thorpe, possessor of advanced academic qualifications, and freshly smitten by Kate, author and daughter of Professor Mark Shaw. It's the Professor who draws Adams into the bizarre murders of the Feiths and tells an improbable (and self-incriminating?) tale in the process. Feith was also a professor; he was a German refugee, wealthy, and head of a university research center doing secret work for Uncle Samuel. He and his wife have been shot with a distinctive antique .44 firing black powder bullets. Then

more bodies, similarly dispatched, turn up, and nothing—least of all the testimonies of interested parties—makes sense. Cipher messages are discovered, along with a stack of unused diaries; a previous theft at the research center seems related, and two minions of the FBI arrive and set up camp. Out of a wondrous melange of the contradictory and impossible the author weaves a most engaging story, and introduces a sleuth and his merry maid who clearly demand a reappearance.

Hugh Pentecost's ninth Julian Quist novel is *The Homicidal Horse* (Dodd Mead, \$7.95), not one of its author's finest efforts. I found the story slow going at the outset and ultimately not very persuasive, but it is invested with the customary vitality and intensity. Quist runs his PR firm in Manhattan. His chief subordinate, Dan Garvey, has for four years been creating a sports complex on Long Island—a project that introduced him to the woman he loves. Now a 60-1 shot has thundered home with a new track record at the complex. Unlikely indeed, raising suspicions everywhere; deadly, too, for that horse, crazed, stomps Garvey's beloved to death. Garvey also goes a bit berserk, and Quist must intervene to find causes and try to prevent a holocaust.

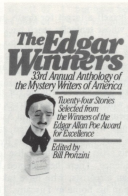
The Spiderweb by Joseph E. Persico (Crown, \$10.00) is another thriller looking back to WWII. Its author knows whereof he writes and builds his fictional edifice on a good bit of fact; would that his prose had a vigor to match the credibility of his plot. The Nazis planned to destroy the economies of the Allies by flooding world markets with superbly counterfeited U.S. and British currency. Now war is over, and various intelligence types, a venal occupation officer, assorted unregenerate Nazis, Russian agents and a vengeance-crazed Jewish photoengraver surge around Germany in pursuit of a trunkful of bogus bills, the master plates, and each other.

Several years ago, I suggested to

someone in MWA that all the Edgar winning short stories would constitute a marvelous anthology. The response was agreement and concern that they all wouldn't be available (or if they were, the book would be too large). The idea (I take no credit) has now been realized in *The Edgar Winners*, the "33rd Annual Anthology of the Mystery Writers of America," edited and introduced by Bill Pronzini (Random House, \$11.95). It is as good a book as it should be, suffering only from the defect anticipated earlier: eight eligible stories are absent. Even so, the twenty-four best-of-year winners occupy 410 pages, and the volume is enriched by a ten-page appendix listing all Edgar and Raven winners in all categories through 1978.

Bill Pronzini's "nameless" private eye returns in *Labyrinth* (St. Martin's, \$8.95). Maybe my fondness for this is partly because it served as an antidote to the Valin book discussed below. In any event, I like *Labyrinth*, with its moody, cold, wet San Francisco, its lonely sleuth, its apparently inexplicable skeins of death, its proud and weak and kind and violent people. A coed at S. F. State is shot dead; she has Nameless's card in her purse. He's never seen or heard of her. Then he's hired by wealthy Laura Nichols to protect her brother, who has been threatened by a man whose wife he killed in a car accident. Another body turns up, but it's the wrong body and, Nameless is convinced, the wrong man confesses to murder. And a link between the dead student and the Nichols case emerges. If Nameless can put it all together, it will probably cost his life. . . .

The third of Ross H. Spencer's mad private eye tales about sublime incompetent Chance Purdue is *The Stranger City Caper* (Avon, \$1.95). Spencer, you'll recall, is the chap who writes novels using periods as the only punctuation mark and allowing no more than one sentence to a paragraph. And here he refines his skill in doing without yet another standard feature of the novel: plot. The result, strangely, is a funny,



wryly observant treat. Vita Chercola, head of Chicago's mob, sends Chance to the titular city to investigate a minor league baseball team he's bought. We are then offered a series of hilarious vignettes dealing with such matters as a perilous bus trip and how it got that way, a baseball team composed only of left-handers, a revivalist crusade, and much more—all having as little to do with each other as possible. The book hasn't much to do with crime or with traditional notions about writing, either. Read it anyway.

I mentioned 1980's MWA anthology earlier, and it occurs to me that the 1979 volume, called *Women's Wiles* and edited by Michele Slung (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$9.95), may have escaped notice in TAD. It's well worth tracking down, for its nineteen stories include one original (by Kathleen Hershey) and eighteen reprints by such masters as Stanley Ellin, Dorothy Salisbury Davis, Lawrence Treat, Margaret Millar, Cornell Woolrich and Edward D. Hoch. The fact that the copyright page almost makes this appear to be an EQMM anthology is surely more a tribute to the quality of that magazine (and a consequence of the limited nature of the short story market) than evidence of restricted horizons on the part of its editor. I had the same problem in my *Best Detective Stories* years.

One of the most entertaining and

stimulating histories of the origins of detective fiction is R. E. Stewart's . . . *And Always a Detective*, horrendously overpriced by its British publisher's American subsidiary (David & Charles, North Pomfret, VT 05053) at \$35! The author proposes, with evident satisfaction, that the great interregnum between Poe and Doyle was no interregnum at all, but filled with examples of the forerunner of the detective story (Poe having been an unintended and unrecognized aberration), the sensational novel. I'm not sure that this is really a discovery, only that R. F. Stewart in his pleasure makes much more of it than anyone else. And he casts Dickens and Collins in a very different role than usual—outside the main line of detective fiction history. Stewart disinters much published 19th-century commentary and many reviews to support his case, taking to task (with evidences) many previous commentators. He considers also what has become of detective fiction in this century, and his thoughts on such fiction as literature are provocative indeed. Highly recommended!

First Strike by Douglas Terman (Scribners, \$10.95) is a first-rate first novel—high suspense, a mobile plot, interesting characters. And it has an unusual history, for it was issued (as "The Three Megaton Gamble," according to the copyright page) a couple of years ago by a small regional publisher. As I recall, that publisher felt it hadn't done well by the book and interested Scribners in bringing it to a larger audience. It appears now in extensively revised form. *Strike* is something of a cautionary tale—caution about unilateral U.S. disarmament—and I know I'm going to look crossways at the next presidential candidate who advocates this. The Russians are waiting and working toward the day when their computers will indicate they have reached a certain acceptable level of risk of failure, then to launch a pre-emptive first strike against the U.S. Progress toward that level is unacceptably slow, and

a scheme to control and elect a suitably disposed (toward unilateral disarmament) U.S. President is developed to ensure reaching the target level. New York Senator Welch is their man, but Welch's pilot, Brian Loss, gets caught in the gears of the plan. Flesh begins to tear, Brian begins to run, and always Petrov seems one step ahead of the game. . . .

"The big difference between detectives in books and detectives in real life is that detectives in books are always rescuing their clients from perilous straits—which is a bunch of hokum and dangerous hokum, at that. That's the way we would have things be, when the bitter truth is that no one can rescue anyone from anything." Thus saith Cincinnati private eye Harry Stoner in Jonathan Valin's *The Lime Pit* (Dodd Mead, \$8.95), which if nothing else with its sex and gore modifies its publisher's image more than a little. The book is competently done, and I can't say the author relishes the sewer Stoner's case submerges him in, but the novel is depressing and leaves me with no particular urge to encounter Stoner again. An old man, shaky and sneaky and broke, asks Harry to find Cindy Ann, age sixteen, who befriended him and then disappeared. Maybe the old man is just a dirty old man, but the trail leads to organized prostitution, perversion and death—death and more bloody death. Nobody can rescue anybody.

Artist and sometime sleuth Persis Willum returns in Clarissa Watson's *The Bishop in the Back Seat* (Atheneum, \$9.95). This is a polished, puzzling and puckish performance by a promising plotter; and lest my alliterative exuberance carry us all away, I should probably also say that it has overmuch the idiot heroine stamp of the gothic. Some political arm-twisting (having to do with an unwanted bride) induces the "beautiful people" of Long Island to loan their fabulous art treasures to the new Waldheim Museum. This brings an outbreak of corpses, and Persis, asked by the beautiful people to serve as liaison,

finds herself a target for death in a caper whose tentacles reach back to Nazi horrors of WWII. Who is killing and why, who is trying to destroy the Waldheim and why, and whom can Persis trust?

Mike Ellis shoots trouble for the U.N., which sets him on the track of disappearing money in Central Asia. He finds worst fears realized and comes back to Italy, where he lives with his artist wife, with a valise full of evidence. There he's greeted by German terrorists, who have taken refuge in his home in Tuscany. The arrival of his wife and child add a deadly complication—especially when their lives become hostage to ensure his burying the U.N. evidence. While Mike tries to simulate obedience and discover who's behind the scene, Sophie Ellis is designing an escape. . . . Agreeable international chase and suspense in *The Nooriabad File* by Geoffrey Watson (Scribners, \$8.95).

Lawrence Watson's *In a Dark Time* (Scribners, \$8.95) is largely inert and tedious. It offers extended doses of the narrator's internal monologues, served up in long paragraphs of which—as they multiplied—I tended to read only the first and last sentences. Said narrator, Peter Leesh, teaches English in the high school of a small Minnesota town. The school is being visited by a killer, who takes the lives of three attractive students. One by one. We are supposed, I guess, to be fascinated by the revelation of the effects on Peter, fellow teachers, Peter's bedmate, other students, the citizenry. Perhaps we are supposed to be avid to identify the murderer. I was not.

I have argued before that the humorous crime novel is one level of difficulty higher than the straight crime novel, because the former has essentially all the demands of the latter plus the element of humor. Humor must be integrated in such a way as not to neutralize the story line and suspense, with avoidance of over-subtlety or silliness on the two extremes. If this argument holds water, Donald E. Westlake is an

exceptional writer and his latest novel, *Castle in the Air* (Evans, \$9.95), is, after a bit of a slow start, an exceptional tale. We here meet Eustace Dench, master criminal, and his grand scheme. It seems that the dictator of Yerbadoro is in some difficulties at home and wants to get out of his country—with his enormous ill-gotten gains. It's the latter desire that causes the difficulty, but said dictator has a solution: secrete all the goodies in the pieces of the royal castle (j.g.), which is being dismantled and shipped to Paris, there to be reassembled as part of an international exhibit. Word of this reaches Dench, who hatches his plot: hijack the castle in transit. He assembles a team—Germans, Italians, Frenchmen and British, who tend not to speak each other's languages—and we're off. The result is great fun, producing indecently uninhibited guffaws in yours truly. It should make a rousing movie some day.

One final note. Mention of one of the finest fanzines in our field, Guy M. Townsend's *The Mystery Fancier*, is long overdue in these pages. The polished, entertaining and stimulating first issue of 1980 (Vol. 4, #1) can serve to illustrate. Its 48 pages contain the seventeenth installment of Townsend's detailed examination of "The Nero Wolfe Saga," twelve pages of letters (remember the good old days when TAD was full of letters?), an article on the novels of Joe L. Hensley by Robert A. Frauenglas, a similar study (with chart) of Adam Hall's Quiller series by R. Jeff Banks and Harry D. Dawson, a short piece on Nicholas Luard's novels by Thomas P. Dukeshire, twelve pages of reviews by Marvin Lachman and other familiar fan names, and the usual editorial pleasantries. Townsend tends—for good and sufficient reasons, I'm sure—to issue each *Mystery Fancier* from a different address, so I suggest you move smartly and send \$9 for a year's subscription to him at 111 W. Market St., Vevay, IN 47043.

—AJH

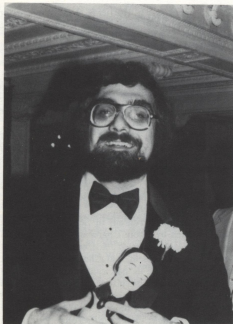
34TH EDGAR ALLAN POE AWARDS DINNER



By Jimo Kimura

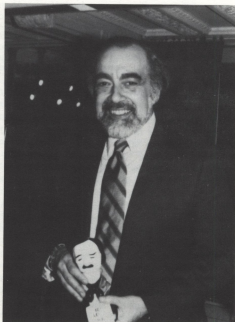
The Mystery Writers of America invited me to attend its Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Reception and Annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner. And asked me to pay for it. I paid. I was supposed to go to the Biltmore Hotel in New York City on Friday, April 25.

William L. DeAndrea



By the time the bar opened at six P.M., there were about five hundred sinister-looking people on the nineteenth floor—mystery writers, agents, editors and their accomplices, talking about crime. Mystery writers are nice people when you get to know them

Ira Levin



Harriet S. Adams (Carolyn Keene)



Richard North Patterson

well—even nicer when you buy their books (whether or not you read them).

Several minutes after seven, the bartenders started to send us to the dining room, pounding a scary gong. We ate fruit cocktail, vegetable salad, ham steak with a slice of pineapple on it, string beans, a slice of sweet potato and a cake with meringue topping and drank coffee or Sanka, believing there was no poison in them.

A little after nine, Harold Q. Masur, dinner chairman, asked us to get back to our seats and introduced the new MWA president, William P. McGovern. Following his colleagues' advice, the president thanked all the members for electing him as president, spoke very briefly, introduced the awards chairman, Thomas Chastain, and got off.

Before the official awards ceremony, a new mystery writer was introduced: Margaret Truman, daughter of Harry Truman, has written *Murder in the White House*, published in July. She was delighted to be one of the mystery writers, she said. She had bought an awful lot of mystery books and spent quite a lot of money on them. She hoped the money went to the pockets of mystery writers, not those of publishers.

Best Critical/Biographical Study of 1979 went to Ralph E. Hone for *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Literary Biography* (Kent State University Press).

Mary Higgins Clark presented a special Edgar to

Carolyn Keene (a.k.a. Harriet S. Adams) as creator and mother of a still-young Nancy Drew. Ms. Keene was very touched by the standing ovation.

Best Motion Picture of 1979 was Michael Crichton's *The Great Train Robbery* (United Artists). Crichton wrote the screenplay from his best-selling novel.

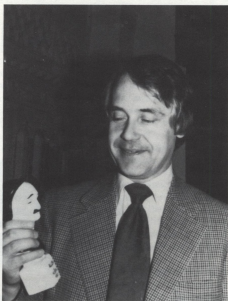
Best Juvenile Novel of 1979 was given to Joan Lowery Nixon for *The Kidnapping of Christina Lattimore* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). To her, the Edgar meant more than any other awards.

Edward D. Hoch handed a special Edgar to our editor-in-chief, Allen J. Hubin, for *Bibliography of Crime Fiction: 1749-1975* (Publisher's Inc.). Hoch found this bibliography "amazingly accurate, painstakingly complete." This is our editor-in-chief's second Edgar, the first, of course, as the editor of *The Armchair Detective*.

Best Television Program in Series of 1979 was "Skin" written by Robin Chapman and Roald Dahl for *Roald Dahl's Tales of the Unexpected* (syndication). Dahl was absent, but Chapman was present and hoped any of us had caught the program. I happened to catch that episode on Saturday at 11:30 P.M. on Channel 5. The show is still running, with unexpected stories not only by Dahl himself but by Lawrence Block, Saki and John Collier. I recommend it.

Best Tele-drama of 1979 was accepted by Richard

Arthur Maling



Allen J. Hubin

(Photographs by Jiro Kimura)

Levinson and William Link for *Murder by Natural Causes* (CBS). These mysterious partners received special Edgars (one for each) last year for creating a number of popular mystery series on TV, including *Columbo*, *Mannix* and *Ellery Queen*.

A Raven flew to *The Muppet Show* for "The Muppet Murders." That episode was a spoof on the P.I. genre, starring Liza (with a Z) Minnelli. Unfortunately, Miss Piggy was not present.

Best Fact Crime of 1979 went to Robert Lindsey for *The Falcon and the Snowman* (Simon & Schuster).

Best Short Story of 1979 was "Armed and Dangerous" by Geoffrey Norman (*Esquire*, March 13).

A special Edgar was awarded to Ira Levin for his long-running play, *Deathtrap*. Incidentally, Levin got his first Edgar in 1953 for his first novel *A Kiss Before Dying*. He was happy to get "a terrific pair of bookends."

William L. DeAndrea won for Best Paperback of 1979 for *The Hog Murders* (Avon). He got his first Edgar last year for his first novel, *Killed in the Ratings*. DeAndrea, who was in tuxedo, begged Newgate Callendar to review his book so that he might sell a few more copies.

Another special Edgar was given to Chester Gould

for his creation of Dick Tracy, the second most famous detective (after Sherlock Holmes). Unfortunately, Gould could not come to accept the award because he had been hit by a cab. On his behalf, Max Collins, writer of Dick Tracy, accepted it from Donald E. Westlake.

Best First Novel of 1979 was Richard North Patterson's *The Lasko Tangent* (Norton). He compared his first novel with first love.

The Grand Master Award went to William Riley Burnett. Burnett wrote a lot of gangster novels on which numerous crime movies, such as *Little Caesar*, *Scarface*, *The Asphalt Jungle* and *High Sierra* were based. He was born in 1899 in Springfield, Ohio and now lives in Marina del Rey, California. In Europe, several of his books are still in print, while in the U.S. all of his books are out of print. Let's hope some publisher will reprint his tough novels. He deserves it.

And last, Arthur Maling's *The Rheingold Route* (Harper & Row) was selected as Best Novel of 1979. He thanked his then-editor, Joan Kahn (who quit H&R) and mystery writers. Having read their books pleasurably, he was surprised, one day twelve years ago, to say "maybe I can do it." Sure he did it.

Congratulations to all winners.

A CATALOGUE OF CRIME

By Jacques Barzun
and Wendell Hertig Taylor



S100 Allen, Michael
Spence at the Blue Bazaar
Walker 1979

Ever since the pioneering of Ross Macdonald in *The Drowning Pool* (ACOC No. 1462), it has become virtually compulsory for authors of detective fiction to adorn their mysteries with sexual trimmings, these becoming more and more explicit with the passing years. One need not quarrel with such "material," provided it bears some reasonable relation to the detective's problem or personality, and of course to the author's plot. In *Crimson Hairs* (ACOC No. 1021) Whidden Graham wrote what many would classify as pornography, yet he did try to write "an erotic mystery." More recently Hillary Waugh based an excellent crime tale on the call-girl racket (*Finish Me Off*, ACOC Supplement 5, TAD July 1977), while today few eyebrows are raised at the sexual vagaries in K. C. Constantine's *The Man Who Liked To Look at Himself* (ACOC Supplement 7, TAD April 1978) or at Joseph Hansen's competent homosexual detective, David Brandstetter, in *Fadeout* (Harp 1970) and several later stories.

But what does all this have to do with Mr. Allen's second book about Inspector Spence? Simply that in describing the tale as the murder of a blackmailing stripper the reviewer has perhaps already said too much. For he cannot reveal any of the numerous sexual twists with which the author amazes both Inspector Spence and the reader without giving away everything, the whole story being forcibly interwoven with a series of sex-related facts and events—one of them a major surgical operation. True, the work done by Spence is painstaking and the tale is well told, but the motive and the mind of the person who slashed two innocent throats are questionable, and what is left can be expressed algebraically as sex-squared.

S101 Carr, John Dickson
The Three Coffins
Introd. by Joan Kahn
Gregg Press Mystery Fiction Series
1979 (orig. Harp. 1935)

The tale now reissued under the guiding hand of the knowledgeable Otto Penzler is the one that contains the much-touted Lecture on the Locked-Room and its Carr-acteristic possibilities. The lecture is very good indeed—some twenty pages of sound reasoning and fine imagination in lively words. One is reminded of the author's superb reconstruction of the case of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey. For the lecture alone *The Three Coffins* deserves a permanent place on the shelf.

The ambiguous sentence just above should, in the opinion of these reviewers, be taken in both senses simultaneously. The murder story is ingenious to be sure, but ingenuity is not enough. And three Problems in Impossibility is two too many. We are asked to believe in one headline adjustment after another—time, place, angles of vision, behavior, and so on. The mere handling of the huge mirror that permits the murder of Professor Grimaud to be misinterpreted is enough to shatter the willing suspension of disbelief. But there is worse: the characters are not even credible puppets, for they behave dramatically, not in conformity with their true feelings or situation, but only for temporary excitement. Glances, gestures, replies are given which in retrospect prove pointless. Finally, Dr. Fell is a dull dog, in spite of his tricks. A fat man full of paradoxes, given to noisy outbursts and sloppy habits, and fond of "Harrumph!" as a rhetorical effect does not carry his weight beyond a few pages. Fat for fat, compare Nero Wolfe. John Locke said it prophetically centuries ago: "I do not like thee, Dr. Fell," but the reason is not hard to tell. Carr had many talents, but the genre's place within literature was a locked-and-barred room he could not break into.

The Three Coffins

JOHN DICKSON CARR



S102 Cousins, E. G.
Death by Marriage
John Gifford 1959

The archaeology of crime fiction is not altogether a barren field: if you dig and dig into the thick layers of past books now unknown, you can once in a while make a proper find. Mr. Cousins apparently wrote a dozen or so stories, among which, according to the Great A.H., six are detective tales featuring Colonel Barne of the War Office. *Death by Marriage* is an early one, which tells in the first person the sequel to the narrator's divorce. His beautiful wife Brenda had left him for a dazzling gent, and soon afterwards she comes to her death, ostensibly by an unlucky fall in the bathtub. Barne is skeptical for several good reasons, and with the unwitting aid of his friend Dr. Aveyel and the

doctor's wife, he sets out to inquire for himself. He is amateurish at first—the author intends it so—but he learns as he goes and ends up doing a very creditable job of pursuit and ratiocination. The situations, especially those in Rome, are well designed, sometimes tense, sometimes comedic; the clues are casual, but all the more plausible thereby; and the sketchy romance is terminated without sentimentality or arbitrariness. What's more, the professional Lothario who only wanted Brenda's money is not allowed an easy way out. Let us all be on the lookout for more of Colonel Barne.

S103 Creasey, John
A Sharp Rise in Crime
Scrib 1978

This is said to be the 43rd book about Roger West of "the Yard" and the author's last. Other readers will have to shed a tear. Despite the respect that is Creasey's due for his productivity, the fact remains that "Handsome" West goes down into oblivion *spuria versenkt*. He is unsupported by any distinction in the recounting of his adventures, which moreover have often been marred by factual inaccuracies. Evidence for the first stricture may be found in the present tale where West is reported dead so that he may disguise himself and "...penetrate to the heart of a nest of potential evil-doers." A typical example of the author's failure to ascertain the facts underlying his plot is his assumption in *A Splinter of Glass* (Scrib 1972) that platinum melts below 1500° C—off by more than 270 Celsius degrees; and this matters, because the whole business revolves about high-melting ceramics. No further comment beyond Ho-hum.

S104 Kienzle, William
The Rosary Murders
Sheed Andrews and McMeel (Kansas City) 1979

The unusual merit of this first effort is that it gives a lively yet down-to-earth view of the Roman Catholic priesthood in Detroit. We

have had a good many attempts at this interesting, quasi-"foreign" setting and its associated locale, the nunnery. Eric Shepherd and Henri Catalan introduced us to the latter scene many years ago. More recently, Thomas Cullinan in *The 8th Sacrament* (Put 1977) and Lady Antonia Fraser in *Quiet as a Nun* (Vik 1977) have employed the convent as a contrast to crime. Ralph McInry's *Father Dowling* series (four tales thus far, Vanguard 1977-79) is sane and competent, even if Father D. is scarcely a patch on Father B. Protestantism has been represented in Robert Barnard's *Blood Brotherhood* (Walker 1978), involving an Anglican "retreat," and in what may be called the capers of the Reverend Randolph of the Church of the Good Shepherd, by Charles Merrill Smith (Put 1974 and later dates), which the astute Allen J. Hubin has surmised may be Methodist. And of course Harry Kemelman has made Rabbi Small run into and work with brethren of other faiths.

The volume here under review presents Father Bob Koessler and his friend Lieutenant Koznicki, together with numerous other policemen and newspapermen who are trying to put an end to an onerous series of apparently motiveless murders of nuns and priests. Though the author has succumbed to the tedious device of letting the murderer intrude into the story several times, his priests and police officers are varied in type and no less attractive than credible. Unfortunately, his plot required that there should be eight murders (about six more than good precedent demands), and the killer's plan—to which Father Koessler eventually tumbles—demands ten victims. The motive is unusual but not quite convincing, and one may regret the attempt to lighten the ecclesiastical load with a few four-letter words and a bit of sex. Still, the story moves along and the digressions are good fun. One may say to an intending reader: *Nihil obstat*.

S105 Moore, H. F. S.
Death at 7:10
CCD 1943

The copy of this long-sought work came from England in a battered condition, as if to prove that patience has its reward though not a glittering one. In the review which the late Anthony Boucher gave of the book and which prompted the search, he failed to mention its striking and unique feature, namely, a device for doing without the recurrent discussion of facts and testing of hypotheses. Mark Kent, a novelist, witnesses a murder by poison on a train. Since he always carries with him a notebook for his observations and fictional ideas, he records what he sees and thinks in the course of being drawn into the case. Then, from time to time, he works up as scenes in a novel the conceivable actions, words, and motives of those involved. He does a little arguing with his friend Professor Grant Newton and with the police, but it is those intercalated fragments of fiction that carry the story and the investigation forward—neat and ingenious. The characterization is slight both inside and outside these portions, but the drama is sustained and the work far superior to its predecessor *Murder Goes Rolling Along* (1942). It remains to find and assess the third and last: *Shed a Bitter Tear* (1944).

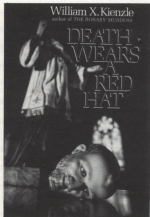
S106 Radley, Sheila
Death in the Morning
Scribner 1979

The appearance of this writer in the detective field marks a date. Hers is a new voice, unmistakable, and if she keeps up the good work, she can quickly take her place among the great women masters of the genre. She rivals P. D. James for combined strength and delicacy of touch, and she is as adept as Sayers or Marsh in constructing and conducting a plot. Humor of the best English kind, that is, arising from social perception, is present throughout, and altogether the book is a delight. One small flaw is the needless mismanaging of a physical clue, which could easily be fixed. A bigger fault, some will say, is the peculiarity of the motive. Yet the motive, though arguable, is by no means outré or incredible—and the romance is very fine. As for the author, the report is that she is a woman of middle age who serves as postmistress in a small village where the post office forms part of a general store; and as "Hester Rowan" she has written adventure stories in the modernized maiden-in-peril style, but more rational than not.

S107 Various Hands
Great Cases of Scotland Yard, Vol. I
Introduction by Eric Ambler; illus.
Readers Digest Association Ltd.
(London) 1978

Of these five pieces, the outstanding one for intrinsic interest and narrative virtuosity is "The Strange Case of Stanley Setty" retold by Andrew Garve. The sordid murder for gain, embellished by dismemberment and the scattering of the pieces over the coastline by airplane, brings out Mr. Garve's genius in full flower. The touches of character, the vivid rendering of places and actions, the quiet speculation, and the underlying tenseness of the crude drama remind us of his greatest achievements in fiction, which have been frequent and varied, even when the scope was restricted to an episode. After "Setty" he should give us a long and complex invention to balance his early masterpiece, *No Tears for Hilda*.

The other reconstructions in this volume (not available in the U.S.) are on a lower plane, but two are nonetheless notable: "Thomas Neill Cream, Poisoner" by Elizabeth Jenkins, the biographer of Dr. Gully; and "The Stealing of Muriel McKay" by Clive Egleton. Less interest is generated in Michael Innes's sketch of "Flannel Foot"—a pity the subject didn't arouse the odd master—and in "The Portland Spy Case" by Ludovic Kennedy. Like Eric Ambler's introduction, these two are pedestrian jobs. Still, this Vol. I is good enough to inspire a wish to see Vol. II, barring the ghostly hand-made illustrations.

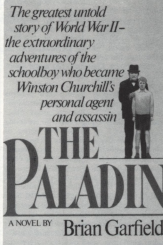


CHECKLIST

By M. S. Cappadonna

MYSTERY, DETECTIVE AND SUSPENSE FICTION PUBLISHED IN THE U.S. JANUARY-MARCH 1980

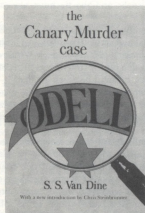
Aird, Catherine: *Some Die Eloquent*. Doubleday, 8.95
 Alan, Ray: *The Beirut Pipeline*. Farrar, 9.95
 Anderson, J. R. L.: *Festival*. St. Martin's, 8.95
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 Fox, Peter: *Mantis*. St. Martin's, 10.00
 Fredman, Mike: *You Can Always Blame the*



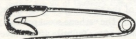
Rain. St. Martin's, 8.95
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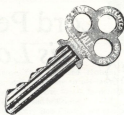


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Lord Peter Wimsey of Piccadilly: *His Lordship's Life and Times*



Part II

By William M. Scott

While his lordship has strong opinions about those things he dislikes, there are those things which he enjoys very much—those things which occupy most of his time (outside of book-collecting and sleuthing). The main pentathlon of interests and indulgence are clothes, food, drink, music and motorcars.

Wimsey is noted for his "Savile-row appearance" of perfection. He owes all of his excellence in haberdashery to Bunter, who, in an absolute Jeeves-like manner, pronounces sentence over all of the garments his lordship dons. Lord Peter enters, in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, wearing an "easy lounge suit, tweedy in texture, and a trifle more pronounced in colour and pattern" than he usually "permits" himself—"not unsuitable for town wear, yet it diffused a faint suggestion of hills and the sea." Wimsey has the gall to suggest that perhaps a faint stripe of purple would be better than the green one present, and Bunter, after calming his enraged sensibility, firmly states, "No, my lord, I do *not* think purple would be an improvement." Bunter, of course, is right.

The medical student, Piggott, in *Whose Body?*, states that Wimsey's clothes "were a kind of rebuke to the world at large," but we also know that Wimsey hates new clothes, and that Bunter must make sure than all his new garments "have every appearance of being several months old." Wimsey also hates for his shoes to squeak with newness, "a thing which Bunter never permitted."

Bunter's absolute obsession with his lordship's perfection in dressing in one of the few things which will deter Wimsey when he is hot on a case. When Wimsey is late for a tea which could be a vital occasion in solving a murder, Bunter refuses to let him leave because of a small grease stain on his trousers; he says, "Not in those trousers, my lord," and blocks the doorway "with deferential firmness." All of Wimsey's pleading is in vain, and he must march into the bedroom and change—a triumph for domestic service. But Wimsey also can get irritated at Bunter's

Wimsey's wardrobe is vast enough to avail him of any disguise he might want to affect, although "his collection of shirts... were mostly of an inconspicuous and gentlemanly sort." However, he can attire

himself to fit in with the masses. To go among the crowds at a market town, Wimsey clad himself in "an aged Norfolk suit, stockings with sober tops, an ancient hat turned down all around, and carried a heavy ashplant." He also has an "ancient" Burberry which he wears in inclement weather. Despite these concessions to disguise and practicality, one can't imagine his lordship's ever abandoning one dictum of Wimsey dress—the socks and the tie must always match.

In the flat at Piccadilly, Wimsey usually emerges every morning, "moist and verbena-scented, in a bath finickiness. In *Busman's Honeymoon*, Wimsey resents Bunter's brushing off his trouser legs in front of visitors, and pleads, "Can't I be dusty if I like?"—a query which Bunter ignores. Wimsey rebels, proclaiming, "I will *not* be brushed. I refuse!" Bunter must then solace himself by brushing the trousers of the visiting vicar.

Wimsey dresses entirely for the occasion and for the impression his attire will have on the people around him. He discards a top hat and frock coat when he is going to view a body ("might mistake me for an undertaker") and replaces it with a "grey suit, neat but not gaudy, with a hat to tone," so he will resemble "Sherlock Holmes, disguised as a walking gentleman." When Wimsey asks Bunter for a wardrobe which would suggest a man in a newly married situation, Bunter immediately prescribes "the lounge-suit in pale grey—the willow-pussy cloth, my lord—with a dull amethyst tie and socks and a soft hat." He does not recommend a bowler, for "the anxiety expressed in a bowler hat would be rather of the financial kind." In *Have His Carcase*, Wimsey wants to "appear in my famous impersonation of the perfect Lounge-Lizard." Bunter suggests "the fawn-coloured suit we do not care for, with the autumn-leaf socks and our out-sized amber cigarette holder." robe cheerfully patterned with unnaturally variegated peacocks." This silken garment is draped over his slight shoulders most of the time he is at home, and he enjoys meditating in it. The verbena scent probably gives way daily to a splash of his favorite after-shave, as we learn in *Busman's Honeymoon*, where his lordship's bedroom "smelt faintly of bay rum and

Harris tweed," although that scent may be alternated with the "Brasier du soir" perfume Wimsey admired in *Clouds of Witness*.

The detecting accessories usually complete the Wimsey wardrobe, along with his "Froth-blower's" cufflinks, and sometimes a heavy ashplant, or a "beautiful Malacca walking stick with a heavy silver knob." We also know that Wimsey is somewhat of a pack-rat, for in addition to the detecting and smoking accessories, Bunter has found sparking plugs, male and female handkerchiefs, a corkscrew, and a feminine powder-compact in his lordship's blazer.

"I speak as a man with some considerable experience in gastronomic matters," says Lord Peter Wimsey, and this is a proven fact. The Wimsey appreciation for the best in fine cuisine is widely known, and we know that Wimsey is "adored by chef and waiter alike for his appreciation of good food," and is "always sent the choicest cut without having to ask for it." He is one of the rare combinations of two separate strains—the rich person and the person who understands eating as a fine art. "The two classes are by no means identical, though they occasionally overlap," as in the case of his lordship.

For someone with so refined a taste for food, Wimsey has a remarkable range of appreciation. With Ann Dorland in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, he orders a meal consisting of:

Hûîtres Musgrave (oysters fried in their shells with little strips of bacon)

soup—*Tortue Vraie*

fish—*Filet de Sole* ("The merest mouthful, a hyphen between the prologue and the main theme")

Faisan Rôti

Pommes Byron

dessert—*Soufflé Glacé*

He eats and enjoys the meal immensely, but he can also be satisfied completely by a "dish of stewed beef with thick gravy and vegetables" which Bunter prepares on an outing in Scotland.

Surprisingly enough, Lord Peter's favorite sustenance seems to be "a large plate of bacon and eggs." It is his usual breakfast, and he goes so far as to state, "I have never regretted *Paradise Lost* since I discovered that it contained no eggs-and-bacon." A large cup of Bunter's excellent *café au lait* usually greets his lordship every morning before breakfast, and it is over this drink that Bunter informs Wimsey of the interesting things in the morning papers, all of which are laid out on the breakfast table.

Wimsey lunches occasionally at one of his "numerous clubs," and he is seen in one having a "Sole Colbert, very well cooked, with a bottle of Liebfraumilch and an Apple Charlotte and light savoury to follow, and black coffee and a rare old brandy to top up with—a simple and satisfactory



meal which left him in the best of tempers." He has lunched occasionally at Wyndham's with the Honorable Freddy Arbuthnot, but perhaps not since that fateful day when, during a lunch of *Consommé Polonais* (a clear soup because Wimsey believes "clear's less trouble to lick out of the spoon"), filet of sole and a decent Salmis of game, the Hon. Freddy found a bone in his fish and Wimsey found a bit of cork in his wineglass.

Evening meals occasionally find Wimsey at the *Savoy* or the *Au Bon Bourgeois* (which has excellent *Tripes à la Mode de Caen* and a decent Blue River trout), but Wimsey often reaches the point where he says "I'm sick of restaurant meals," and heads for the known excellence of Bunter's superb cooking.

Bunter's specialties include grilled steaks, which Wimsey likes "bloody," served with new peas and potatoes; "Roast duck with apple sauce and sage and onion stuffing"; and his omelettes and rhubarb tarts are delicious. In the unappetizingly titled *Strong Poison*, Bunter gives his recipe for casserole chicken: "If done with a good beef stock... vegetables well-packed in layers, on a foundation of bacon, not too fat, and the whole well seasoned with salt, pepper and paprika, there are few dishes to beat a casserole chicken. For my own part I would recommend a soupçon of garlic."

Bunter is also unsurpassed at the art of whipping up a complete meal fit for the tastes of a Wimsey in a few short minutes. In the middle of the night after Peter and Harriet are married Bunter is able to open a few tins, manifesting a meal of turtle soup, paté de fois gras, and quails in aspic, all served up with a bottle of hock—a suitable honeymoon midnight supper in a few moments.

Wimsey's love for food is so great that he never truly berates any comestible. He comes closest with "that impassive pale substance known to the English as 'cheese' unqualified," but even this he tolerates. His partaking of culinary delights occasionally leaves him a bit under the weather. He admits, "You should see me when my stomach's upset. Took a woman out the other night—lobster mayonnaise, meringues, and sweet champagne—her choice—oh, lord!" Indeed.

Lord Peter does not like champagne, neither does he like cocktails. But we see him indulging in the bubbly above, and he and Parker, along with Bunter, toast a new development in the Bellona Club case with the corks popping "merrily," and after the birth of Wimsey's first son, Bredon, he invites a policeman in off the street to share a bottle of Pol Roger 1926 in

celebration, telling the constable, "you'll find it thin . . . but if you drink enough of it, you'll tell me the story of your life." The pair finish the bottle, and the constable tells him that very story. And we see Wimsey having a dry martini at the Bellona Club, against his second taboo of drinking (his third, and presumably last, being not to drink before eleven A.M.—"Bad for the insides"), but his lordship must be allowed an occasional lapse from the norm to stimulate the palate.

While wine is Wimsey's true love, he occasionally imbibes other types of spirits. He claims to "have a particular instinct about pubs," and boasts of being able to "find one blindfold in a pea-souper with both hands tied behind" his back. He's not above enjoying a good bottle of Bass on occasion, as well as a drink of Martell Three Star or White Label, and when he goes on a treasure-hunting expedition with his ten-year-old nephew Pickled Gherkins, he was heard to sing, "Fifteen men on the dead man's chest, and all that! Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of Johnny Walker!"

But the grape is Wimsey's forte—"In vino veritas." As with food, Wimsey's appreciation and knowledge of fine wines is widespread. He once won a bet from the Hon. Freddy when the latter challenged him to identify the vintages of seventeen years, blindfolded, something Wimsey easily accomplished.

The preceding is related in "The Bibulous Business of a Matter of Taste," in which Wimsey must prove himself to be the real Lord Peter to a foreign Count as he is surrounded by two imposters. The Comte de Rueil says, "is it not matter of uncommon notoriety that Lord Peter has a palate for wine almost unequalled in Europe?" So the Count devises a test, over dinner with the three men, to discover the real Wimsey. A different wine is served with each course, the labels hidden, and the true Lord Peter is vindicated by correctly identifying all seven wines, without error. He names:

Chablis Moutonne, 1915
 Chevalier Montrachet, 1911
 Schloss Johannisberger hock (from the castle vineyard)
 Lafitte, 1875
 Clos-Vougeot, 1911
 Genuine Imperial Tokay (overrated) and
 The Brandy, the true Napoleon.

With Wimsey's superb tastes, he is constantly being called upon to give his opinion of a vintage wine: In the Bellona Club, Captain Culyer wishes Wimsey's opinion, at a later date, on a case of Margaux. Once Mr. Pettigrew-Robinson "had the nerve to try out" a case of "reputed Lafitte '76" on Wimsey. "It had a nasty flavour." Mr. Murbles, the Wimsey family solicitor, brings out a bottle of Lafitte '75 claret for Wimsey, explaining "It's very seldom, very seldom, I bring it out for anybody under fifty



years of age—but you, Lord Peter, have a discrimination which would do honour to one of twice your years."

Murbles then brings out a bottle of 1847 port which, although dead of spirit, is tried, because "it would be something to say that one had tasted it." Wimsey sips the honorable vintage, and then pronounces:

"It is like the taste of a passion that has passed its noon and turned to weariness. . . . The only thing to do is to recognize bravely that it is dead, and put it away." With a determined movement, he flung the remainder of the wine into the fire. The mocking smile came back to his face:

"What I like about Clive
 Is that he is no longer alive—
 There is a great deal to be said
 For being dead."

Wimsey draws a similar analogy between man and wine with Ann Dorland. He says of a bottle of Romanée Conti, 1915, "it's rather unfinished, but it has plenty of body—it'll be a grand wine in ten years time. . . . But it's got the essential guts. So have you. It takes a fairly experienced palate to appreciate it. But you and it will come into your own one day. Get me?" In vino veritas.

Wimsey's own cellar is an extensive one (the contents of which his lordship drinks from special, elegant wineglasses, with "flower petalling from rim to stem"). In it are extensive selections of Chambertin, Pommeroy, Haut Brion and Château Yquem, and

countless others, along with a great number of Cockburn ports, including the '68; the '80, with its "balmy after-taste"—the wine which a fellow once "polluted" with a strong Trichonopoly cigar. Lord Peter says, "He was not asked again. Eight months later he committed suicide. I don't say it was on that account. But he was earmarked for a bad end, what?" Other Cockburns in the cellar include the '98, which costs Lord Peter "two-hundred and four shillings a bottle," and which Peter and Harriet carefully transport with them on their honeymoon, only to have it disturbed, and therefore rendered undrinkable, when a nosey house woman dusts the bottles (an incident which actually causes Lord Peter to howl in pain). And his lordship thinks enough of the Cockburn 1908 to transport it to the Pyrenees with him when he masquerades as a mountain-wizard in "The Incredible Elopement of Lord Peter Wimsey."

The Napoleon Brandy tops off the cellar, with the 1800 the pride of the house. Wimsey is very free with his brandy, but Bunter warns Lady Mary Wimsey not to snort the brandy so after giving her a drink, because "his lordship would be greatly distressed to think that any of it should be wasted."

Wimsey says the thought of his being drunk is "a thought I hate to think," and truly we do not find him in this condition often. He is a bit tipsy in celebration of his newborn son with the police constable in "The Haunted Policeman," but not to any great extent.

However, at the close of *Clouds of Witness*, Wimsey's true spirit of drunken revelry shines through. He and the Hon. Freddy, along with the Detective Inspector Parker, all in an advanced state of drunkenness, are caught cavorting in Parliament Square by Inspector Sugg. Lord Peter is sharing the pedestal with the statue of Lord Palmerston, clinging to said statue "precariously with one hand, while in the other he held an empty champagne-bottle to his eye, and surveyed the surrounding streets." Wimsey falls into a taxi, turns back to Sugg, asking,

"Why hasn't alarm gone off, Shugg?" He pointed a wavering finger at Big Ben. "They've for-forgotten to wind it up.



Dishgrayshful. I'll write to The *T-T-Timesh* about it."

In vino veritas.

Wimsey's favorite composer is Bach. He finds "that Bach is good for the brain. Steadyin' influence and all that." He reserves the playing of Bach on the black baby grand in his library for times when the "grey matter begins to resolve." He has been known to sit and play a selection from a Bach Mass after a case has been resolved, and he occasionally breaks out in song, singing the likes of "et iterium venturus est" from Bach's Mass in B minor. Even at his wedding Lord Peter allows "no Mendelssohn and *Lohengrin*," and the couple was "played out with Bach."

Wimsey plays excellently, with a power impressive for a "man his size." He has been heard switching play suddenly from "a melody of Parry's" to "an odd, noisy, and painfully inharmonious study by a modern composer in the key of seven sharps." He enjoys the Italian Concerto and often plays Scarlatti sonatas, but complains that both want "a harpsicord. Piano's too modern—all thrills and overtones. No good for our job."

His lordship has the habit of whistling complicated and elaborate pieces "with great accuracy," and often taps "out an intricate fugal passage" with his fingers while immersed in thought.

Wimsey's favorite plaything must be Mrs. Merdle, the Twin-Six Daimler he buys in *Unnatural Death*. It is a "slim black monster, with its long rakish body and polished copper twin exhausts," and Wimsey develops a reputation as a frenzied yet expert driver as a result of her joining the family. Named Mrs. Merdle for the character in *Little Dorrit* who was "averse to row," the car is deceptively quiet, and her power shocks Parker when he first rides with Wimsey.

Parker later informs Wimsey, "I don't like your methods of driving," what with Wimsey's "skimming with horrible dexterity between a bath chair and a butcher's van," and taking little girls and their nurses for test rides at 85 miles per hour, ending the demonstration going around "the corner on a spectacular skid." Parker manages to look the other way as Wimsey breaks law after law in Mrs. Merdle, but we know of one incident, in Scotland, where "there was a trifling complaint of speeding. . . in which justice was rather more than tempered with mercy." Wimsey has also said, "I always drive more mellow on a pint of beer," but he's as yet to be stopped, in the twelve-cylinder beast with special "racing body," for drunken driving.

Even Harriet is afraid of Wimsey's driving, but by the time they are married, Wimsey has another Mrs. Merdle, the "ninth Daimler of that name." Besides, "he was accustomed to say that his brain worked

better when his immediate attention was occupied by the incidents of the road." Who's to begrudge a man a better-working brain?

Lord Peter is a noted incunabulist, which, strictly defined, is a person interested in the collection of those books printed before the advent of movable type, or before 1500 A.D. Lord Peter is quite well-versed in this specialized hobby, and has even written a treatise on the subject, "Notes on the Collecting of Incunabula."

Wimsey likes nothing better than to attempt, at a book-auction, to break a "ring of dealers, an exercise very congenial to his mischievous spirit." A certain Mr. Skrymes holds Lord Peter in a low light because of a "previous little encounter over a Justinian," and his lordship often bids on an item simply for the fun of building up the price and then withdrawing from bidding at the last moment, leaving a greedy collector with a very expensive book of little value.

Wimsey realizes "that the picking up of first editions afforded insufficient exercise," but his love for books is too enormous ever to abandon them altogether. He wonders "what people did in the old days, with no books to turn to." He admits, "I have to fall back on books for my escape. Reading is escape for me." He often uses his knowledge of books in his sleuthing. He examines Ann Dorland's room in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, and analyzes her character right on the spot, saying, "Books, you know, are like lobster-shells. We surround ourselves with 'em and leave 'em behind as evidence of our earlier stages of behavior." And his knowledge of *Manon Lescaut* helps clear his brother of a murder charge.

Wimsey's library is full of expensive editions. He admits to his hobby's costing him "thousands of pounds in cash," but the investment has been a good one. Dantes are his specialty, and he owns: one Folio Dante, first Florence Edition, 1481, by Niccolò di Lorenzo; the Aldine 8vo, of 1502; and the Naples Folio of 1477. Wimsey also owns the *Apollonius Rhodios*, Lorenzobodi Alopa, 1496 (4to); the Caxton Folio of *Four Sons of Aymon*, 1489; a twelfth-century manuscript of Tristan; an early Vitruvius; a rare Satyricon; a Caxton *Confessio Amantis*; a *Hyperotomachia*; a fourteenth-century Justinian, and a rare Cattulus, along with myriad other volumes.

But Wimsey's library is not made up solely of rare incunabulae. Many of the shelves are devoted to criminological works and treatises, along with medical works. One whole wall in the library deals with crimes and criminals, and much of Wimsey's collection is made up of classic and modern literature. His lordship shows a knowledge of Wordsworth, Tennyson, Swinburne, Machiavelli, Keats, William Morris, Sir Thomas Browne, as well as Shakespeare

and the Bible. He also is quite familiar with the likes of H. G. Wells, C. P. Snow, Ernest Bramah (*The Wallet of Kai Lung* is a favorite of both Wimsey and Harriet), Abbé Provost, Lewis Carroll, A. E. Housman, Horace Walpole, Michael Arlen, Hardy, James, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, E. B. C. Jones, May Sinclair, Galsworthy, Katherine Mansfield, Max Beerbohm, J. D. Beresford, D. H. Lawrence, and many others. Suffice it to say that Wimsey is well read. And although "Wimsey was no friend to superstition," he owns a 1678 copy of Middleton's *Practical Astrology*.

Lord Peter readily admits "philosophy is a closed book to me, as music is to the tone deaf," and there is no mention of a volume of philosophy gracing Wimsey's shelf for the sake of its content. Of course, Aristotle is admired by Wimsey, but mainly as a source for the detective's method of deduction.

It's doubtful that theological works interest Wimsey. He says he has "nothing much in the way of religion," although he stuffs a "handful of treasury notes" into a "Church Expenses" box in *Strong Poison*. Wimsey believes that "Roaming Catholic was rather an appropriate name for the more ultramontane section of the High Church party," and when his shoes squeak as he enters a Catholic church, he believes it "a protest against a religious atmosphere on the part of his own particular besetting devil. Pleased with this thought," he enters the church "more confidently."

Wimsey concedes "his mind had been warped in its young growth by 'Raffles' and 'Sherlock Holmes,'" and his interest in the genre seems to lead back to the time just after the War, when he had returned in a bad state of shell-shock to find the girl he loved married to someone else. He relates that he read detective stories while recuperating in a convalescent home. "They were about the only thing I could read. All the others had war in them—or love... or some damn thing I didn't want to think about."

Wimsey keeps himself informed of all the latest in detective fiction. He strongly fancies G. K. Chesterton and is familiar with Connington's *The Two Ticket Puzzle*, Austin Freeman's *Eye of Osiris* and many others, Kennedy's *Corpse on the Mat* and Cole's *Burglars in Bucks*, along with the canon of Conan Doyle and Poe's Dupin stories, especially "The Purloined Letter." Wimsey also maintains that detective stories are "the purest literature we have," because "in detective stories virtue is always triumphant."

Perhaps the most often consulted book on the Wimsey shelves is one which is unavailable anywhere at any price. It is *Who's Who*, but not the publicly-printed edition. It is a joint product of Lord Peter Wimsey and Mervyn Bunter, a book filled, "in part, with the small print-like handwriting of Mr. Bunter, in part with Lord Peter's neat and altogether illegible

hand. It contained biographies of the most unexpected people, and the most unexpected facts about the most obvious people,—quite an aid for the incubulist detective.

Wimsey is not only widely read, but also widely experienced, and he displays the massive intellect to prove it. He is “a respected scholar in five or six languages, a musician of some skill and more understanding, something of an expert in toxicology,” in addition to being the expert collector of rare editions. Wimsey’s Latin is perfect, to the extent that he often uses the Latin phrase for the English without being conscious of it. His French is superb, spoken completely “without accent,” and the criminal Jacques Sans-Culotte, in “The Entertaining Episode of the Article in Question,” after being apprehended by Wimsey over the former’s use of a masculine article of speech while disguised as a woman, proclaims, “He is the only Englishman I have ever met who is capable of appreciating our beautiful language.” We also find Wimsey casually translating his own version of Aeschylus from the Greek. His mastery of languages, French in particular, can be attributed to the fact that his mother always insisted that he, his brother, and sister always have French governesses in their formative years.

Wimsey is not humble about his intellectual powers; he says in *Gaudy Night*, “My talent for standing in my own light amounts to genius, doesn’t it,” and he has a right to boast. He displays expertise on such varied subjects as Georgian architecture, international politics (a subject he proclaims to hate, but one in which he is deeply involved), public advertising (in *Murder Must Advertise*, posing as an ad-man, he comes up with the greatly successful campaign for “Whifflets” cigarettes—“Whiffle Your Way Around Britain”), campanology (the ringing of church-bells), and “the history of income tax collectors.” Wimsey’s medical knowledge is of such a caliber that when he examines a corpse, a doctor admires his skill with “grave approval.” His lordship is also somewhat of a recognized historian, having taken his Master of Arts at Balliol with a First in history.

The Wimsey mind is a solace to him in times of stress, and in *Clouds of Witness* we find him abandoning himself in thought, to clear his mind of problems, “to a variety of shallow considerations upon (1) the vanity of human wishes; (2) Mutability; (3) First Love; (4) The decay of idealism; (5) The aftermath of the Great War; (6) Birth control; and (7) the fallacy of free-will.”

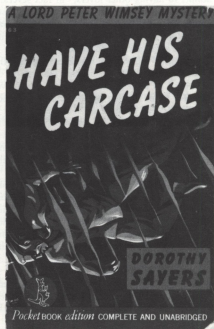
Surprisingly, Wimsey is unable to channel his intellect into the game of chess. He says he’s “no good at it. I like it—but I keep on thinking about the history of the various pieces, and the picturesqueness of the moves. So I get beaten.” “But to Lord Peter

the world presented itself as an entertaining labyrinth of side issues,” so this minor deficiency should be excused.

Harriet Vane realizes the forcefulness of Wimsey’s mind, but she questions, in *Gaudy Night*, “But is it only intelligence, or is there any genuine feeling?” Wimsey admits, “It’s embarrassing to be taken seriously—as a person,” but he does take himself seriously and is a very emotional man.

It has already been noted that he dislikes the end results of his sleuthing. Harriet later says, “I shouldn’t accuse him of any lack of feeling. I’ve seen him very much upset, for instance, over convicting a sympathetic criminal.” We see this in *Five Red Herrings*, where, after a long process of deduction, Wimsey exposes Mr. Ferguson, and then comes to like the man so much that he says, “if the jury are sensible people they’ll bring in a verdict of self-defense or justifiable homicide,” which they do. He is “shaken by an unwanted vehemence of feeling” when he thinks of Paul Alexis, the naïve man murdered in *Have His Carcase*. After learning of the suicide of Mary Whittaker, the multiple murderer, he feels “cold and sick.” Harriet Vane tells of a time during a case when the two were to have dinner, and Wimsey showed up “unfit to either eat or talk” as a result of the emotional pressures of tracking down another human being.

Wimsey was in a bad state upon his return from



the War in 1918, and his nerves are still occasionally shattered by remembrances of the horrors of war. During the pursuit of Sir Julian Freke in *Whose Body?*, Lord Peter breaks down completely, crying, "Oh my God! I can't hear—I can't hear anything for the noise of the guns. Can't they stop the guns?" As usual on these unfortunate occasions, Bunter takes full charge of his former commanding officer and nurses him back to health, but the attack recurs in *Busman's Honeymoon*, after Lord Peter and Harriet Vane are wed.

The murderer Crutchley is sentenced to hang, and Lord Peter goes to ask the condemned man's forgiveness for having been instrumental in his conviction. The man curses Wimsey and refuses. Gradually, Wimsey's nerves begin to crack again, and as the hour of the man's execution approaches, Peter confides to Harriet, "it's my rotten nerves. I can't help it. I suppose I've never been really right since the war. I hate being like this. I tried to stick it out by myself." He begins to wonder over Crutchley's execution, "If there is a God or a judgement—what next? What have we done?"

Wimsey reaches a breaking point as the hour approaches, and cries, "Oh damn that cursed clock: Harriet, for God's sake, hold on to me... get me out of this." Harriet succeeds, and the night passes. From that point on the bond between the two is eternal.

Harriet Vane, although the most important and the ultimate woman in Lord Peter's life, is by far not the only female ever to claim Wimsey's attentions. He admits to having other lovers, "in fact several," and claims that he "can produce quite good testimonials." It's a well-known fact that "Women had found paradise in his arms—and told him so, with considerable emphasis and eloquence."

His reputation follows him wherever he goes. Miss Hillyard, in *Gaudy Night*, informs Harriet, "You know as well as I do that he is notorious all over Europe. He keeps women by the score," to which Harriet replies, "all at once, or in succession?" It is true that "various women, at various times and in various quarters of the globe, had clothed themselves by Wimsey's advice and sometimes also at his expense," and he is known to have "once owned the finest lyric soprano in Europe."

Wimsey is strongly attracted to earthy women, like Mrs. Grimethorpe in *Clouds of Witness*, with her "broad white forehead under masses of dusky hair, black eyes glowing under straight brows, a wide passionate mouth," who stirred "sixteen generations of feudal privilege" in Wimsey. He knows he has charms of seduction, and although he doesn't use them on Mrs. Grimethorpe, he employs them in *Have His Carcass*, where "the conquest of Leila Garland followed the usual course... he fed her, took her to the pictures and carried her off to the Bellvue for a cocktail."

Many women have pursued Wimsey, from that "Sylvestre-Quick woman who tried so hard to get hold" of Wimsey, to the lesbian Mary Whittaker in *Unnatural Death*, who attempts to seduce Wimsey, who kisses her and feels in her "that uncontrollable revulsion of the flesh against a caress that is nauseous." He is hounded by the ill-fated Dian de Momerie in *Murder Must Advertise*, who is charmed by his romantic antics disguised as the elusive and fascinating "harlequin." Women have intentionally sought out Wimsey, "those who sought experience as well as those qualified to bestow it."

Wimsey knows that "Sex is everyman's loco pot... he'll take a disappointment, but not a humiliation." His lordship seems to have been dealt both when he returned from the war to find Barbara, the girl he intended to marry, already Mrs. Someone else, and it took him a while to get over the whole incident. But Wimsey benefited from the experience by learning to accept women on a higher plane than he had done before. He admits to Sheila Fentiman during the Bellona Club episode, "One has ancestral ideas that women must be treated as imbeciles in a crisis, centuries of the women-and-children-first idea," but he has broken away from the old standards enough to truly communicate with and understand the troubled Ann Dorland, who discloses things to him she will not divulge to another woman.

Wimsey has been quoted as maintaining, "I don't believe women ever get sensible, not even through prolonged association with their husbands," and he believes women are basically tougher individuals than men, because "they're not troubled with sentimentality." He agrees with Robert Fentiman in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* that a woman's basic nature is why he'll "never get married."

Then he meets Harriet, and proposes to her almost instantly, and hounds her with proposals until she finally agrees to marry him. But then "no woman had ever so stirred his blood; she had only to look or speak to make his very bones shake in his body." This Sherlock finally meets his Irene.

This, then, is the quintessential Wimsey. He's "like all male creatures... a simple soul at bottom," but even Bunter agrees that his lordship is "very singular indeed." Taken as a whole, he is a rather slight, emotional, silly-looking, giddy, impeccably groomed blond gentleman—with a taste for the best in wine, women, and song, and the money to obtain anything his lordly heart desires. And he sleuths.

Very singular indeed.





THE HAPPY LAND

JAMES M'LEVY

A popular type of literature from approximately 1850 to the turn of the century was the volume which purported to reveal the real-life experiences of genuine policemen. The tradition went back to the enormously successful memoirs of Vidocq (1828–29) and the practice continues to the present day, but their hey-days were the second half of the nineteenth century.

Each such volume could be rapidly identified by its use of such words as "memoirs, experiences, reminiscences, leaves from the note-book of, revelations," etc. The best-known is probably *The Recollections of a Policeman* by Waters (1852), selected for *Queen's Quorum*, which enjoyed new editions into the 1890s and, indeed, was reprinted again only a few years ago by

a London bookshop.

Curiosities of Crime in Edinburgh by James M'Levy did not enjoy the same success, although it had several printings. It is virtually impossible to find a copy today, in any edition, and so we provide here a short tale from its pages. We also print here the "Preface" by the editor of the original edition, as well as a biographical sketch of the author, also taken from the original edition. You will see that M'Levy attempted here to make *his* experiences seem more realistic than anybody else's experiences.

This is the second story in the book (the first is a bit on the slow-moving side), which was published in Edinburgh by William Kay in 1861.

—Otto Penzler



PREFACE BY THE EDITOR

THE cases of detection contained in this volume are only a part, and a very small part, of the experiences of Mr. James M'Levy, taken from among no fewer than 2220 instances, where he almost uniformly got convictions. The strange adventures will speak for themselves, and will at once suggest the great difference between a species of literature which can be safely read, as being a true account of what happened, and another which, pretending to be true, is only fiction, with a few and sometimes no grains of truth at the bottom. In this latter kind must, I fear, be held to be included the greater part of those books which have been latterly given out as the experiences of detective officers, the authors being not only not of that class of men, but often entirely unacquainted with them or their ways, and drawing their materials—the more wonderful the more successful—from their own prolific brains. The name of Mr. M'Levy is the guarantee of this book; and well it may be, for he is known throughout the kingdom, not only for his honesty and veracity, but for the possession of those many qualities which go to form a successful detective officer; nor, indeed, will it be too much to say, that while he is beyond question without a competitor, now or heretofore, in Scotland, he has very few, if any, in England. It is needless to enumerate these requirements, among which a native sagacity, ingenuity, decision, and courage, are indispensable, but I may remark, that he is well-known for having uniformly illustrated these by urbanity, moderation, and kindliness—qualities not always found in people of this class.

The advantages to which a book of this kind may be turned seem very evident; for, while all pandering to an appetite for details of crime has been carefully avoided, there is set before the reader such an array of examples where misdeeds have been brought to light as if it were by miracle, that no one can read them without being impressed by the conviction that in these times, when the dark paths of vice are so carefully watched, it is scarcely possible to be wicked without being in some way or another found out.

The cases given in this volume constitute, as I have said, a small portion of Mr. M'Levy's detections; but if this be, as I hope it may, considered a fault, it is one which it is the intention of the author to mend.

MEMOIR OF MR. JAMES M'LEVY

MR. M'LEVY was born in the parish of Ballymacnab, county Armagh, in Ireland, his father holding the position of a small farmer. Having received a suitable education, at the age of thirteen he was apprenticed to the trade of fine-linen weaving, at which he continued till he was seventeen, when he came over to Scotland. Having remained for two years at the Gatehouse-of-Fleet, he came to Edinburgh, where he was first employed by Mr. Wallace, a considerable builder at that time, and subsequently by Mr. Walker, a son-in-law of Mr. Wallace's. Latterly, he went into the service of Mr. Robert Paterson, builder and tax-surveyor. During all this time he conducted himself with honesty and propriety, occasionally displaying freaks of humour, and instances of that ingenuity which so signally marked his subsequent career.

In particular, Mr. M'Levy had so recommended himself by his uniform steadiness to Mr. Paterson, that that gentleman, who probably saw other qualities in him capable of being turned to better account than in the daily toil of a labourer, advised him to enter the police, and promised to get Captain Stewart to accept his services. He immediately agreed to this proposal, and Mr. Paterson having succeeded in his application, he entered the force in August 1830, as a night-watchman. In this capacity he acted till 1833, when, having taken fever, he was removed to the Infirmary. Though at one time dangerously ill, it was not long till, through the means of a strong constitution, he began to shew symptoms of amendment; and at this stage there occurred an incident worth recording, a shewing his turn for "finding people out." It seems the doctor who attended his ward, having noticed with satisfaction the returning convalescence of his patient, in whom he felt perhaps more than the usual interest, ordered nourishing food and wine for him. On the first day after this order, the nurse brought the supply. There was no objection to the food, but the patient thought the quantity of wine not only below what he wished and required, but so limited as to do him no good. He at once suspected the nurse of defrauding him of what he so much required. Accordingly, when the doctor came round next day and asked his patient how the wine agreed with him,—"Why, sir," said he, "it could not disagree with me, for I scarcely knew it was in my inside, it was so small." "Well, you shall have more," replied he; "I will give directions to the nurse." Next day the nurse appeared again, this time with a good quantity in a bottle. As she entered, M'Levy turned his eye, saw the bottle, and then throwing the clothes over his head, with room only for the play of one eye, began to snore stoutly. Up comes the nurse, and being satisfied that her patient was sleeping, she put the bottle to her head, and took off nearly the half. "So, so," said the patient quietly, getting his head out, "this is the way my wine goes. Madam, this will be the dearest gulp you ever had in your life." Then the woman began to preach and pray, and appeal to his feelings,—that she would be turned away if he informed on her, and would, in short, be a ruined woman. But M'Levy would not say he would not inform—he kept his intention to himself, and the consequence resulted very happily for him, and not unhappily for the woman, who, from that day, gave him even more wine, not only raw, but in the form of negus, than he could swallow—all which tended to his convalescence.

After recovering from this illness, he was told by the doctor that he must renounce his night-work, and he accordingly went to Captain Stewart with the view of resigning. That gentleman, who had a quick eye to intelligence, and knew where to look for it, offered M'Levy

promotion to the staff of detectives. He was accordingly appointed, in 1833, to that situation he has filled since with so much honour to himself and advantage to the public. His name soon came to be known everywhere, and for a thief or robber to be ferreted out or pursued by M'Levy, was held equal to his being caught. We have only to look to the number of his cases, 2220, to form some idea of the vast amount of property he has been the means of restoring to its owners, of the number of offenders he has brought to justice, and of the impression of his influence in the observed diminution of crime. Other causes have, happily, tended to this last result; but it cannot be denied that, in so far as regards Edinburgh, much of that effect has been due to his exertions.

THE HAPPY LAND

DON'T fancy I am going to speak of the "happy land" of which Richard Weaver sings so well, through the medium of the hymn, so joyous with its "away and away" to where many of us, it is to be hoped, have mothers, sisters, and brothers. Nor will the people of Edinburgh be ignorant of the meaning of the title of my present reminiscence. Yet many may not know the "happy land" I allude to—not other than that large tenement in Leith Wynd, not far from the top, composed of a number of houses, led to by a long stone-stair,—the steps of which are worn into inequalities by the myriads of feet, tiny and large, light and heavy, steady and unsteady, which have passed up and down so long,—and divided into numerous dens, inhabited by thieves, robbers, thimblers, pickpockets, abandoned women, drunken destitutes, and here and there chance-begotten brats, squalling with hunger, or lying dead for days after they should have been buried. Well do I know every hole and corner of it, and so well that I shrink from a description of it, which at the best would be only a mass of blotches—not a picture, only coarse cloth and dingy paint. Some people may have a notion of a "stew;" but the Happy Land is a great conglomeration of stews; so that the scenes, the doings, the swearings, the fights, the drunken brawls, the prostitutions, the blasphemies, the cruelties, and the robberies, which you figure of various houses removed by distance, are often all going on at the same moment, and with no more screens or barriers to hide the shame than thin lath walls and crazy doors—often, indeed, without any division at all. Yet all the people who inhabit this accumulation of dens understand each other. It is a world by itself, with no law ruling except force, no compunction except fear, no religion except that of the devil. They laugh at every thing that is fair and good, and transfer the natural feelings due to these over to evil; and, then, there's not a whit of effort in all this—to them it is perfectly natural. And I'm not sure if they do not consider the outside world over in the New Town a very tame affair, not worth living for.

In the third storey of the huge tenement, as you go into the right, there was a section of this little world, occupied by a young, stout, and fair hizzy, called Mary Wood, about twenty years of age. She was well known, not only in the Happy Land itself, but in Princes Street, where she was often seen walking as demurely under her fashionable bonnet as any of the young ladies from the houses in the New Town. Her section was very limited, consisting only of a small room, containing a bed, a table, a chair or two, a looking-glass of course, and a trunk for her fineries, not forgetting "the red saucer." Immediately off this room was a closet, with no means of light, excepting one or two auger-bored holes, intended for gratifying any one taking up his station there by a look of what was going on in the room. These two apartments formed the castle of this enchantress, and the scene of a plot—not uncommon then—entered into by Mary and two strong ruffians of the names of George Renny and James Stevenson. The conspiracy was not so complicated as it was bold, dastardly, and cruel. Mary was to go out in her most seductive dress, and endeavour to entice in any gentleman likely to have a gold watch and money on him, and when she had succeeded in this, the two bullies, as they have been called, who, on a signal of her approach, had previously betaken themselves to the closet, were, when they considered all matters ripe, to rush out, seize the victim, and rob him.

This conspiracy, I had reason to suspect, had been carried on for some time with considerable success, and without our being applied to by the sufferers, many of whom were

anxious to conceal their imprudence, and consented rather to lose their watches than expose their character. One night, the 9th of August 1849, our damsel was trying her fortune in Princes Street, while Renny and Stevenson were waiting, ready for their work when the time came. About twelve o'clock, she fascinated a likely "cully," or "colley," as the Scotch women say, with perhaps more humour than they wot of—a gentleman by the name of W—n, from London, who, little knowing the character of the "happy land" to which he was destined, agreed to accompany her home. In a short time she had him all safe. Mistress of her trade, she was all blandishments to the happy Englishman, who, after all deductions for the squalor of her dwelling, could probably not have picked up a woman better qualified to please; but no sooner had he made preparations for departing, than the gentlemen of the dark closet rushed out upon him, laid him on his back, took from him a gold watch and chain, with fifteen sovereigns, and everything they could rife; but, most unkind cut of all, the enchantress Mary helped them in their work of robbery, pulling off his fingers two valuable rings, which, a little before, she was praising to him with much admiration. I afterwards ascertained that the struggle was a desperate one, no doubt owing to the value of the property inflaming the one party, and nerving the other.

When allowed to depart, Mr. W—n, much injured, and greatly alarmed, rushed downstairs, almost breaking his neck in the descent, and went direct to the Police-office, where he gave a rapid account of the transaction, as well as a description of the parties. The case was one for me, and, about one o'clock, I was roused out of my sleep to catch these robbers. I recollect I was much wearied that day, and was in no humour for a midnight hunt, exhausted as I had been, by late hours. I was, notwithstanding, dressed in a moment. I went first to see the gentleman, who seemed inclined to lose more time by a description. I told him it was of no use, for that I knew the men perfectly. I had, indeed, seen them in company with Mary, who was familiar to me, and knew that they were her special retainers. The difficulty was to know where to find them, and get hold of the money, but I had confidence enough to tell Mr. W—n that, if he would remain for a time in the office, I would bring the robbers to him. As for Mary, she had been taken up about the time I was called, but she had no money on her—the whole having been carried off by the robbers.

My task was arduous enough, for, although I knew their haunts, the places were not few, and would likely be avoided. I tried many without success, and was beginning to repent of my promise to Mr. W—n, when I bethought me of a lodging-house at the West Port, occupied by a man of the name of Goodall. Thither I went. It was now about four in the morning, and having rapped, I was answered from behind the door by Goodall.

"Did two men come to your house this morning to lodge?" was my question.

"Yes," replied he, as he opened the door, probably knowing my voice.

"Well, I think they will be the men I want."

"But you're too soon," said Goodall, with a kind of laugh.

"Why?"

"Because it's only *four*, and they told me they were not to be wakened till five."

"That's a pity," said I; "but they will excuse *you*, and as for me, why they set me up at one, so I'm quits with them there. Shew me into their room."

I then beckoned the constable I had with me; and, preceded by Goodall, we were led to the side of the bed where lay the very men. I held Goodall's candle over their faces, and saw the effect I produced upon them—not that I augured from their surprise and dismay that they had done this deed, for I knew I was a terror to them at any time, but that I liked to enjoy my advantage.

"Get up," said I, "and go with me;" so sure of my men, that I did not even put them to the question.

And then broke in Goodall again with his humour—

"Ye see, you're not to blame me, my lads. It's only four, but Mr. M^rLevy says you were the cause of wakening him at one."

These men, who, four hours before, were throttling an innocent gentleman, were now

dumb and docile; nay, they were simple, — for Renny, when getting out of bed, let slip —

"You'll not find either the watch or the sovereigns on me, anyhow."

Stevenson looked daggers at his friend.

"Why, man," said I, "Renny has done no more than I have made others do, by simply holding my peace; and he has done you no harm either by his mistake, for I can prove that you and Mary Wood robbed the gentleman four hours ago in the Happy Land."

"D—n the Happy Land," cried Stevenson, still enraged at his friend. "I never found any happiness in it, nor money either."

"D—n the Happy Land!" said Goodall, again wishing to be witty. "Lord save us! that's a terrible oath against a place we are all doing our best to get to. The very children sing, 'Come to you happy land,' and you curse it."

I could scarcely keep from laughing, even in the midst of my impatience, at the keeper of this famous resort for all moral waifs thus reproving, by his mirth, his children — so many of whom came from that Happy Land. Of course he had reason to bless it, and did it in his own way of humour — a habit of his.

"Quick," said I, as the putting on of the clothes proceeded slowly. "Mr. W — n is waiting for you."

Worse shock yet, for such men are great moral cowards; and to confront the gentleman they treated so cruelly was so complete a turn, within so short a time, that my words stunned them.

In a quarter of an hour after they were standing before Mr. W — n.

"Are these your men?" said I.

"Ah, I know them too well," said the gentleman. "And I wish I had never seen them; for I am a stranger here, — all my money is gone, and I know not what to do."

"We have none of your money," replied Stevenson, growlingly.

No doubt secreted somewhere. I forgot to say I searched them at Goodall's.

"And it is gone, then?" said Mr. W — n, despondingly.

"No," said I; "not all. The money may not be recovered easily, but I will get the watch."

"Well, I shall live in hope," said Mr. W — n, as he went away, leaving his address.

They were now locked up, and the next question for me was how to get the property.

On the following and subsequent days every effort was made. There had been no pledging or selling to the brokers, and I was at fault; but I had succeeded in so many cases where there appeared no hope, that I persevered. As a last resource, I had a young fellow confined for a short time along with the prisoners, who I knew was on terms of intimacy with them. All thieves and robbers "split" when in trouble; confidences are the weakness of criminal natures; yet, perhaps, I would not have got this information if he had not expected I would favour him. He told me that the two men, after having committed the robbery, flew along St. Mary's Wynd, and never stopped till they got to the Dumbiedykes; — that there they placed the watch, sovereigns, and rings into a hole of the old dyke, where they made a secret mark, only known to themselves.

I was now as much at fault as ever. The men remained obdurate, and they alone knew the secret. I would, however, try the old dyke; and while I was busy peering into the crevices, who should come up to me but one of the park-keepers?

"I think," said he, "I know what you are looking for. You're Mr. M'Levy?"

"Yes," said I. "I am searching for a stolen watch and sovereigns; can you help me to the place?"

"I can, at least, help you to the watch," said he, as he held out the glittering object, with its gold chain and seals. "I found it here," he continued, going a few steps along. "The rainy night must have washed away the earth from the top of the dyke, for I found it nearly exposed in a hole not deep enough to escape observation."

And so the watch was recovered, but no more. The sovereigns were never found, and are likely in that dyke to this day, for all the three prisoners were shortly after transported for seven years.

REX STOUT

Newsletter

By John McAleer

On 16 August 1961, Rex Stout, Carter Brown, Herbert Breen, and Veronica Parker Johns appeared on Mike Wallace's "P.M. East" TV show. As devil's advocate, Wallace was soundly defeated by Stout and Brown, Mike Avallone later reporting to the MWA: "These two gentlemen, the first with what must be the oddest beard in the history of hair and with one of the keenest minds operating in the mystery-writing field, and the second with a remarkably lucid view of the writer's job, i.e., 'to entertain,' made short work of Mike's superficial and old-fashioned notions about the genre." Did anyone tape this broadcast? Let's hope so.

On a visit to UConn, in the 50's, to lecture on world federalism, Rex Stout outlined to his friend, Alan Green (whose name Archie once borrowed—do you remember where?), a plot he had in mind for a new Wolfe novel. "Rex," exclaimed Alan, "that's the plot of Christopher Bush's *Perfect Murder*." "Is that so?" said Rex, with no great concern. Afterward Alan wondered if Rex had been putting him on. "He must have been," he told me, "since that was the only time he ever outlined a plot to me."

To Jim Kiddie, charter member of the BSI, Rex wrote, on 2 July 1957, concerning a picture of Wolfe in an unidentified restaurant in Washington, D.C.: "Someone—I forget who—told me a long while ago about that picture of Nero Wolfe in that restaurant, and said it had decreased his liking for the stories by 13%, and advised me to sue. Maybe I will." Can anyone identify the restaurant?

A 97th birthday for Ruth Stout on 12 June. Now bed-ridden, Ruth's gardening days are



Rex Stout scrutinizing a new species of iris at High Meadow in June 1939.

done, but she's still plucky and cheerful.

The front and back covers of *Paperback Quarterly* (Winter 1979) feature illustrations of the jackets of Dell editions of *The Broken Vase* and *The Red Bull (Some Buried Caesar)*. With good reason. This issue has a 13-page article, "Rex Stout in the Dell Mapbacks," by Bill Lyles. A definitive piece, it's a must for collectors of choice Stout paperbacks. Thirty illustrations accompany the article.

The second issue of the Wolfe Pack's *Gazette*, just out, contains David Anderson's "As Far as I'm Concerned, You're Out of It," a critical piece on a par with Anderson's "Creative Order in Rex Stout" (*The Mystery Nook*, August 1976). Has anyone assessed the Wolfe Corpus with greater discernment? Let's hope David has a book-length study in mind.

Larry Brooks and Ellen Krieger have surpassed themselves with this issue of the *Gazette*. Surely the *Baker Street Journal* itself, at its outset, didn't match the standards the *Gazette* uniformly adheres to? No wonder the Library of Congress is collecting it.

.....

Judson Sapp's "Orchids to the Wolfe Pack" is in the latest issue of *Unicorn*, together with his address given at the First Nero Wolfe Assembly (1 December, The Biltmore, NYC) on how to build a Stout collection. Both pieces, a fine blend of Jud's rare wit and wisdom.

.....

The Harvard Law School Library catalogue lists a Stout war-time address as the work of "Tex" Stout.

.....

The descriptive, annotated Stout bibliography which I've been working on for Garland, under Guy Townsend's editorship, has gone to press and will be published in September. My Stout collection, thanks to this effort, now contains 708 separate editions of Rex's works, not counting foreign editions in 26 languages.

.....

The Christmas edition of the *L.A. Times* carried this letter, reprinted with the letter writer's permission:

"Although it kept me up until 2:30 A.M., 'Nero Wolfe' was, without a doubt, the best television film I've ever seen and one of the best-made mystery films in any medium. It's unbelievable ABC let it sit around for two years and then put it on after midnight—at 12:15 A.M.! ...

"If there is justice in the world and intelligence in television programming... we will not have seen the last of the Wolfe project... Rex Stout never gave permission to have his books filmed after two forgotten Wolfe movies in the early '30s, feeling, with some justification, that Hollywood would make a travesty of the original. At last, he's been proven wrong. It's high time Nero Wolfe took his place with Holmes and Spade and Marlowe in the pantheon of great screen detectives."

Abrams must have some clout because Paramount has had Leon Takatyan, who scripts the "Lou Grant" show, prepare a Wolfe pilot for an NBC fall series, starring Orson Welles. And, by the way, the *Chicago Tribune* says Welles, to be Wolfe, should drop a hundred pounds!

.....

Novelist Stephen King tells me to count him as a Stout fan. And so we shall, even if Archie would never have asked Carrie to his senior prom.

.....

Over dinner recently, Robert Parker, creator of Spenser, that most excellent of sleuths, told me that Rex Stout stands with Chandler and Hammett in that triumvirate of writers who schooled him in writing detective fiction.

.....

Dr. Barbara Raisbeck, treasurer of the New England chapter of the MWA, and daughter of Norbert Wiener, one of the great intellects of the 20th century, confirms that Wiener's lively exchange with Rex Stout over "The Zero Clue" was no fluke. Barbara says her father read at least three detective stories a week, but Holmes and Stout headed up his list of favorites.

.....

The search is under way for a winner of the Second Annual Nero Wolfe Award for that novel, first out in 1980, which best exemplifies the standards Stout brought to detective fiction. I'm again chairman of the Award committee. Let us know if you encounter a book you don't want the judges to miss.

.....

In last year's prize winner, Lawrence Block's *The Burglar Who Liked To Quote Kipling*, Block's burglar, Bernie Rhodenbarr, speaks with admiration of the Rabson lock. Block tells me: "There's no such lock. I borrowed the name from Archie Goodwin. Archie always has things to say about the Rabson."

.....

The February 1976 issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction* has a story, "Volcano," by Paul Chapin, the same Chapin, we are assured, who set the pot boiling in *The League of Frightened Men*. At it again, Paul!

.....

Archie says that in the Chillicothe farmhouse of his boyhood a picture on the wall showed the driver of a sleigh harassed by wolves, buying time for himself by tossing them his infant son. Rex Stout told me the same picture hung on the wall in his boyhood home in Kansas. Can any reader provide me with a copy—even a Xerox—of this picture, or at least identify it?

.....

On 11 March I had a visit from Cris Hedquist and Jane Schroff, seniors at Topeka High, who have compiled an oral history of Rex Stout. Topeka is proud of a local boy who made good. Cris and Jane rate full marks too. They plan to start a Wolfe Pack chapter at Kansas State next fall where they'll be members of the freshman class.

.....

San Marino's Nero Wolfe postage stamp now rivals Nicaragua's Nero Wolfe stamp as a hot item among avid Neroonians, whether philatelists or not.

.....

Cornell's Jane M. Livesay owns that she, too, had a mirror image of Wolfe's house.

"Perhaps," she says, "you have discovered a new form of left-handedness? Are there Sherlock Holmes readers with the same problem?" Dr. Livesay says further that a fresh reading of the stories resulted in the discovery that "Archie's bedroom faces the front overlooking the street, instead of being located at the back of the house where I assumed it was." Anyone else laboring under the same misconception?

.....

Four years ago, George W. Berry, of Nashua, N.H., formed his own Wolfe gang. This year, on 7 May, thirty-two members met for their fourth annual gourmet dinner, prepared from the *Nero Wolfe Cookbook*, at the elegant La Petite Auberge Restaurant in Maynard, Mass. Learning of the existence of the Wolfe Pack, these sturdy pioneers are joining en masse, bringing with them, naturellement, their appetite for Quail Véronique, Neptune Bouchées, and Tagliarini.

.....

A perusal of the card catalogue at Boston's august Athenaeum Library, one of the world's great private libraries, shows that the library owns a dozen books by Doyle and forty-one by Rex Stout.

.....

The Jove editions of Stout are being phased out as Bantam makes preparations to add these titles to its own list. Grab them up while they're still to be had.

.....

The Wolfe Pack held its Second Annual Shad Roe Dinner on 24 April, at the Captain's Table, NYC. Isaac Asimov again presided.

.....

Melville C. Hill, Spring Valley, Calif., won our *Mother Hunt* contest and gets a Wolfe Pack t-shirt carrying the Pack logo designed by Gahan Wilson as his prize. Rex said Valdon was 42, Lucy, 26, Anne Tenzer, 28, Manuel Upton, 54, Julian Haft, 48, Willis Krug, 39, Carol Mardus, 38, Leo Bingham, 40, and Ellen Tenzer, 55. Mel had an almost perfect score. Congratulations, Mel!

.....

A September wedding at High Meadow is planned for Liz Maroc, Rex Stout's granddaughter. The lucky groom is Jack McCullough, of Stamford, Conn. Blessing on them both.

.....

Thank you for keeping my mailbox full and for keeping this newsletter prospering. And continue to write to John McAleer, Mount Independence, 121 Follen Road, Lexington, Massachusetts 02173.

TAD at the MOVIES

By Thomas Godfrey



Cruising arrived in February after more advance publicity than any detective movie since *Chinatown*, and more pre-release controversy than any mystery-suspense film I can recall.

The negative remarks had nothing to do with the film's format. Gay activists were attacking it solely as an unfair depiction of homosexuals. They were obviously afraid that uninformed audiences would decide all male homosexuals were like the sado-masochistic leather boys they saw on the screen. They may have had a point, but ironically, their protests probably generated what audience *Cruising* eventually attracted.

The critics certainly did not help it. I don't know anyone who saw the picture who liked it. It has undoubtedly been written off as a financial and critical failure. Yet it was an interesting, even important, mystery film.

Al Pacino plays a New York police officer who goes undercover to trap a sadistic murderer preying on patrons of the town's

"leather" gay bars. Eventually he traps his man by using himself as a decoy, but finds himself psychologically compromised by the experience.

William Friedkin, the director (also: *The French Connection*, *The Boys in the Band*) and principal creative force behind the film has denied that the film is anti-gay, instead claiming it to be a standard who-dun-it with homosexual victims.

It is hard to take this disclaimer at face value. The seamier sides of the subculture are played for all they are worth. Blood gushes up onto the screen of a porno movie house as the murderer stabs a victim who attempts oral-genital intercourse with him. Another scene is intercut with shots of a man being bound and restrained as another shoves his fist in his rectum. Certainly Friedkin did not expect an audience to sit dispassionately through little gut-grabbers like that.

Nor do you have to be homosexual to be put off by *Cruising*. The single heterosexual

love scene looks harsh and unpleasant.

In fact there is nothing pleasant in this picture. Everyone is about as unattractive as possible. The leather boys all look sweaty, ugly and pimply. And their scenes are photographed like something out of *M*. The girlfriend is sexless and tedious. Pacino himself looks chronically ill. It is hard to perceive the strain this investigation is supposed to have on him, when he looks this dissipated at the start.

Then suddenly it begins to sink in that this is not a homosexual who-dun-it, not even an anti-homosexual movie, but rather a remake of *The Exorcist*, Friedkin's previous assault on the tender-hearted. Instead of Linda Blair vomiting and masturbating and swearing, we have a whole group of strange men under the spell of something bizarre and satanic. Why else would Friedkin have the murderer speak to his victims in a disembodied Mercedes-McCambridge-voice? Why else do the bars

and the streets around them seem so hellish in a German Expressionist way?

Many have criticized the film's ending, which implies that Pacino may have killed a harmless homosexual in the next apartment. And indeed, all logic points to another perpetrator. But viewed as another monster-morality movie, it makes some sense. The evil spirit may have indeed taken possession of Pacino. Larry Talbot has become a wolfman himself. Dracula, though eliminated, lives on in another victim.

As another personification of the struggle of good versus evil, *Cruising* is a dud. Lon Chaney and Bela Lugosi were more fun. Even *The Exorcist* went better with popcorn.

It is this aspect of *Cruising* that compromises its stature as a detective film. A less imaginative director might have stuck more to the story, instead of hyping the setting, and in the end, come up with a better picture.

One of Raymond Chandler's most quoted observations is his statement that Dashiell Hammett gave murder back to the people who really committed it. People, it can be inferred, who are socially, economically or emotionally repressed, and see murder as a way out, if only fleetingly, when "passions erupt beyond the layer of the skin." Homosexuals must be counted among them, regardless of personal value judgment.

If Hammett gave murder back to the right

people, the mass media, even the popularizers of mystery fiction, keep taking it away. A movie like *Cruising* makes one realize how laundered and chic the characters of movie and certainly television mysteries have become in relationship to the culture.

Homosexuals are not new to the genre. There are the epicene innuendos of Peter Lorre's Joel Cairo and the more explicit, but still unsexed, aspects of *The Detective*, just to name two examples. Though stylistically a failure, *Cruising*, in fact, may help revive the Mystery. After a decade of remakes and retreats, at last there is a movie that gives murder back to people who look like they might genuinely commit it.

A Force of One finds another detective in an interesting milieu. This time it is martial arts expert Chuck Norris playing martial arts expert Matt Logan, who is recruited by the police to help trap a man who is—you guessed it, a martial arts expert. Seems several members of the special narcotics unit are getting their tracheas mashed by an unpleasant individual in a ski mask.

The screenplay by writer Ernest Tidyman (*Shaft*, *The French Connection*) is surprisingly rudimentary, but does give Norris the chance to mash a few tracheas of his own. Actually Norris is not a bad actor—uneven, perhaps, but never less than interesting—a more animated, more muscular, decidedly Cali-

fornian version of Alan Ladd.

There is enough potential in the basic idea behind the film to warrant another try. A stronger plot and more genuine suspense should head the list of improvements. Also they will have to resurrect Eric Laneville. Plots, like machines, go much better if you don't remove the sparkplugs.

Going In Style is an amiable picture. George Burns, Art Carney and Lee Strasberg play pensioners who decide to rob a bank and have one last fling. Strasberg is all mannerisms, Carney seems inhibited, but George Burns delivers the best performance of his career.

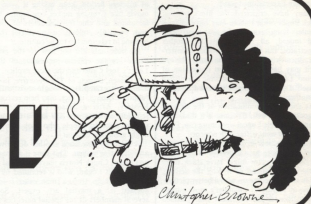
Trouble is, writer-director Martin Brest has allowed the film to get too amiable. *Going In Style* blunts its own points and mutes its own messages in the end. But Burns's performance is the thing to see.

The Case Against Ferro (French title: *Police Phytos 357*) is making its rounds belatedly. Connoisseurs of great acting can feast on the performance of Yves Montand as Police Inspector Ferro and Simone Signoret as a bed-ridden accomplice, but the twists and turns of plotting are too flowery and ornate, while the melodrama turns rich and goey. A little bicarbonate of humor might have made this two-hour trifle go down more easily. As it is, *The Case Against Ferro* is ultimately one of indignation.



TAD ON TV

By Richard Meyers



Summertime and the living's in rerun. But while we may be rewatching repeated favorites (like the Edgar-winning *Murder By Natural Causes* rebroadcast May 20) or catching missed series episodes the second time around, network executives are scrambling to create the most attractive 1980-81 season possible. And like every season from 1949 on, mystery and detection is a solid part of it. So it is time to say goodbye to the series shuffling off the carbon coil into syndication land and hello to those intrepid, trepidacious new series willing to test the shark-infested waters of prime time.

Of the three networks, CBS is doing the most mystery work, since it is losing two of its most popular detective efforts. First, the longest-running cop show is giving its last aloha. *Hawaii Five-O* and its star Jack Lord called it quits April 5th with a showdown between those fictional adversaries of twelve years, Steve McGarrett and Communist Chinese spy Wo Fat. These two first met on September 20, 1968 during the two-hour pilot telefilm that introduced the fictional Five-O police force. Six days later, the regular series was off and running. It kept running through twelve seasons, four co-star changes and several time slots.

But what didn't change was Steve

McGarrett. He was molded in the same heroic clay that shaped Dick Tracy, Elliot Ness and Inspector Erskine of the FBI. His suits were usually severe blue, his gun was quick, and the only thing bigger than his regard for the law was his ego. "He takes orders only from the Governor or God," it was said of him during the pilot episode, "and sometimes even they have trouble!"

In the first few historic seasons, produced by Leonard Freeman, *Hawaii Five-O* could be depended on for solid action yarns incorporating fine writing, imaginative direction and spectacular scenery. As the years wore on, each of the ingredients became familiar. It was only the camaraderie of the Five-O staff and McGarrett's obsessive morality that kept things sparkling. And when that changed, most of the show's life went with it.

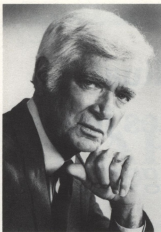
At first, this Hawaiian police unit had some of the fastest guns around. McGarrett could pump a bullet into a villain's shoulder faster than Starsky and Hutch could run. After the "anti-violence" edicts came down, there was still some satisfaction to be derived from the team and their screeching tires. Then the team started to disappear. Zulu, a Hawaiian comedian who played Detective Kono, left after the first few seasons. Incredibly, Chin

Ho, played by Kam Fong, was murdered during the eleventh season by a mad-dog hit man played by Steven Keats. McGarrett popped him in the jaw for that transgression. Finally, Daniel "Dan-O" Williams, enacted by James MacArthur, left at the end of the same season. Although he was replaced by a character named Keno, it just wasn't the same. "Book him, Keno," just didn't have the proper ring.

Jack Lord knew it, however. It led to his announcement that *Hawaii Five-O's* twelfth season would be its last. And one might think that this knowledge of its own obsolescence would lead to a cracker-jack of a climax, mightn't one? Unfortunately, the final episode, "Woe to Wo Fat," was as limp as the series had been strong. The one-hour conclusion, featuring Khig Dhiagh as the villain for the eighth time, encapsulated almost everything that had been going wrong with the series. Neither acting nor direction can measurably improve an arbitrarily written script. The plotting, motivations, and action seemed plastered together with Elmer's glue, and the overall impression of the show was an apathetic attempt to fill up sixty minutes. Even the conclusion was apathetic. Lord couldn't resist winding up the "showdown" with a shot of Wo Fat in jail slyly pulling a hidden file out of his shoe. It seems Lord is leaving plenty of room for McGarrett to return.

At least CBS is giving Lord that option. It was not as kind to eight-season veteran *Barnaby Jones*. For star Buddy Ebsen, the news of cancellation came as a total surprise during the first week in May. Its demise could be attributed to the same thing that killed Ebsen's previous hit series, *The Beverly Hillbillies*; gradually declining ratings. But Ebsen's record is all the more impressive when one considers that both shows were seen as unlikely gambles by most executives. Reviewers weren't much more enthusiastic. The Los Angeles Times called *Barnaby Jones* "an agreeable addition to TV's melodramatic hokum."





Crusty, affable old Barnaby was introduced in 1973 after his son, who also served as his partner in a private detective agency, was murdered. Barnaby went on the vengeance trail, assisted in his quest for the murderer and Neilsen ratings by Frank Cannon, as played by rotund William Conrad. And once the Jones show got rolling, to paraphrase a CBS executive, "you couldn't kill it with a stick!"

As a detective, Barnaby made a good old man, and as an easygoing mystery series, the goings got pretty bloodthirsty. The best thing that could be said about the proceedings were that they were workmanlike. Philip Saltzman, the sixth season's producer, added up Barnaby's success formula thusly: "Each show is an intriguing puzzle and it's pleasant to watch Barnaby unravel it. At 11:00 the viewers can switch off the set and go peacefully to bed. We're never nasty."

Even so, there were far too many arbitrary rapes, murders, and acts of sadism for my peaceful bed. The memory of innocent people getting crowned with shovels, beamed with wrenches and autistic kids getting chased by killers often lingers after Jones goes easily on his way. Most of the time it seemed as if these deaths were perpetrated just to give Barnaby his weekly puzzle. None of the demises were made to seem necessary to me. Perhaps old Barnaby is getting his just desserts for unraveling all that nasty stench, for, while Jack Lord received honors from the Hawaiian House of Representatives and is executive producing, directing and guest-starring in a CBS telefilm called *M Station: Hawaii*, and even William Conrad is being brought back for *The Return of Frank Cannon* later this year, Buddy Ebsen is a man without a series.

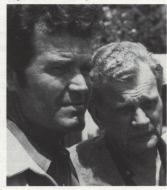
NBC is finding itself in the same boat. But instead of cancelling a series or being warned about a show's imminent demise, this network had one of its most popular stars walk out of his series with but a few episodes left in the season. The star was James Garner, and the series was *The Rockford Files*. Premiering as a TV movie in March of 1974, Garner managed to imbue the show with an

acting talent he had culled from twenty-five years of westerns and mysteries. He took the amiable cowardice of the cowboy in *Support Your Local Sheriff* (1969), *A Man Called Sledge* (1970), *Skin Game* (1971) and *Support Your Local Gunfighter* (1971) and combined it with the realistic, tired detective of *Marlowe* (1969) and *They Only Kill Their Masters* (1972) to create Jim Rockford, an amiably realistic private eye living on a Malibu beach in a house trailer which he describes as "cheap, tax deductible, earthquake-proof and when I get a case out of town, I take it with me." Rockford's approach to life is also cheap, tax deductible and earthquake-proof, but Garner adds something else to his character that no other TV detective has. And that something is exasperation.

No one can do exasperation like Garner, and no one does it as much as Rockford. Writer/Producer Steven Cannell and Garner, among the many other writers, delighted in dumping the craziest characters this side of the cuckoo's nest in Rockford's lap, making his investigations whimsical as well as winning. Among the many, Angel Martin, the slimmest con man ever televised, shines as one of television's greatest side-kick creations. As delineated by Stuart Margolin, an as-yet unexcavated mine of talent, Angel makes Rockford look like Captain Nice. To get an idea of Margolin's versatility, remember his performance as Rabbi David Small in the telefilm *Lanigan's Rabbi* (1977). Sadly, they replaced him with the less interesting Bruce Solomon (late of *Mary Hartman*) when the show went to series.

Jim Garner is no slouch when it comes to acting, either. Having won the Emmy as Best Actor in 1977, it took three more seasons for Rockford's work load to catch up with him. The reason for his final curtain is no mystery, however. He has pretty much told all to both Johnny Carson and Barbara Walters. "Rockford did me in," he admitted. "You work twelve to fourteen hours a day every day for six years and it kinda gets a little tough. I was in a lot of pain and I didn't know what I was doing it for. I was getting sick and everyone else was as happy as can be. I didn't think that was right."

NBC is no longer that happy, and we no longer have *The Rockford Files* to revel in.



Instead, there are five new mystery/action/cop series filling network berths. ABC is hanging tough so far, leaving its schedule virtually unchanged except for a few sitcoms. The excellent *Barney Miller* and watchable *Vega\$* are staying put. NBC is filling in the *Rockford* slack with *Hill Street Blues*, a one-hour comedy/drama created by the MTM company in the *Barney Miller* mold. Daniel Travanti, Michael Conrad and Kiel Martin star as cops in one of the worst crime areas of a major metropolitan city. Steve Bochco and Michael Kozoll wrote the pilot script and are serving as executive producers. If they can mirror the success of MTM's *Lou Grant* on CBS, the series, presently set for Saturday night at 10:30, stands a chance.

Meanwhile, over at CBS, three new 'vees are setting up shop, one specifically created to fill the *Five-O* void. Entitled *Magnum P.I.*, it seems intent on combining *Hawaiian Eye*, *Dirty Harry*, *Vega\$* and *The Rockford Files*. From the first title they take the location, from the second two they take the weapon and the strong, handsome hero, and from the last, they take the actor to play the strong, handsome hero. Tom Selleck plays Tom Magnum, an ex-Navy man living on the estate of an absent author. Selleck can be remembered for "CHAZ" commercials as well as his repeating role of egocentric private eye Lance White, who gave *Rockford* headaches on a couple of occasions (the most recent being the "Nice Guys Finish Dead" episode of March 27th).

The remaining two CBS series are spin-offs. The first, *Enos*, is spun off from *The Dukes of Hazzard*. There and here Sonny Shroyer plays a dim-witted deputy who is known more for his reckless driving than his revolutionary deductions. Borrowing a page from *McCloud*, executive producer Gy Waldron has him recruited for a special Los Angeles Police metro squad. Once there, it is a safe bet *Enos* will cause chaos never even imagined by that other New Mexico Marshall.

The second spin-off comes from a movie and is only six years late. In the theaters, *Freddie and the Bean* (1974) were James Caan and Alan Arkin as two San Francisco plainclothesmen who made "wild and crazy" an understatement. They would run over a high school parade and through the wall of an apartment building after having emptied four guns into the toilet stall of a bowling alley bathroom. For TV, the parts are played by Tom Mason and Hector Elizondo, and who knows what producers Hy Averback, Jay Folb and Robert Singer will make of them.

But however these new efforts come out, and whatever the new season brings in the way of second-season series and telefilms, one can find the reviews, the latest news, and interesting interviews here. No one has to be told about what effect television has on the mystery industry, so this column will keep up with the shows and the network changes that make the shows. In the next edition, all the new series will be critiqued, the prospects for the second season will be examined and a new network decree will be investigated. A decree that states that the series villain *cannot* be killed by the series hero.

Karma and Spiritual Responsibility in James Jones' *A Touch of Danger*

By Steven R. Carter

Only in *From Here to Eternity* and *Some Came Running* does James Jones describe his philosophical system. Nevertheless, the system provides the basis for characterization, plotting, and symbolism in all his subsequent works of fiction, including his detective novel *A Touch of Danger*. This system emphasizes a learning process in which each soul is forced to discern both its similarity to all the other souls on earth and its isolation from them. The isolation is the reflection of the distance which each soul has fallen away from God and become immersed in self. Self is the enemy in Jones's view of the world, and it must be defeated so that each soul can be reunited with God. As long as a soul remains subject to the desires and illusions of its ego, it functions on the animal level. However, in the course of spiritual evolution, each individual is pried out of the animal level by being put through a series of distressing and humiliating experiences designed to break down his ego and to make him realize that everyone else is being treated in the same way so that nobody's pride will be left intact. At a certain point in its education, each soul should reach a state of compassionate understanding in which it feels sorry about the pain in everyone's life without wishing to change or eliminate that pain. This recognition of the necessary rôle of suffering can come at different times for different souls since it occurs within the context of a process of reincarnation which spans eternity. Eventually, though, compassionate understanding will come to all souls, and they will all become One with God at the end of time.

According to Jones, one significant paradox involved in the process of spiritual growth is that

everyone comes to resemble what he despises. Karen Holmes in *From Here to Eternity* and Gwen French in *Some Came Running* are explicitly told not to shun the cloak of evil when it is flung on their shoulders, but this warning could also have been issued to many of Jones's other characters, including Sonny Duval and Chuck in *A Touch of Danger*. The purpose of such transformations is to compel individuals to walk in another's shoes and thus to learn directly how it feels to be "evil." The result is that the individual will transcend the state of mind that he believed to be evil by passing through it, since becoming what he hates is merely a stage in a person's development rather than a goal or a destination.

In recent novels such as *A Touch of Danger*, Jones has focused on questions of responsibility. He argues that even though the responsible man is superior to the irresponsible man, he has not yet attained the highest level. The responsible man has learned that the danger of irresponsible behavior lies in its association with selfishness, but he has not discerned that his own efforts to help other people are also prompted by vanity. His own vanity has its origin in the belief that one person can arrange another person's life for him better than he could arrange it for himself. Hence, before the responsible man can move on to the level of the spiritual man, he must find out how to display compassion without seeking to alter the object of the compassion. At the same time, the responsible man should keep in mind that a person who has mastered some area of experience can offer limited assistance to a Disciple who has already learned enough to be able to comprehend and to act on the basis of this guidance.

One of the chief sources of spiritual growth for both the irresponsible and the responsible man is the Karmic relationship. In a Karmic relationship, each person involved arouses a strong feeling of love or hate in the others and brings about a collision between his subjective view of reality and that of the others. The result of this collision is that each person loses part of his illusions and becomes aware of the inevitability of his own and everyone else's isolation in the world. Hence, even though a Karmic relationship is a painful binding force, a person can and should free himself from it by abandoning the pride and the illusions that have been holding him captive. In obtaining his release from this Karmic attachment, a person will stop blaming his misfortunes on the others in the relationship and will acknowledge his own role in shaping the circumstances of his life. At this moment, the person gains his first real chance of moving beyond the suffering caused by the desires of his ego and of eventually becoming the Master of his own progress toward reunion with God.

Jones's seventh novel, *A Touch of Danger*, not only adheres to the conventional patterns of hard-boiled detective fiction but also remains true to the basic patterns of his philosophy, including those which relate to his views on individual responsibility and Karmic relationships. This is a difficult technical accomplishment since even the hardboiled version of the detective novel is an extremely rigid form and does not readily permit the introduction of "serious" content. For example, the bulk of a detective novel has to concern the investigation of a crime, and the criminal's identity must be hidden until near the end. In addition, most of the suspects should have something to conceal and should maintain a false front which the detective must cleverly pierce before he can discover who performed the crime he is interested in. These requirements force the mystery writer to devote a lot of effort to devising an intellectual puzzle founded upon deceptive appearances. Under such conditions, it is far from easy to develop complex characters or complicated, meaningful themes. Only a few remarkable writers, such as Dashiell Hammett, Ross Macdonald, and Nicolas Freeling, have managed to devise plots that satisfy both the mystery reader's demand for an intellectually stimulating game and the serious novel reader's desire for substantial psychological, social, and philosophical content.



Jones accomplishes a large part of his difficult task by making the investigation a learning experience for his detective, Frank "Lobo" Davies. For example, the Karmic relationships which Lobo forms with some of the suspects compel him to face several of his strongest illusions and to accept the responsibility for some painful mistakes. Most obviously, his involvement with two women, Chantal and Marie, teaches him that he can never entirely escape his isolation; and his relationship with Freddy Tarkoff, a client who becomes a drug racketeer, disturbs his confidence in his judgment about other people and about his own values. At the end of the novel, Lobo is still a long way from attaining the level of the spiritual man, but he has at least started to question his belief in the virtue of acting responsibly and to achieve momentary glimmers of compassionate understanding.

However, Jones's major technical feat here is his double surprise ending. The hardest thing for a serious mystery writer to accomplish is to create an ending which both provides the answer to a puzzle and illuminates a theme, yet Jones does this twice. He prepares the way for the revelation of free love advocate Sonny Duval's motive for murdering his wife's lovers by calling our attention to the parallel case of Chuck, who claims to believe in free love and who finds that he has begun to feel a possessive love for Diane. Yet Jones also uses this motive as a springboard for social commentary on the hippies' desire to reconstruct society along freer lines and for philosophical commentary on the folly of attempting to shun the cloak of evil. In addition, Jones prepares us to accept the discovery that Freddy Tarkoff is the big boss of the drug ring by making it clear that Leonid Kronitis, the apparent boss, seems too weak to hold such an operation together and by stressing Kronitis's acquaintance with Tarkoff. Then Jones points out how this discovery moves both Lobo (who unknowingly helped Tarkoff form the drug ring) and Tarkoff himself toward the humility that is necessary for spiritual progress by forcing them to admit that they too have performed the evil they shunned.

In spite of these technical achievements, however, *A Touch of Danger* cannot compete with most of Jones's other novels. One of the main problems is that it takes place in a fairy tale atmosphere which frequently stretches credibility a little too far. The most glaring example of this violation of credibility is Lobo's overdone combativeness; Lobo would have to be a superman to survive all the fights he gets into. Even if it achieved a total credibility, though, *A Touch of Danger* would still lack the powerful myth-making of *From Here to Eternity*, the philosophical sweep of *Some Came Running*, the grisly irony of *The Thin Red Line*, the psychological complexity of *Go to the Widow-Maker*, and the social scope of *The Merry Month of May*. Nevertheless, it is a strong

minor work, and, as such, it deserves our respect and attention.

As expected, the character in *A Touch of Danger* who has reached a higher level than the others and who comes closest to being Jones's spokesman is the detective-narrator Lobo Davies. One of the main signs of Lobo's spiritual advancement is his sense of dissatisfaction with his life. He has almost as acute an impression of his general failure as Jack Hartley in *The Merry Month of May*. Although he had once been hailed as a hero for killing the murderer of his private detective partner and had gloried in this acclaim, he has come to regard this shootout as a tragic blunder and admits that he would handle the situation differently today. He feels even more ashamed of the job he did for Freddy Tarkoff, in which he terrified a Greek into returning embezzled but legally untouchable money by breaking one of the Greek's fingers and threatening the lives of his children. Afterwards, he imagines himself in the Greek's position and is disturbed by the image of what he has done. He concedes to himself, "I would not have wanted to be him, in that sour-smelling, awful, evil, lonely area of Paris, for anything in the world. If I had been him, I would have been totally terrorized." However, he finishes the task which he had accepted from Tarkoff and acknowledges that he is capable of doing the same thing again under the same circumstances, though he vows never to let himself be placed in similar circumstances. Naturally, his pride is also hurt by the discovery that Tarkoff had used part of this recovered money to mastermind a heroin operation. There is little chance to see the effect which this discovery will have on Lobo's development, but it can only move him further along the path of spiritual growth through ego-reduction.

Several observable changes do occur in Lobo as a result of his past and present experiences. The most obvious of these is the alteration in his attitude toward vengeance. When his partner Jeff Watson died, he was furious and set things up so that he would have a chance to shoot the murderer. He let the killer make the first move so that his own shooting was done in self-defense, but he could have prevented the killer from making that move. He asserts to Chantal that if the same thing happened now, he would place the black murderer in the hands of the law, even though "six months later he would be back on the Street, terrorizing and extorting other black people, and bragging about how he fooled us whites" (TOD, 293). Moreover, he proves the validity of this assertion by his handling of Sonny Duval, a man who has murdered someone who mattered a lot more to Lobo than his partner had. He not only turns Sonny over to the law but he is even willing to let Sonny be confined to a mental institution because he "didn't really want to see Sonny executed" (TOD, 425).



The deal which Lobo makes with Tarkoff and Kronitis about Sonny's punishment and about their heroin ring reflects the same change in attitude which Lobo had shown in his treatment of Sonny. Although Lobo has cause to hate Tarkoff and to wish to hurt him, he reins himself in out of concern for Chantal, whom he no longer "loves" but whom he still wants to help. He could let his idealism or his anger influence him enough to make him turn his information about the heroin operation over to Inspector Pekouris and to ignore the consequences, but he chooses instead to accept the compromise which the two men offer him. He does not try to make his own desires paramount, but rather enters into what he calls "horse trading" and proffers only a couple of modest demands of his own in return for keeping silent and letting them both go free. He fulfills the promise he made Chantal to get her released from her part of the heroin operation, and he succeeds in his main goal of halting the operation. These two concessions are sufficient to make him feel satisfied with this compromise solution. Also, he now feels free to seize back the money which his idealism had made him return to Kronitis. This is all he allows himself to gain from the deal, and it is obvious that he will use most of this money to meet what he considers his responsibilities to his ex-wife and his two daughters. The last line of the novel, after all, is a reminder that his next alimony payment will soon be due.

A related change in Lobo occurs in his attitude toward violence. Although violence is a form of assertiveness and Lobo is highly competitive, he has reached a point where he strives to limit his violence. He will not let anyone dominate him, and he is ready to fight for any number of reasons. However, he has come to regard killing as thoroughly wrong and the more extreme forms of violence as too destructive. After the hippies beat him up outside the suspect

Steve's nightclub, Lobo reflects, "In all, I was in pretty good shape. They hadn't chest-stomped me. Hadn't kicked in my jaw. I felt a kind of liking for them. No maiming; just good, clean old American fun" (TOD, 248). He acknowledges to himself that he provoked the beating, and he can later feel friendly toward Harvey Richard, who had assisted in the hitting, though not in the kicking.

Presumably Lobo's remorse over his destruction of his partner's killer and his violence toward the Greek embezzler have helped to give him the insight to appreciate the control which these young people exerted in the midst of their demonstration of hostility. When he subsequently battles with Chuck, the hippie who appears to be Marie's murderer and who has kicked Lobo twice in his testicles, he limits the damage he does to Chuck. The moment he is about to break Chuck's jaw, he finds that "something" stops him, and he grabs Chuck's shirt and shakes him back and forth instead. Afterwards, he almost grinds Chuck's glasses under the heel of his shoe, but then he pauses and contents himself with snapping the bridge of the glasses and throwing the two halves into the water in a place where Chuck can retrieve them. Later, when he concludes that Chuck is not guilty of the murders, he decides not to give Pekouris the machete which he has acquired at great expense to his testicles. He still regards Chuck with anger and contempt, but he believes an action like this would be too harsh a penalty for what he had done in the fight. Moreover, Lobo begins to feel dissatisfied about his own part in the fight and asks himself, "Was I feeling a little sorry for goofy Chuck? Was I thinking about Marie, who couldn't be brought back, whose murder couldn't be undone even if I solved it?" (TOD, 325). Although Lobo has a long way to go to reach the level of insight attained by Dave Hirsh in *Some Came Running*, he is definitely advancing toward it. At the moment, it is an achievement for him to restrict the harm he does to others and to experience sympathy afterwards for those whom he does hurt.

One other feature of Lobo's character which perhaps undergoes some minute modification is his sense of responsibility. In this, he resembles Jack Hartley of *The Merry Month of May*. When he takes on an obligation, he feels bound to carry it through no matter what it costs him mentally, physically, or spiritually. One such obligation which he adheres to is his "duty" to his ex-wife and daughters. Part of the reason he accepted Tarkoff's job of terrorizing the Greek was to obtain money for support payments, just as part of the reason he took back Kronitis's retainer was to help them maintain their social life. These consequences of his aid to Joanie are something he will have to think about before accepting other "responsibilities." Although he does not approve of the way Joanie and his daughters live, he believes that his past relationship with them gives

them the right to ask his assistance in the path they have chosen for themselves. Yet he is aware of the irony that he can make contact with disobedient hippies and reunite many of them with their parents at the same time that he must remain estranged from his daughters because they obey their mother and fit into the conventional upper middle class social pattern. Naturally, he is largely motivated by a sense of guilt toward both Joanie and his daughters. He is prompted by a similar though lesser guilt to overtip any lower class person who puts his hand out. Immediately after pondering the failure of his marriage while thinking back over his life, he reflected, "Sometimes I felt all the Spades and Jews and Puerto Ricans, Japs and Chinese on the West Coast, Wetbacks from the Texas border, had all formed a circle, and stood and pointed their finger at Frank Davies and hollered, 'Wasp!'" (TOD, 291). He overtips the taxi-driver and who brings him to the boat for Tsatsos at the beginning, and he overtips the old cleaning woman just before leaving the island. In these activities, he makes no alteration.

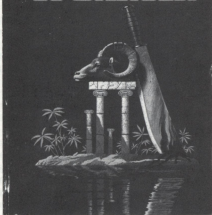
The area of responsibility in which Lobo appears headed for major change is in the working out of his Karmic relationships. The most powerful of these relationships are the ones with Tarkoff, Chantal, and Marie. The one with Tarkoff is especially significant since it precipitates Lobo into this adventure and since it is likely to have the most lasting effect on him. At the time he met Tarkoff, Lobo's code was simple: "As long as you worked for him and took his money, the client was right. If you didn't think the client was right, or if you didn't like what he wanted you to do, you didn't take the job" (TOD, 35). He felt that Tarkoff was correct in his assumptions that the Greek embezzler "was depending on human decency to let him off the hook" (TOD, 36) and that it was therefore morally justified to go outside the bounds of human decency in his handling of the Greek. His discovery of how hard it is for him to live with the consequences of his actions against the Greek moves him back toward a belief in behaving decently toward others. It also undermines his confidence in his judgment of right and wrong and forces him to view human behavior from a more complex perspective. He still has a sufficient conviction of his personal responsibility for the results of everything he becomes involved in to be hurt by the knowledge that Tarkoff used the money he regained for a purpose which Lobo considers evil. However, he will eventually learn that he can only take responsibility for his own actions and not for the use which others make of them. Once he learns this, he will be able to appreciate the irony that Tarkoff got the idea for starting his heroin ring by accompanying Lobo on his efforts to assist the hippies who had been harmed by misuse of drugs and thus observing what a large market there was for drugs. The depth of Lobo's distress at the moment,

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From the author of the bestsellers WHISTLE
and FROM HERE TO ETERNITY

James Jones

A TOUCH OF DANGER



though, can be measured by his refusal to shake Tarkoff's hand, even though he has previously shaken the murderer Sonny's hand.

The encounter between them is also a learning experience for Tarkoff. In his eyes, he is a combination of shrewd businessman and good citizen, but Lobo shows him that both parts of his self-image are illusions. As Lobo points out, Tarkoff's cleverness is suspect since he let his partner Kronitis hire not only a couple of irresponsible thieves like Kirk and Girgis to run the drug operation but also the Narcotics Bureau man Pete Gruner who would probably have destroyed their operation and arrested them if he hadn't been recalled to Washington. Lobo hurls the worst insult he knows when he calls both Tarkoff and Kronitis "amateurs," and Tarkoff is compelled to admit the accuracy of this accusation. Lobo also challenges the apparent paradox that Tarkoff is a member of the City Anti-Drug Commission as well as a heroin smuggler when he argues, "So you're the angry citizen, fighting the criminal drug traffickers. Who turn out to be yourself" (TOD, 426). It is possible that Tarkoff sent Lobo to Tsatsos for a vacation because he subconsciously wished to be caught, just as Edith Barclay in *Some Came Running* arranged to have herself exposed as Frank Hirsh's mistress to exorcize her guilt over having called her dead grandmother a whore. Anyway, Tarkoff is now

in a position where he must abandon his idealized picture of himself and confront some realities of his life that he had been sidestepping up till now.

Lobo's affair with Chantal is also a source of illumination for both the participants. Chantal tells Lobo that the reason he is doing so much for her as well as making love to her is his concern about "old age. You see it in me just like you see it in yourself" (TOD, 342). Lobo is constantly aware of his age and regards it as uncomfortably restrictive. One of the reasons he is so pugnacious is that he is eager to test himself in physical combat to prove that he is still strong, skillful, and able to endure much abuse. He is also testing himself in the bedroom with Chantal, especially at those times when he comes to her freshly battered. His replies to Chantal's criticism that his fighting is "childish" are clumsy, and he can't deny that there is some truth in what she says, even though he intends to persist in this behavior. After his fight with Sonny, his pride makes him try to make "the long, hard climb up those stairs again. . . look like it was easy for [him]" (TOD, 401). Although he recovers from this and begins to feel proud of his endurance again, it is obvious that age is going to take an increasing toll on his ability to pass through incidents like this relatively unscathed. He is aware of this and does not look forward to the depredations time will make in ever greater amounts on his body and ego. However, he has reached some acceptance of the inevitability of the ravages of time since his response to Chantal's distress over growing old is to tell her "softly" that "there's nothing anybody can do about that" (TOD, 342). He has also come to terms with the knowledge that he can't get outside himself through loving Chantal, and he bids her farewell with "a medium-light, passionless kiss" in recognition of their past relationship and their mutual failure to achieve anything more than what they did (TOD, 431).

Chantal's affair with Lobo also focuses attention on her own age and on her foremost illusions. When Lobo first visits her home, he notices a painting of Chantal as she looked when she was younger, but he discovers that this picture has been taken down on the day she accuses him of helping her because he sees his old age mirrored in her. Her main asset has been her appearance, and she knows that this is losing its value. As a result, she is beginning to find it hard to bear the contrast between her youthful looks and her present appearance. Moreover, Lobo has wounded her ego by his lack of interest in her much of the time and by his indirect pity of the effect of aging upon her. She is especially vulnerable to rejection because she has centered her life on pride—pride in her beauty, her aristocratic title, and her social position. She has been a social butterfly, like Lobo's ex-wife, and the similarity between her and Joanie is probably what both attracted and repelled Lobo. However, Lobo exposes the emptiness of her

social life and confronts her with the ugly realities underlying her illusion of social prominence, such as her impecuniousness, the vapidity of her "friends," and the fact that her husband is a homosexual playboy. He also gets her to admit to herself that she has been a petty, greedy carrier of drugs and brings her to the point where she can face getting out of this business, even though this means she will no longer be able to escape from Tsatsos to winter in Paris each year. At the end, she at least has strength enough to joke about her situation and to ask, "What will I do now? . . . I guess I can sell my hot body to a rich old Greek. But I'm getting a little too old even for that" (TOD, 431). She is willing then to be honest with Lobo about the story she had told concerning the drug dealer Girgis's imaginary attempt to blackmail her and to reveal that she had only told this story because she was attracted to Lobo and wanted to gain his attention. In making this admission, she is facing up to the implication that there has been little else in her life to interest a man like him.

Age also plays a role in the relationship between Lobo and Marie. Lobo desires her as much as he has ever desired any woman, but he learns that there are other considerations that are more important to him than his sexual excitement. He feels that it would be ridiculous for a man as old as he to become involved with a woman as young as Marie, but he is even more disturbed by the ways in which Marie reminds him of his daughters and by his awareness that he reminds her of her father. His basic feeling toward her is one of protectiveness rather than lust. When he is about to accompany her to her apartment to accept an obvious invitation for sex, he finds that he dislikes the hard look he sees on his face in the mirror and the "whorish" look which he had previously observed on her face when she was striving to be seductive with him. He senses that the overtones of incest and of "kickiness" that would be involved in any sexual act between them would be damaging to Marie as well as to himself, and he is willing to sacrifice whatever pleasure this act might give him for the sake of helping her remain youthfully open to life rather than allow her to make herself jaded and self-enclosed. Although he is probably also influenced by his own fear of "incest" and his distress about what such an act might do to him, he does have a powerful sympathy for her which is at least part of the motivating force behind his actions. This concern for Marie also lies behind his offer to set her up with a friend in New York and to provide her with money for her flight back to the United States. He does not want her to choose the alternative of going to Capri with Slow John who would introduce her to some of the hard-shelled lesbians there who might brutalize her. He cares about her growth as a person, and he endeavors to do what he can to promote it.

Marie is an apt pupil since she has reached a stage

in her life where she has recognized the folly of the direction she has taken and is looking for a way out. In an interview on *A Touch of Danger*, Jones states:

I have found the overpermissive liberalism of today somewhat a dead end and wanted to explore the feeling that the young of today are only seeking to reestablish the ancient virtues of honor, honesty, personal integrity, etc. The concept of moral self-discipline seems to be getting lost in today's rush for "absolute" freedom.²

Marie is obviously the chief example of a youth making this kind of search for integrity (the other example being Harvey Richard, who had been honest with Lobo about his part in the beating). Lobo refers to her as "the only bit of true gentility and integrity I'd found here, in their lousy country" (TOD, 292). She is candid not only about the extent of her sexual life, but also about her realization that it has had a disastrous effect on her and that her present anguish is the result of her own bad choices. Her biggest mistake has been the way she let everyone else make use of her; she has never displayed the vicious self-concern of a Jane Duval (Sonny's wife) or a Jim Kirk (Jane's lover). Beyond all this, Marie has demonstrated courage in spearfishing by herself and in spending the winter in Tsatsos (something which Chantal was unwilling to do). It's little wonder that Lobo becomes interested in her welfare.

The relationship between Lobo and Marie is a Master-Disciple one. Although Lobo hasn't advanced enough to give her more than elementary spiritual guidance, he can oversee her growth toward his own level. Significantly, the first time he notices her she is alone in the water. This indicates to him that she has progressed further than her hippie comrades who bunch together most of the time. Then, once he takes her in tow, he discovers that he can quickly lead her "over the psychological hurdle" in skin diving so that she can go 45 feet underwater without panicking at the heaving of her diaphragm or the knowledge that she is down so far (TOD, 200). He can also instill sufficient confidence in her to enable her to decide to return to the United States.

Although there is no hint that Lobo has any comprehension of Jones's theory of reincarnation, it is possible that he dimly senses its meaning and that this is why he becomes so interested in the question of what level she had attained at the time she was forced to abandon this incarnation for the next one. Anyway, it comforts him to learn that she did not surrender to despair when she realized that Sonny was trying to kill her, but rather took measures to preserve her life. It also pleases him that she had the fortitude not to scream or to make unhearable pleas because this implies that she was ready to move on to a new stage of development.

In addition to Lobo's various Karmic relationships, there appears to be a three-way Karmic bond

developed between Sonny and Jane Duval and Jim Kirk. The essence of the typical Karmic relationship is that each member of it acts in a way that exposes the illusions of the other(s) and that allows his own to be exposed. The reality which Sonny's involvement with Jane and her lover Kirk reveals to him is that underneath his overpermissive attitudes is a childish desire to have everything go his way and to have all his wishes fulfilled. Given his self-image, this is a hard truth for him to accept. In their turn, Jane and Kirk must learn that they are not the superior beings they consider themselves.

Sonny Duval is an average hippie who violates every one of his ideals. He is a millionaire who believes in working and in living strictly on what he earns, but he hires men to clean his boat and spends money which he couldn't afford from his wages to make trips throughout Europe to retrieve Jane whenever she runs off with a lover. Moreover, when Lobo exposes his crimes, Sonny tells him, "When you've got the money, nobody can touch you. . . . And I've got it" (TOD, 393-94). Like Steve and Chuck, Sonny professes to be a pacifist, and he betrays this ideal not only through his murders but also through his knock-down drag-out fight with Lobo. In addition, he claims to be opposed in principle to marriage, yet he is legally married to Jane, even though he usually denies this when questioned about it. Above all, he asserts that he respects Jane's "free spirit" and that he would not wish to hold her down by preventing her from having as many love affairs as she wants when he is really so upset by her promiscuity that he is driven to kill her lovers. His one redeeming trait is his suffering; he was hurt by her indifference to him in the past and he will be hurt even more by her decision to confine him to a mental institution in order to obtain his money. It is undoubtedly this quality of suffering that prompts Lobo to agree to shake Sonny's hand.

In contrast, neither Jane nor Kirk is capable at the moment of the kind of intense suffering that Sonny undergoes. However, they both have spots of vulnerability where they can be hurt and educated to a limited extent. Jane's weak spots are her sexual vanity and her pride in her independence. She is confident about the appeal of her body and has no doubt she can attract any man or woman she lusts for. In this, she resembles Samantha-Marie Everton in *The Merry Month of May* who thinks only about her own pleasure and who doesn't give the slightest damn what her pursuit of pleasure does to other people. She is convinced she can get away with anything she wants to. Thus, when she encounters Sonny at the villa, she is stunned to learn that he has been killing her lovers and that her fate seems to be in his hands. She is also disturbed by the knowledge that Lobo has been immune to her charms and has manipulated her into a humiliating position as bait in

his trap for Sonny. Lobo notices that when she appears on the balcony clad in a towel concealing almost nothing she has "a big broad sexy smile on her face. A fake one. I guessed for the first time since I'd met her anyway, she wasn't looking superior and self-confident" (TOD, 391). Following Sonny's capture, she begins to lean on Kirk for support and to acknowledge her dependence on him. However, since Kirk is untrustworthy, Jane's attachment to him may well further her spiritual education, especially now that she will have Sonny's money to provoke Kirk's cutthroat tendencies. She should realize that his concern for the money will probably lead him to view her as an obstacle to getting it, but she hasn't done so—yet.

Kirk's education is a simple and profound one. When Lobo first meets him, he has the impression Kirk "would just bull ahead and do anything, anything that came in his head and that he wanted to do. He would talk or fight his way out of it afterward. And had complete confidence that he could" (TOD, 123). He has no scruples and deals casually in hashish and heroin. Also, he does not hesitate to shoot at Lobo or to threaten him with a knife. Furthermore, he shows no more fear when Lobo has him at gunpoint than he did when he held the gun on Lobo. However, it is a new experience for him when Sonny points the gun at him and pulls the trigger. Since Lobo did not forewarn him that the gun contains blanks, he believes that he is about to die and that there is nothing he can do to prevent this. Thus, he is shaken to the core of his being by his sense of helplessness at his fate. After he learns he is safe, he sobs and screams that he wants to kill Sonny. Later, he recovers a lot of his outward confidence, but he will never again be able to believe in his indestructibility. It is comforting to think that even a man like Kirk can have his ego dented and be moved along the path toward spiritual growth through his Karmic relationships.

Notes

1. James Jones, *A Touch of Danger* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1973), p. 39. Subsequent references to this edition will be made in the text under the designation TOD.
2. Barbara A. Bannon, "Story Behind the Book: A Touch of Danger," *Publisher's Weekly*, 7 May 1973, p. 38.



LETTERS

From Richard S. Meyers:

What a great way to relax from writing woes! To sit down in my own armchair with TAD and Ellery Queen (Summer '79 issue) was practically a panacea.

On the other hand, I feel I must comment on Thomas Godfrey's "TAD at the Movies," being that much of my own bread and butter is media related.

Particularly in reference to his review of *Death on the Nile*, I must admit I wasn't expecting much when I saw it. Although screenwriter Anthony Shaffer had proved his mettle, director John Guillermin had never provided more than a surface gloss on most of his previous films (*The Towering Inferno*, *King Kong* '78). But even my low expectations didn't prepare me for the crude, obvious movie I wound up sitting through.

Taking Mr. Godfrey's favorable review by its most arguable points, he contends that "none of the book's admirers will feel cheated." Well, maybe not from a plot point of view, but from an execution angle, the film was awful. I'm pretty sure the late Ms. Christie did not spend the last half of the book enmeshed in one flashback after another, as did the film. I am also fairly certain her Poirot did not beat the "French/Belgian" joke to death as did the film.

And I am positive that Ms. Christie would not have appreciated the surprising bloodlust of the film. The moviemakers not only took the opportunity to shoot Lois Chiles in the head repeatedly during the many flashbacks, but they also managed to have close-ups of Jane Birkin's throat being slashed, and, incredibly, filmed Angela Lansbury getting shot right between the eyes from two angles, spurting blood and all! This is a "first class Christie?" I'm all for movie realism, but not the price of good taste. *Murder on the Orient Express* managed to be chilling without laddling on the gore.

Speaking of that fine film, Mr. Godfrey also contends that "Christie-ites will no doubt spend the next fifty years debating who made the better screen Poirot..." To my mind, comparing Albert Finney's exceptional portrayal to Peter Ustinov's lifeless rendition is no comparison. Finney went totally outside himself to create an engaging Poirot where every move, mannerism, and line of dialogue was a terrific display of fine acting. Ustinov's rendition was without passion or power. Indeed, the finale of *Murder on the Orient Express* was based on a moral choice... a choice the Finney Poirot made in favor of a greater justice. For all of Ustinov's Poirot's pontificating on, as he pronounced it, "the truth," his detective was morally vacuous.

I concur with Mr. Godfrey's opinions of the film's cinematography and score, however. Even now I enjoy listening to Nino Rota's soundtrack music...if I force myself to



forget the movie that went with it.

In addition, I find myself agreeing with most Mr. Godfrey says about *Murder By Decree*. In the name of edification, however, I thought I might bring its "weak final confrontation scene" into sharper historical focus.

This climactic sequence was filmed in an accurate recreation of what was known as "The Star Chamber." This infamous room is one of the main reasons we now have public trials. At about that time of English history, this chamber was used to have private trials in cases concerning the Crown. Make no mistake, Sherlock Holmes was on trial for his life. His three judges had the power to make him disappear.

A wonderful thing about *Murder By Decree* was not only its entertainment value, but its scrupulous attention to detail and realism. It was so scrupulous, in fact, that sometimes audience comprehension suffered. The final scene was the strongest example of this. Holmes had to "rail on endlessly," as I paraphrase from Mr. Godfrey's review, because legal jurisprudence had to be followed.

The Prime Minister represented the privy counsel, the Scotland Yard head represented the common law judge, and the remaining Lord present represented the Peers of



Parliament. They accused Holmes of getting away, and, according to my lawyer (a great *Murder By Decree* lover), he defended himself correctly and brilliantly.

I am only sorry Bob Clarke, the talented Canadian director, did not make the situation clear, because the movie is probably the most accurate rendition of the Ripper saga yet produced. As a matter of fact, my legal cronies feel that the Duke of Clarence (whom the movie contends was the Ripper) himself was tried and eliminated in The Star Chamber. History tells us that he died of syphilis, but history also tells us no autopsy was performed.

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From George Grella:

I was quite surprised to pick up your Mickey Spillane issue and find my name smeared all over the first two essays. In some ways I suppose I should find it flattering somehow to be regarded as the mean ogre who has said mean things about poor old Mickey Spillane. It doesn't seem to have hurt old Mickey one bit and I don't notice that he loses any sleep over it, but it really seems to bother poor R. Jeff Banks. R. Jeff was so tough on me and so menopauseally snippy in his tone that his essay made me go out and reread my work on the hard-boiled novel, "Murder and the Mean Streets," to see what I did wrong and what put him into such a snit. I hadn't looked at that essay in quite a long time and I must say I owe R. Jeff a debt of gratitude: the essay is so damned good that I enjoyed it as if it were someone else's work and in fact found myself wishing I had written it, then realizing that, by golly, I had written it. So, I hope R. Jeff knows that I admire that piece of work and will be proud to stand by it any time—it's a decent job from any angle and has the further advantage of being correct. On the other hand, I do not for a moment begrudge Spillane any of his success nor do I deny him certain narrative skills. I have only read about a half-dozen of his books and have no plans to read any more, since the clumsy style loses its redeeming energies after the earlier stuff and the books get very hard to finish, rather slow and dull. I had forgotten what R. Jeff calls Mike Hammer's "persuasive rehabilitative work with prostitutes," but I must say I find it profoundly moving to rank him with Gladstone and the Salvation Army, quite touching. Hammer is no Spade—he is not morally tough, though he may be good at beating people up, and he is something of a raging queen—R. Jeff slithers away from confronting what... say about Hammer's pursuit of the homosexual transvestite in *Vengeance Is Mine*. In that novel Hammer is devastated by Juno's height and muscularity, her deep voice and firmness of character,

even her refusal to fall into bed with him, like some cheerleader with a crush on the quarterback. Spillane's most embarrassing prose—though among such richness over a long career it is hard to single out one book—occurs in that novel, as lush and purple and soppy as any adolescent confession magazine. Clearly Spillane has his heart—not to speak of any other organs—in the relationship between Hammer and Juno, probably the central relationship of the entire Spillane canon, no matter how hard Mike works to salvage those soiled flowers of the pavements in his off hours. I suppose R. Jeff also ought to know that Spillane has always had trouble with that word “rehabilitate,” too, so he is in company with the writer he admires.

Anyway, if every knock is a boost, at least R. Jeff spelled my name right and quoted me with some occasional accuracy, though I am sorry he doesn't like my work. I still maintain that Mike Hammer is not a man of honor by most definitions. And I do thank R. Jeff for getting me to go back and read that Grella essay—it's a terrific piece of work.

From Frank D. McSherry, Jr.:

The rapid arrival of TAD 12/4 was a most welcome surprise, so soon after no. 3. Leader in this notably well-balanced issue was easy to pick this time. Jeff Banks' "Spillane and the Critics," showing the provable errors and misunderstanding of that author and his hero, leads off a long overdue and thoughtful re-appraisal of Spillane. An important article throwing new light not only on Spillane but on the field and the times, the sort of thing I buy TAD for. Second place goes to Barson's interview with Spillane. I don't usually rate interviews this high, but this one was packed with much new information on Spillane's career (and Hammer's) and was remarkably entertaining to boot. As is typical of TAD, the articles on Spillane aren't there just because Spillane's name sells things, but to give a more accurate and fairer view of him and detective fiction in general. Penzler's fascinating comment keynotes the theme: "it is an injustice to fail to recognize... that he nearly single-handedly kept alive the tradition of detective fiction in the United States during the late 1940s and early 1950s."

Third place goes to LaBorde's thoughtful analysis of the characteristics of the stage's psychological thriller, with B. A. Pike's fine installment of Albert Campion's life and career coming up next and almost tying. Also noteworthy (and close to a tie) are Arden Knight's "An Appreciation of Archie Goodwin," more than just entertainment (though I'm not knocking that) with an interesting point of view about a new factor in the success of the Nero Wolfe tales; and the deep article by Erica Eisinger on France's *nouveau roman* and its intriguing relation to the detective story; much food for thought here. Like Max Collin's coverage of Hammer in films too and Carolyn Hartman's well-done drawing of Spillane on the cover. The surprising inclusion of the comic strip of Hammer is another example of TAD's creative editing....

TAD readers like Mr. Nolan and Mr. Masliah who wish more indexes will be interested in a forthcoming volume from Robert Weinberg's Pulp Press (10606 S. Central Park, Chicago, IL 60655): *Index to the Detective Pulps—Dime Detective* by Walker Martin, due out in fall, of that vigorous magazine that ran some excellent hard-boiled stuff, much of it untouched by anthologists (for instance, the Marquis of Broadway stories by John Lawrence, the Lonerang of Frisco tales by John K. Butler, and the stories about Cardigan of the Cosmos Agency by Frederick Nebel).

Mertz, whose excellent review comments on the almost forgotten Carrol John Daly (as does the touching incident recounted by Spillane telling how he sent Daly the first fan letter Daly had gotten in 25 years) will be interested in another forthcoming book from Pulp, "a long hard-boiled detective novel" by Daly! (No other details given, though.)

Other pulp detective works available from Weinberg are two reprints from the heyday of the pulps, *Master of the Death-Madness* by Grant Stockbridge, a facsimile reprint of most (112pp.) of the August 1935 *The Spider* (lead novel and one short), and *Legions of Starvation* by Curtis Steele, reprinting the lead novel from the December 1934 *Operator* #5, again 112pp. and fine paper in a limited edition from Dimedia Press at \$7.95 each.

Dimedia plans two more titles from both magazines, *Overlord of the Damned* and *Scourge of the Invisible Death*—nostalgia and thrills! Dimedia is also planning a new magazine for summer, called *Dime*—no details are given, but it sounds of interest.

A note in the *Doc Savage Club Reader* #7 answers my question about the forthcoming publication by Mysterious Press of the Shivan Khan novels: yes, they'll reproduce in full color the fine Gladney covers for the original magazine appearance of these four novels in *The Shadow* for 1939 and 1940. The superb portrait of Shivan Khan lolling on his golden throne will form the front of the dust jacket for the first volume (reprinting in facsimile form the first two Golden Master novels), with the cover of the second novel forming the back of the jacket! Covers for the third and fourth novels will form the front and back of the jacket for the second book, which will contain the last two novels in the series. Each volume will hold a new introduction by author Walter B. Gibson.

By the way, the *Reader* seems to be catching on; no. 8 is 28 letter-sized, well-mimeographed pages, with many articles of interest to the pulp-detective fan, including one of "Zanigrew, Napoleon of Crime," another



antagonist of the Shadow, by Will Murray, one by Wooda Carr on "The Mysterious Wu Fang" which reproduces in b&w all six covers of that rare magazine; Tom Johnson on Secret Agent X's opponent, "The Leopard Lady," and much Frank Hamilton artwork... The zine is not limited to Doc Savage alone, and is \$1.50 an issue from Frank Lewandowski, 2438 S. Highland Ave., Berwyn, IL 60402.

Department of Utterly Useless Knowledge: Purcell's review of a book on director Alfred Hitchcock refers to a "nameless" model who did some of the shower scenes for star Janet Leigh in *Psycho*; well, not exactly nameless. The model was Melissa Merfiss. (I read this is a magazine somewhere, I don't recall where now, and for some idiotic reason it stuck in my mind.)

I still feel that much of the popularity of Spillane's early works had nothing to do with literary quality—but, possibly, so might some of the critical dislike of them. I'll have to give them another try sometime. After all, his short story, "I'll Die Tomorrow" (*Great Action Stories*, ed. by William Kittredge and Steven Krauzer, NAL, 1977), was a good one; and perhaps, this time, I can get past the first chapter of *I, the Jury*...

From Max Allan Collins:

I'd like to make a few additions/corrections to my "DATS" Mike HAM-MUH?" article in TAD's Fall '79 issue. And I have a few other comments to make, mostly relating to things I've read in recent TAD letter columns.

In my Mike Hammer media article, I discuss the film *Kiss Me Deadly* at length, but screwed up my description of the unique, mood-setting opening credits: the credits do not "roll up" from the bottom of the screen, but roll down from the top of the screen, but in such a way that it's necessary to read upward, thus: DEADLY"

"KISS ME
SPILLANE'S

MICKEY. All of this is very disorienting to the viewer, and helps establish the out-of-kilter, other-worldly atmosphere of this "finest of all private eye films," to quote myself.

Since the writing of the article, I have discovered another Mike Hammer-related record album: *Franz Waxman: Music for Jazz Orchestra* (Ent'act Records, a repressing of a 1956 Decca recording). Though you have to read the fine print of the liner notes to get even a clue of it, the eighteen-minute section on side two, titled "Three Sketches," is, in effect, the *I, the Jury* soundtrack. Which is to say, the best private eye music ever. On the same album is Waxman's "Crime in the Streets" suite. Still available.

Also, the "Blues Blues" from the *Mike Hammer* TV show was recorded a number of times, included on such albums as *Impact* (Buddy Morrow Orchestra, RCA Victor, 1959); *Music for a Private Eye* (Ralph Marterie, Mercury Wing, 1959); and *TV Action Jazz* (Mundell Lowe, RCA Camden, 1959).

I thought I had added a footnote to the

article (but either I, or TAD, omitted it) about the Mike Hammer TV pilot film starring Brian Keith, which pre-dated the McGavin version, and is mentioned in Everson's *The Detective in Film*: since I haven't seen the Keith pilot, I couldn't deal with it properly in the Hammer media article—but it apparently exists (or existed). And a friend who follows the Hollywood trade papers advises me that a new Hammer TV pilot movie is in the works, despite Spillane's claim in Mike Barson's fine interview that he will allow no new Hammer films to be made. (It's been a while since I've seen *Ring of Fear*, but I have no recollection of Mickey Spillane being accompanied by "a friend... named Mike Hammer" in the film, as Spillane says in the interview.)

Finally, there seem to have been two actors who played Mike Hammer in the radio series *That Hammer Guy*—I have eight or nine examples of the show on cassette, and one of them stars Ted Corsia—not as satisfying a Hammer as Larry Haines.

Back in the October '78 TAD, Steve Mertz comments on my mention of Novel Books in Bob Randisi's earlier interview with me; he seems pleased that someone else was corrupted by such harmless trash, and singles out author Ennis Willie for special mention. Well, if Mertz is "strangely reassured" by my mention of Novel Books, I feel likewise about his mentioning Ennis Willie, who is one of my favorite writers.

Willie (who wrote for Novel Books' "second line"—an amazing thought: that anyone could consider Novel Books the "top of the line"—called Merit Books) was the best Spillane imitator who ever put a .45 in the fist of a vengeful hero. Like Spillane, he had a pulp fervor that made his work, at its best, hypnotic. Of course at its worst it was embarrassing, but even then sheer entertainment, for a reader like me (and Mertz, apparently) with the proper twist of mind. Sample the names of some of Willie's tough guy heroes: Cruss Ballard; Lash Tagger; Cord Mando; Birch Sunday; Trade Bronson; Gard Hogan; Trade Drummond; and Brace Terrett. And you thought "Tiger Mann" was an outrageous name...

Willie was at his (her?) best in the Sand books. Sand was a cross between Mike Hammer and Parker—and the books were like Mickey Spillane ghostwriting Richard Stark. As in the Parker stories by Stark, the central character is a bad guy, with a single name, the stories told in third person. As in the Hammer stories by Spillane, the hero is an avenger, the stories speeding to a rapid, violent halt. There were eight Sand novels, several of which had supernatural, Lovecraftian overtones, particularly *Scarlet Goddess* (first in the series, 1963) and the excellent *Haven for the Damned* (also '63). Some of the earlier books, and later ones, appear to have been titled by house hacks (one of the final books is called *The Case of the Loaded Garter Holster!*), but others appear to be Willie's own, for example the evocative *And Some Were Evil*.

It's difficult to know how many books Ennis Willie wrote for Merit Books, as they

occasionally brought them back out under new titles. I have eighteen, and want more, and need the lone Vega title he (or she) wrote. Who was *Ennis Willie*, anyway?

Regarding J. Randolph Cox's review of *Secret Agent X-9* (which was very nicely handled) there are a couple of inaccuracies, one of them minor, the other major. The major one: the Nostalgia Press book does *not* reprint the entire Hammett/Raymond collaboration; a sequence called "The Torch Car Case," running from 3-11-35 to 4-20-35, was omitted. In fairness to Nostalgia Press, "Torch Car" is rather awful and its absence in the *X-9* volume is lamented only for historical and completist reasons. How much of *X-9* Hammett actually wrote is anybody's guess—certainly the first story was mostly his; but if he wrote "Torch Car," he must've done it on the backs of envelopes in between drinks. And the minor inaccuracy: Cox states that *X-9* was conceived "to compete with *Dick Tracy*, *Dan Dunn*, *Red Barry* and *Radio Patrol*," when in fact *Red Barry* was an offshoot of *X-9*. Both Alex Raymond and Will Gould submitted *X-9* samples, when King Features was having artists compete for the plum role of Dashiell Hammett's illustrator, and both Raymond and Gould (no relation to Chester) were hired by King—with Gould instructed to give his *X-9* red hair, a new name and separate scripts (which Gould did with occasional advice from Hammett)... hence *Red Barry*.

And I concur with Thomas Godfrey's low opinion of *Last Embrace*—to watch it is to want to rewrite it—but I can't agree with his offhand dismissal of Brian DePalma's *Sisters*, and his ignoring of that same director's *Obsession*, in the "Hitchcock tradition" sweepstakes. DePalma's films go beyond mere imitation, and are far superior to most of Hitchcock's own post-*Psycho* work.

And back in the Spring 1979 TAD, in a letter, Dorothy Glantz said some nice (and I thought perceptive) things about my Nolan books. Thank you, Ms. Glantz. One of these days you may be seeing more of them.

And thanks to everyone at TAD for letting me be a part of your special Mickey Spillane issue, and my compliments to Mike Barson and Jeff Banks for their excellent contributions.

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From Linward C. Marley:

Is there anything that I and other TAD readers can do to get new paperback editions of older mystery fiction? Are there certain editors or publishers we can write? Are they receptive to tearful pleas?

It does happen. Look at Bantam's excellent set of Dorothy B. Hughes's novels last year. I would love to have new paperback editions of the works of Fredric Brown and Cornell Woolrich, most of which I have never read, but constantly read about. What can we do?

* * * * *

From Helen Wells:

The double portrait of Ellery Queen—the two cousins, Fred Dannay and Manfred Lee

—makes a stunning cover illustration for TAD, volume 12. It is the first by Carolyn Hartman, and this subscriber hopes it will be the first of many more.

What at first glance appears to be an extraordinarily perceptive photograph turns out to be deeper, beautifully detailed portraiture. The artist manages to give both the physical similarity between the two men and the contrast in their personalities.

I presume to speak as a former painter and student at The Art Students' League, and because I have the pleasure of often seeing Fred and Rose Dannay at Mystery Writers of America.

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From T. J. Shamon:

Can anyone satisfy my curiosity regarding the following?

1. What is the origin of the term "hawkshaw"? The earliest reference I've come across is in Bentley's *Trent's last Case* (1913). My edition of the Oxford Dictionary doesn't help.

2. What is the original significance of the "green door" in mystery fiction? As a teenager I read a story, long forgotten, which featured one prominently.

3. What is the derivation or origin of the name "Ellery" as in Queen? Again, my Oxford has failed me. There is an Ellery King in Boston and a reference to an Ellery King on page 22 of Wyndham Martyn's *The Murder in Beacon Street* (1930). Allied question: did Ellery King or Ellery Queen come first?

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From Bob Adey:

I have just received TAD for Fall 1979 and am writing to express my appreciation for the kind review of *Locked Room Murder*.

There is no doubt at all that titles have been omitted. I already have another 40-50 for any time when a supplement or revised edition is called for. I would be delighted to hear from anyone who knows of further examples (address: 7 Highcroft Avenue, Wordsley, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 5LX, England).

I would also like to place on record an acknowledgement that was omitted from the book due to a misunderstanding. It is to George Locke, publisher and guiding light of Ferret Fantasy, who undertook the daunting task of deciphering my handwriting and transcribing hundreds of entry cards into the form in which the book appears. Without the University publishing system that has been a boon to American bibliographers in the past, it is frankly difficult for an unknown writer without connections to get anything published over here. Three publishers had already failed to take up an anthology of mine (in fairness it should be stated that one of them went out of business) and George was the only one who was prepared to back his judgement with some capital and a great deal of hard work. The true test is that, at the end of it all, we still remain friends!

DICKS ON STAGE

FORM AND FORMULA IN DETECTIVE DRAMA INSTALLMENT VIII

By Charles LaBorde

COMIC MYSTERIES

Comedy has played a significant role in mystery theatre from the inception of that approach to melodrama. The first modern mystery play and the oldest drama dealt with in this study, *Seven Keys to Baldpate* by George M. Cohan,¹ comically treats many of the overworked devices found in mystery novels. Few mystery dramas since Cohan's initial detective play have been devoid of a touch of humor,² although most mystery works maintain an appropriate melodramatic appearance of seriousness. The authors of mystery dramas use an occasional bit of comedy merely to lighten that seriousness ever so slightly so that the subject matter of crime does not seem overly gruesome. Several plays, however, have gone beyond a superficial use of comedy and have followed more closely the pattern used by Cohan. Confined mysteries that have taken such a comic slant include another Cohan vehicle, *The Tavern*,³ Owen Davis's *The Haunted House*,⁴ Ralph Spence's *The Gorilla*,⁵ George Batson's *Ramshackle Inn*,⁶ and the most successful of them all, Joseph Kesselring's *Arsenic and Old Lace*.⁷

All these plays carry their comic elements so far that they represent a wholly unserious form: they are comedies disguised as melodramas; that is, they employ mystery-melodrama plot incidents for the chief purpose of laughter and ridicule rather than fear, hate, suspense, or even bafflement. The most facile method of imposing comedy upon the melodramatic form is a parody⁸ of the latter. Consequently, authors of humorous mystery plays have employed parody as their principal approach to a comic treatment of crime. Like the plays in the preceding chapter, these works incorporate a slight alteration in

the standard formulas (the replacement of a seemingly serious approach by an unserious, parodistic one) that results in a radically different drama, a comic mystery.

Essentially the method used to scoff at the sober originals calls for an author to exaggerate the many familiar incidents, techniques, and details of the more serious mysteries to the point of absurdity. In doing so, a playwright makes the borrowed ingredients laughable and in most cases shows how preposterous they were even in their original, unexaggerated form. The writers of these comedies favor murder-house mysteries as the chief recipients of their ridicule, but features of procedurals, "Had I But Knowns," and even psychological thrillers also appear in comic mysteries with considerable frequency. This chapter examines the means whereby the features of standard formulas are exaggerated in these plays to create comedy out of melodrama.

In the realm of plot, authors of comic mysteries can be accused of nothing, if not of obviousness. They begin derision by employing some of the more ubiquitous features of the expository scenes in standard thrillers. A favorite target of their satirical barbs is the rapid introduction of essential information leading to the crime. Almost universally, authors of these comedies treat such exposition with exceeding brevity. When that is impossible, the celerity with which they present essential expository material serves to indicate the superficiality of such information, as evidenced in the following speech from *Seven Keys to Baldpate*:⁹

My husband is the president of the Reuton-Asquewan Suburban Railway Company. He has agreed to pay a vast amount of money for a certain city franchise; a franchise that the political crowd at Reuton has no power to grant. They are going to cheat him out of this money and use it for campaign funds to fight the opposition party at the next election. If he sues for his money back, they are going to expose him for entering into an agreement he knows to be nothing short of bribery. The present mayor is at the bottom of it all! . . . I ran to my husband tonight and begged him not to enter into this deal. I warned him that he was being cheated. He wouldn't believe me, but I know it's true. He's being cheated, and will be charged with bribery besides. That's why I risked the mountain on a night like this. I must have been followed, for I was shot at as I reached the top of Baldpate. Oh, I don't know who you are, but you're a man and you can help me (II.839-40).

While the speech is anything but brief, it effectively mocks a propensity in murder plays to handle a plethora of information as expeditiously as possible in order to get more quickly to the villains. A similar comment on the rush of mystery dramas toward scenes of mayhem is made by the suddenness with which the crime itself is committed in these parodies. Although crimes come early in some standard mystery plays, they often occur in comedies

with the rise of the curtain. In *Ramshackle Inn*, for instance, a character is murdered for no explicable reason only seconds after the start of the drama (I.7); *The Haunted House* begins with an apparent burglary (I.5). When an actual crime does not take place immediately, comic playwrights at least provide an obviously expeditious means of establishing the probability of fearful incidents. Such transparent introduction of fearful materials ranges from the simplicity found in *The Tavern*, where Cohan merely has the first character on stage tremble with fright (I.9), to the heavy-handedness of *The Gorilla*, in which mysteriously moving furniture and a radio broadcast about ghosts (I.7-8) set the mood of mysteriousness.

Authors of parodies even more mercilessly lampoon the middle sections of mystery plays. Complications resulting from a crime that was so rapidly introduced early in one of the opening scenes of the play now become objects of derision. Again the parodist's tool is exaggeration, but of a different kind. Many familiar but unfunny devices found in mystery plays appear largely unaltered in comic mysteries. A degree of humorous exaggeration comes not from the devices themselves but simply from an overabundance of them. The roster of mystery-drama ingredients found in the development and complication scenes of these plays stretches almost endlessly, as the following partial list indicates: a fake ghost (*Haunted*, III.70), pistol shots (*Baldpate*, I.837), an insane culprit (*Arsenic*, III.ii.497), suspicion of the wrong man (*Ramshackle*, II.37), corrupt police (*Tavern*, II.83), a real ghost (*Baldpate*, II.882), framing the hero (*Baldpate*, II.866), the "dead" coming to life (*Haunted*, I.30), a detective who inductively reasons from minuscule clues (*Haunted*, I.37), a big-city policeman on hand to assist local officers (*Gorilla*, I.20), a mysterious face at a window (*Gorilla*, I.35), a talking skeleton (*Gorilla*, II.72), secret panels (*Gorilla*, II.57), chicanery in the dark (*Ramshackle*, I.34-35), a mysterious hand sneaking around a corner (*Gorilla*, II.66), torture (*Arsenic*, III.i.491), and a foolish person walking into a trap (*Arsenic*, III.ii.489-90).¹⁸ So many such overworked complicating factors¹⁹ appear in each comedy that a logical unraveling of them seems an impossibility. Some plays, such as *Seven Keys to Baldpate* and *The Gorilla*, even assume an anti-logical stance in their indiscriminate use of such devices: anything that is totally out of place and unrelated to most, if not all, that has preceded it becomes an optimum device of further complication.

The authors of these comedies face the prodigious task of providing solutions for such seemingly insoluble masses of complication and confusion. In the less muddled mysteries, typical ingredients of mystery solutions can be used to comic effect, as is done in *Arsenic and Old Lace* (insanity as an

explanation of criminal behavior), *Ramshackle Inn* (deduction leading to a single logical solution), and *The Haunted House* (confession by the villain when escape appears impossible). In those dramas that seem anti-logical because of their exceedingly complicated scenes of development, a unique comic solution has been developed. Cohan first used the special explanation in *Seven Keys to Baldpate*; he explains all of the seemingly impossible events by revealing in an epilogue that most of the play is an enactment of a novel being written by the leading character, Magee (Epilogue, 886-87). Ralph Spence borrows Cohan's solution for *The Gorilla*, in which most of the play similarly visualizes a drama as it is read to a potential producer (III.115). Such a technique, in effect, places the inexplicable activities in a frame or in quotation marks. "Anything goes" becomes the byword of plays with that solution. The technique carries with it a last satirical thrust at the detective genre: it implies that mysteries are so ridiculous that their authors can and do get away with anything.

All such ingredients of plot as exaggerations, anti-logic, and framing devices serve to emphasize the unserious nature of comic mysteries. The authors themselves are careful to note that their plays should never cross the barrier even into seeming seriousness.¹² Furthermore, they employ several means of pointing their intent to mock seemingly serious mysteries. Cohan seems particularly fond of emphasizing his parodistic approach by identifying the object being ridiculed, as can be seen in the following exchange from *Seven Keys to Baldpate*:

MAGEE. You harm that girl, and I'll get you if it's the last act of my life!

CARGAN. I've read that kind of talk in books.

MAGEE. I write books of that kind, but I'm talking real talk now! (II.861)

Later in the same play, Cohan has his central character admit that most of the drama is "Wild, terrible, horrible melodrama. . . . Treated as a joke" (Epilogue.887). Similarly, in *The Tavern*, Cohan underlines his comic intent by inserting questions whose answers are all too clear: "Are you trying to poke fun at me?" (II.62) and "Surely you wouldn't have me take this seriously?" (II.81). Owen Davis also tries to make the parodistic nature of *The Haunted House* apparent when he observes that his work should be enacted in a "satirical spirit" of "half-exaggeration" (I.13). Further to ensure that their plays remain obviously comic, playwrights often include such expected ingredients as visual humor and verbal jokes, many of which come directly from farce. *The Tavern* features such typical "sight gags" as people sticking their tongues out at those they hate and choking someone to keep him silent (I.15-16). Owen Davis uses more complicated visual comedy

that is dependent on precise timing when he has characters play a slapstick scene involving a door in *The Haunted House* (I.8). Other visual farce devices found in these dramas include slaps in the face with wet clothes (*Ramshackle*, I.15), slow takes (*The Gorilla*, I.41), double takes (*Arsenic*, I.443), and a chase through the audience (*Gorilla*, III.114). Such visual humor is at least as old as the *commedia dell'arte*; most of the verbal jokes seem scarcely any newer. Freshness in comic lines ranges from the many theatre-related comments of *Arsenic and Old Lace*¹³ to the old-and-not-so-favorites of *The Gorilla*¹⁴ and *Ramshackle Inn*.¹⁵ Effectiveness aside, verbal comedy, like the visual humor found in these parodies, marks the authors' efforts to avoid even a suggestion of seriousness.

Magnitude is yet another aspect of stage mysteries that receives the attention of comic writers. The excessive complications that dominate comedy mysteries reflect the attempts in more serious detective plays to make the problems under consideration seem more perplexing than they are. Owen Davis best parodies such artificial enhancement of magnitude when he reveals that the victim in his baffling case actually is a milk cow (III.93). Comedy writers further belittle the typical insistence that murder be the subject of investigation, because any less heinous crime would weaken a mystery's already insignificant magnitude. As has been noted earlier, people in humorous detective dramas may be murdered at the beginning without a word of explanation, thereby lampooning the supposed necessity of a murder by getting it out of the way as quickly as possible. In *The Tavern*, George M. Cohan uses a diametric approach: the play contains no deaths and few moments of even remote danger until the final minutes. As if remembering that he must include murder, Cohan provides three unnecessary deaths off stage during the denouement.¹⁶ Though his approach differs from that of other authors, Cohan's satirical comment is the same: while murder is not essential to a mystery, it has become so ingrained in the formula as an enhancer of magnitude that authors perceive it as being indispensable.

The excessive complications that serve well to parody magnitude cause problems in the matter of unity. While such confusions even function effectively to satirize the episodic and illogical qualities of many stage mysteries, complications in the parodies cause an extraordinary lack of unity even for comedies, which by their nature tend toward episodic plots. As is the case with many parodies and satires, these joking mysteries often suffer from worse instances of the faults they are belittling than do the objects of their ridicule.¹⁷ Although the reason for this flaw in comic mysteries is clear, a lack of unity need not be considered a necessary evil in parodies of mystery plays. In those infrequent examples that do not

parody excessive complication so mercilessly as do the Cohan efforts, unity of action proves far more easily achievable. Actually, the degree to which a comic play lacks unity is dependent on the particular formula being lampooned. The more unified the parent formula, the greater is the unity evidenced in its comic-mystery offspring. Therefore, a comic version of an episodic murder-house play, such as *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, presents considerably more inhibitors of unity than does a comedy like *Arsenic and Old Lace*, which has its ancestry in a more readily unifiable formula, the HIBK.

Because of their close resemblance to the parent formulas, comic mysteries also exhibit a lack of complexity, as do most of the more serious formulas. In general, these parodies possess the same degree of complexity as the formulas they are copying. Since most such parodies are of murder-house plays, they hyperbolize that pattern's usual simplicity in plot, in which startling discoveries and reversals come only in the waning moments. Cohan, who seldom misses a chance to lampoon seemingly serious mysteries, provides the best example of such eleventh-hour pseudo-complexity when he includes two late reversals in the revelation scenes of *Seven Keys to Baldpate*,¹⁸ the second peripety being more annoying, unsatisfying, and expedient than the initial one. While the first reversal seems necessary so that the author can extricate himself from an impossible situation he has created, the second serves only to mock the mystery writer's belief in the necessity of supplying just one more surprise.

Just as comic mysteries were seen to differ obviously in their degree of seriousness from standard-formula mysteries, these humorous versions also depart from serious treatments in their emotional materials. Laughter and ridicule, which serve only a secondary function in other detective plays, move in these plays to a foremost position of importance. Bafflement is present in most of these works,¹⁹ but its paramount position is greatly eroded. A sign of that difference is the fact that solutions can be handled cavalierly, as they are in *Seven Keys to Baldpate* and *The Haunted House*, without totally destroying the effectiveness of the plays in the theatre. Hate is still evoked in those instances where it would have been strong in the serious models being lampooned. In *Arsenic and Old Lace*, for example, the clearly identified evildoers, Jonathan and Dr. Einstein, remain objects of hate. A comic treatment of their deadliness, however, mitigates the hateful potential of the material significantly. Similarly, comic mysteries abound in what would ordinarily be fearful situations,²⁰ but their comic ingredients effectively negate that potential also. Violence is mitigated like that of farce, in which customarily harmful actions do not inflict pain or create physical danger. Without a real threat, there is no fear and,

consequently, no suspense. Thus, laughter and ridicule become predominant not only because of an abundance of comic incidents but also because those laughable ingredients serve to remove the ordinarily stronger but conflicting emotional materials of fear and suspense.

In their treatment of character, comic mysteries pursue the pattern of exaggeration that is so clearly evidenced in their plots. Such comic overstatement of character manifests itself in the many eccentric types that are responsible for much of the humor in these plays. Such types appear with even greater frequency than in more sober works, in keeping with the exaggeration of the more obvious features of the standard formulas. In particular abundance because of their comic potential are dumb cops. Seldom have police been so stupid, at least in the annals of fiction. In one instance they follow the tracks of a dog, which they think are a woman's footprints (*Haunted*, II.56), while on another occasion they admit to never knowing anything about the cases they try to solve (*Haunted*, II.65). The plays call for even the more intelligent officer in the traditional team to be "quite dumb" (*Gorilla*, I.25). Many other *outré* characters join the stupid law officers in these eccentric-laden dramas.

Cohan capitalizes upon the comic-mystery proclivity for whimsical characters with his mystery novelist in *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, who lives life as if it were a detective story, and with his lovable lunatics in *The Tavern*. In *The Haunted House*, Owen Davis employs a novelist who cannot separate fiction from reality. For good measure, Davis includes a policeman who is not only mentally deficient but who also faints at the sight of blood (III.92). *The Gorilla* might seem to take the prize for strangest character with its cavorting, audience-roaming ape; however, by sheer weight of numbers, *Arsenic and Old Lace* is the play most steeped in and dependent upon eccentricity of character. In addition to a phlethora of idiotic enforcers of the law, Kesselring provides old ladies who poison lonely men as a hobby, a man who believes himself to be Teddy Roosevelt, a plastic surgeon with a drinking problem, and a murderous fellow whose resemblance to Boris Karloff is a direct result of the former character's dipsomania. Even the supposedly normal Mortimer is not a model of correct behavior; presumably most theatre critics do not write their reviews on the way to the theatre in order to save time, as Mortimer does (I.444). By including such eccentrics in their plays, the authors strive through character to create much of the necessary laughter and ridicule in their comic mysteries.

Unlike character, thought and diction receive only minimal ridicule from comedy playwrights. Mockery of thought is apparent chiefly in the inclusion of pseudo-scientific explanations for a criminal's law-

breaking. In *The Haunted House*, for instance, a would-be Freudian detective talks of complexes and suppressed desires and employs psychoanalysis to restore the faculty of speech to a man who never lost it (I.38-40). Similarly, the title character in *The Gorilla* claims that his reason for murdering people stems from the fact that girls do not like to hug him because he has hairy arms (III.113). Comic mysteries also parody the use of supposedly sound reasoning to arrive at a solution. In the Owen Davis play, the detective persistently reasons from his observations in a manner worthy of Sherlock Holmes himself; unfortunately his conclusions almost always prove to be erroneous. As added material for the appearance of illogicality, the authors also employ non-sequitur thought in many of the plays. While Cohan appears to have instituted the practice in his irrational comedies, non sequiturs figure most prominently in *Arsenic and Old Lace*. The thought patterns of the Brewster sisters are as labyrinthine as any found in the entire mystery field. Their thinking often follows what might be termed an "insane logic," which is entirely consistent with the characters of the two women. For instance, the sisters explain their latest murder to their nephew in the following manner:

MORTIMER. Aunt Martha, men don't just get into window seats and die.

ABBY. No, he died first.

MORTIMER. But how?

ABBY. Mortimer, don't be so inquisitive! The gentleman died because he drank some wine with poison in it.

MORTIMER. How did the poison get in the wine?

MARTHA. We put it in wine because it's less noticeable.

When it's in tea it has a distinct odor.

MORTIMER. You put it in the wine?

ABBY. Yes. And I put Mr. Hoskins in the window seat because Dr. Harper was coming. (I.435)

Although there is an erratic trail of logic in the sisters' reasoning, none of their answers are responsive to Mortimer's questions, with the result that the sisters appear to think illogically to a presumably sane theatregoer. Less evident in these plays is any effort to derive humor from diction: comic language comes chiefly in the form of intentional use of those bad lines that occur with altogether too much frequency in more serious mysteries.²¹

Although the authors of mystery comedies fail to lampoon thought or diction as mercilessly as they do other elements, the playwrights do not overlook the strong dependency of mysteries upon sound and spectacle. Settings for these parodies occasionally rival those of the most device-filled of the parent plays. Ralph Spence employs a living room in *The Gorilla* that is riddled with as many sliding panels, hidden doorways, trap doors, and false-backed fireplaces as the set for *The Cat and the Canary*. The typical lighting of mysteries is the subject of even more obvious parody. When a murder uncharacter-

istically takes place with the lights up in *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, someone immediately insists they be extinguished for the investigation (II.863). The tendency of lighting to wane periodically in mysteries gets a comic treatment as well. When lights act erratically, they do so with a vengeance, as can be seen in the opening to *Ramshackle Inn*:

Lights go down. Patton lights match and goes to light candle. Lights flicker up. Puts match out. Starts to read again. Lights go down. Lights candle. As he begins to read by candlelight, lights come up again. As he starts to blow out candle, lights go down. (I.5)

Through that use of comic overstatement, a device ordinarily used to evoke fear becomes laughable instead. Sound receives the most ridicule in the plays that utilize a storm as the means of confinement. In no less than three of the comedies, *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, *The Tavern*, and *Ramshackle Inn*, the fierceness of the weather is heard each time someone opens an outside door. In two of the plays the noise simply sounds inordinately loud, but in *The Tavern* the storm rages so harshly that pistols fire when the door opens (I.9). Such approaches to sound and spectacle carry the method of exaggeration for comic effect through to those final two elements.

The formula for comic mysteries is the simplest of all. The creation begins with a standard formula, usually that of a murder-house mystery. Devices of parody such as exaggeration of weaknesses and eccentricities of characterization are combined with visual jokes and verbal humor to alter the seemingly serious original formula until it becomes undeniably ludicrous. The emotional statement of the play thereby shifts from fear and bafflement to laughter and ridicule. Such a simply stated, though not easily achieved, process leads to the creation of a piece of comedy that is disguised in the outward form of melodrama.

CONCLUSION

Now that the confined-mystery plays under study have been categorized and analyzed, general observations about them can be offered with some assurance. Most comments must relate, however, only to the broadest of criteria, because of the diversity found among confined mysteries. The most obvious observation holds true for all mysteries: the dramas deal with crime and criminals. In most instances murder serves as the major crime, but illegal acts ranging from blackmail to infidelity also animate the dramas. Each confined mystery poses a question to both characters and audience alike; that question (usually "Who done it?") emanates from a criminal act. The answer to that crime-related question surfaces only near the end of the mystery and ideally results from

the actions of the character who has been investigating the crime. That character, the detective, also appears in all confined mysteries. He need not be a professional investigator; he must only function as the investigating force. Beyond that general observation, variety creeps into the character of the detective as it does into most other aspects of these dramas: detectives may be professionals or amateurs, individuals or a group of people, clearly identified or ill defined. Because of such differences, further remarks about these mysteries must be couched in less general terms. Nevertheless, a brief re-examination of those areas touched upon in the initial analyses of categories reveal a few more points of similarity among the plays.

In the realm of plot, all the plays begin with an introduction of the crime and the posing of the all-important mystery question. When a play uses a late point of attack, the crime occurs at the outset and the beginning section of the drama is brief. A mystery employing an early attack has a considerably longer opening section, an attribute that allows for character development and creation of motives before the commission of the crime. The middle of a confined-mystery play commences after the discovery of a major crime and depicts a detective's search for a solution, which usually takes the form of a criminal investigation. In the details of that search, variety enters into the development scenes of such mysteries. A plethora of different conclusions follows that diversity in development. Although each of the mysteries provides its mystery question with an answer, which usually amounts to revealing the criminal, the means of doing so varies.

More commonality among all categories of confined mysteries can be found in the areas of unity, complexity, seriousness, and emotional ingredients. Confined mysteries generally lack unity of action. Furthermore, even when a play possesses a degree of unity, it may convey an impression of being episodic because of the uncertainty of where the seemingly unrelated clues lead. Complexity, like unity, usually is absent in confined mysteries. While the plays may seem complex, they actually abound in excessive complication and problems of seemingly great magnitude. Seldom do the dramas contain the major discoveries and reversals necessary for complexity, except in their final moments. Even more commonality among categories appears in the seemingly serious approach mystery playwrights take toward their crime-related materials. In general, the authors include a considerable amount of comedy to ensure that patently serious crimes will never seem too gruesome. Although the emotional ingredients usually included in these mysteries—fear, hate, suspense, bafflement, and ridicule—are alike, their importance varies greatly from one category of play to another. The least prevalent emotion is hate, which proves

difficult to achieve in mysteries since the object of hatred, the villain, is unidentified throughout most of the drama. On the other hand, when an author reveals the villain early, hate plays a particularly strong role in the emotional makeup of the play.

An extensive use of types epitomizes character treatment in all confined mysteries. Because of the importance of crime in mysteries, all characters can be grouped into categories based on their relation to the major criminal activity: each agent is either a detective, victim, suspect, or an auxiliary figure. More specific types populate each of those major categories of characters, so that a myriad of stereotypical figures appears in the body of confined mysteries. Apart from the use of types, the most pervasive aspect of character in mysteries involves the proclivity for character transformation, which occurs in all confined mysteries except those in which the author presents the criminal act as being morally justifiable.

Although thought varies from play to play and from one character in a play to another, some broad observations can be made about its use in confined mysteries as a whole. Deduction or a semblance of a deductive process permeates the overall thought in most of the dramas. All of the identified categories also abound in tangential topics that are seldom linked to the crime under investigation. Similarly, the plays often present philosophical stances on crime in general. In most confined mysteries, "Crime doesn't pay" serves as an appropriate motto; however, mysteries also advocate vigilantism with great regularity.

Diction in these mysteries is unremarkable; only in the rarest of instances does it bear noting. In procedurals, for instance, jargon adds a touch of realism to the dialogue. More noteworthy is the fact that authors display particular skill in diction only in an isolated play such as *Rope*.

Finally, some general characteristics appear in the areas of sound and spectacle. Confined mysteries employ both elements to augment the plays' mysterious and fearful qualities, the most common device for such enhancement being to extinguish the lights to hide the crime. Dependence upon sound and spectacle ranges from overt violence in recent offerings to a virtual nonexistence of traditional devices in such a drama as *Dangerous Corner*.

In addition to general observations based upon the analysis of the categories, this study as a whole suggests other comments about confined mysteries and, by extrapolation, about all mystery dramas. The ease with which the plays fit into restrictive categories and the number of commonalities among plays so grouped suggests the validity of the initial assumption of this study: that mystery plays follow prescribed formulas. That the specific formulas have not heretofore been carefully detailed in handbooks for authors

but have been tacitly understood by writers of thrillers remains an unimportant point. It is significant only that such formulas exist and that they are extremely sophisticated, as evidenced by the many details of each major, minor, and sub-formula deciphered in the body of this study.

The indisputable proof of the existence of the formulas makes it possible to attempt to explain the wide-spread popularity of mystery dramas (and of the mystery genre in general): mysteries appeal not on a single, shallow level, as is postulated by denigrators of detective fiction, but on at least two levels, one of which is quite sophisticated dramatically. To relatively naïve audiences, any mystery works either as a melodramatic adventure focusing on a heroic detective's search for a villain or as a simple intellectual puzzle. To a more blasé theatre-goer unimpressed by excessive bloodletting and facile solutions to life's problems, a mystery play offers an opportunity to respond to expert dramatic craftsmanship. The sophisticated audience member can perceive the problems inherent in writing within the strict confines of a formula. Furthermore, he can appreciate the skill of the dramatist in lending his own originality so that his play, while conforming to a familiar formula, appears to have a dramatic identity of its own. The ability of the mystery to enthrall both those people unfamiliar with its formulas and those who know the formulas all too well serves as at least one reason for the genre's phenomenal success on the stage.

This study has also led to some insights into the writing of plays according to formulas. Such playwrighting is, of course, nothing new. Melodrama, the larger dramatic form to which mysteries belong, can itself be viewed as a kind of super-formula that has experienced changes in details over the centuries. Obviously, works by classical writers of melodrama such as Euripides and Seneca differ from plays by Renaissance practitioners such as Shakespeare and Marlowe. In turn, the melodramas of the latter authors show marked contrast to their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century descendants, the plays of Kotzebue and Pixérécourt. Formula became the watchword in the last century as Scribe and his disciple Sardou worked their own variations on Pixérécourt, elevated the *pièce bien faite* to a position of pre-eminence, and made playwrighting more a science than an art. The twentieth century has continued the pattern of change by replacing the too obviously mechanical melodramas of the preceding hundred years with new approaches such as mystery plays.

The evolution of confined mysteries from 1913 to 1970 appears to have been a microcosmic version of those changes that had previously occurred in the super-formula of melodrama over two millennia. Formulas become too familiar with overuse, and new

directions must be sought. Seldom do they come in the form of completely new patterns. Instead, variations in the older formulas lead gradually to fresher approaches. In just that way, remarkably original but formula-based mysteries such as *Arsenic and Old Lace* and *Sleuth* have appeared on the stage. Mystery plays rejuvenate their form through variation rather than through wholesale departure from the older ways, in much the same manner that melodrama as a whole has retained its vitality in the theatre since its inception centuries ago.

Notes

- George M. Cohan, *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, in *10 Classic Mystery and Suspense Plays*, ed. Stanley Richards (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1973), pp. 797-887. Further references to this play will be noted in the text.
- It should be remembered that even macabre psychological thrillers such as Patrick Hamilton's *Rope* contain moments of humor.
- George M. Cohan, *The Tavern* (New York: Samuel French, 1920). Further references to this play will be noted in the text.
- Owen Davis, *The Haunted House* (New York: Samuel French, 1926). Further references to this play will be noted in the text.
- Ralph Spence, *The Gorilla*, revised ed. (New York: Samuel French, 1950). Further references to this play will be noted in the text.
- George Batson, *Ramshackle Inn*, revised ed. (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1944). Further references to this play will be noted in the text.
- Joseph Kesselring, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, in *Best Mystery and Suspense Plays of the Modern Theatre* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1971), pp. 409-508. Further references to this play will be noted in the text.
- William E. Over, in "The Rehearsal and Its Place in the Development of English Burlesque Drama in the Seventeenth Century," *Diss. Ohio State* 1975, p. 242, defines parody as "The high burlesque of a particular work (or author) achieved by applying the style of that work (or author) to a less worthy subject (or author)." At its simplest, parody is merely a humorous imitation of a serious writing. It is said to change sense to nonsense or, to use more Aristotelian terminology, seriousness to ludicrousness.
- Though Cohan inserts these lines in the middle of his play, the speech is clearly derivative of the rapid early exposition of murder-house mysteries.
- Only a single instance of each device has been noted. Actually most of these details occur repeatedly in the six plays. For example, the favorite use of an insane or mentally troubled individual occurs in all the plays except *The Haunted House* and *Ramshackle Inn*.
- One other mystery device complicates comic mysteries almost exclusively: a vanishing corpse or "busy body," as it was labeled by Donald E. Westlake in the title of one of his comic mystery novels. What would ordinarily be a loathsome, repugnant object becomes a comic prop instead. The humorous use of a corpse in stage mysteries begins with *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, in which a body disappears and then reappears toward the end of the drama (II.871), and continues in most of the comic mysteries. Usually authors display their inventiveness by providing variations on the *Baldpate* approach, as in *Ramshackle Inn*, in which the body is placed in a sack for easier handling (II.57). A bagged body also appears in *The Gorilla*; however, the person stuffed therein is merely unconscious (III.96). In *The Haunted House*, the originality lies in the fact that the corpse has vanished so completely that no one ever sees it (III.93). Joseph Kesselring is particularly dexterous in *Arsenic and Old Lace*: he provides two bodies, which arrangement enables the characters transporting the corpses to play a game of musical graves (II.461). Whether a busy body is dead or alive, mobile or nonexistent, bagged or unencumbered, it serves as one of the few complicating features that are unique to comic mysteries.

One of the few confined mysteries not categorized as a comedy that employs a busy body is Agatha Christie's *Spider's Web*. The use of the device in that drama does much to make it one of the most amusing of Christie's many tongue-in-cheek mysteries.

- For example, George Batson warns about the body in *Ramshackle Inn*. He includes the prohibition that the corpse "should not be too realistic" (II.54). He fully realizes that even a remotely human body carted about the stage can easily become grisly; therefore, he cautions against exceeding perilously close limits of unseriousness.

- "Why, Mortimer [the critic] hates the theatre. . . . He writes awful things about the theatre. You can't blame him, poor boy. He was so happy writing about real estate, which he really knew something about, and then they just made him take this terrible night position" (I.420-21).

- Included in *The Gorilla*'s aging repertoire of jokes is the following hilarity about people ministering to an unconscious friend:

ALICE. Mr. Garrity, do you think a drink of brandy would help?

GARRITY. It might. (Takes brandy, gulps it down and hands glass back to Alice) Thanks. (II.59)

- The author assures the reader that the following will get a laugh: "If I'd known I was leaving a jackass in charge, I might just as well stayed myself" (II.61). He makes no guarantees, however, about his less original witticisms such as "I've always hated the sight of blood—especially my own" (III.71).

- The following exchange includes the reference to the triple slaying:

STEVENS. Who were those two men doing all the shooting out there?

FREEMAN. Officers of the Law. . . .

STEVENS. Why did they shoot and kill the man who just left the tavern?

FREEMAN. They killed him! William is dead!

STEVENS. Dead as a door nail. . . .

GOVERNOR. They'll hang for this.

STEVENS. No, they won't. I shot and killed them both.

(II.90)

- Parodies or satires in mystery form are not alone in this regard. For example, Terry Southern and Mason Hoffenberg claim to have set out to satirize the ridiculousness of modern pornographic novels in their creation, *Candy*. The novel became one of the biggest sellers in the 1960s, not because it was brilliant satire, but because it contained excessive versions of the material that had made the objects of its derision so popular; therefore, *Candy* was one of the most pornographic novels on the market.

- The first reversal reveals that none of the prior events have been real. They have been staged by a group of actors hired by the novelist's friend to distract the author from writing (II.883). The second reversal discloses that even that explanation is not true. All of the events, including the first explanation, are part of a novel (Epilogue.885-87).

- Arsenic and Old Lace* does not read heavily on bafflement. Its absence results not from the fact that the play is a comedy, but instead comes from the drama's being patterned after the HIBK formula, which has little bafflement in its serious versions as well.

- Such fearful materials are not included because they are necessary for the creation of comedy; they instead stem from the ingredients of the formulas being parodied.

- The best example occurs in *The Tavern*:

VIOLET. You can't frighten me. I'll have my revenge if I have to bound you to the end of your days.

VAGABOND. By gad, I never heard the line read better.

(II.62)

CURRENT REVIEWS

The Rasp by Philip MacDonald. Dover, 1979. 278pp. \$3.50

Another one of Dover's resurrected Golden Age classics, *The Rasp* is great fun to read and impossible to take seriously. The plot concerns the murder of a cabinet minister on a weekend in his country manor, a frequent occurrence in Golden Age mysteries. The rasp of the title does not refer to a suspect's voice but to the weapon, a woodrasp, a file used in carpentry and, in the case of this book, to beat the victim's head in. MacDonald's starring sleuth, who is introduced in this novel, is Anthony Gethryn, artist, poet, former spy, and journalist, who has an ego second only to Philo Vance's. Gethryn is equal to the challenge of red herrings and unbreakable alibis, but succumbs to the charms of one of the lovelier suspects, a neighboring widow, who swam a quarter-mile to the scene of the crime on the night of the murder. She is further implicated in the crime by her deranged brother, the former secretary of the victim, and her sister, who is engaged to the victim's Wodehousean secretary, an even more likely suspect. Needless to say, Gethryn brings the case to an ingenious, although somewhat unlikely, conclusion, with a solution involving the butler's hay fever and the strength of certain climbing vines.

— M. S. Cappadonna

* * * * *

Murder and Magic by Randall Garrett. Ace Books, 1979. [vi] + 266pp.

Back in 1967, Doubleday published Randall Garrett's *Too Many Magicians* (later published in paperback by Curtis Books, no date; in 1978 reprinted in hardcover by G. K. Hall, with a good introduction by Sandra Miesel; and reprinted in paperback in 1979 by Ace Books). The title is a deliberate echo of several Rex Stout titles—*Too Many Cooks*, "Too Many Detectives," and *Too Many Clients*—and one of the characters in the novel is an imitation of Nero Wolfe, the Marquis of London who "makes a hobby of cultivating rare and exotic herbs," just as Lord Bontriohmpe is a third-person version of Archie Goodwin. The Marquis's office is described—with its painting of a waterfall and a large globe—in Chapter III. (The locked-room plot has a greater parallel to a certain John Dickson Carr novel than to any by Stout.) I read the novel in 1971 primarily for its imitation of Stout.

The new book—the one being reviewed—is a collection of four novelettes or short stories: "The Eyes Have It" (magazine publication in 1964), "A Case of Identity" (1964), "The Muddle of the Wood" (1965), and "A Stretch of Imagination" (anthology, 1973). Two of these stories are referred to in a conversation in the second chapter of the novel.

These stories and this novel are examples of the alternate-history genre, where one or more events in the past are different than in real history—and their repercussions influence the story's background. (A recent example is Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration*.) In Garrett's fiction, the change is that Richard the Lion-Hearted survived the crusade in which he was actually killed, and established an Anglo-French Empire which still exists. Instead of science developing as it has in the real world, magic (which means primarily types of ESP) has been regularized under Church control. (Only a relatively few people have the Talent to be magicians.) But the stories are mystery puzzles in which, while the magic can develop clues and prove or disprove hypotheses, the final puzzle must be put together by Lord Darcy, Chief Investigator for His Royal Highness, Richard of Normandy. (Lord Darcy also functions in the novel, despite the use of the Nero and Archie figures.)

Obviously, these stories are exotic in background, but they are firmly within the detective story genre. (They are not even as outrageous to the conventions as Carr's *The Burning Court*.) "The Eyes Have It," for example, reports the investigation of the murder of an amorous nobleman in his bedroom. There is a red herring of another nobleman who practices black magic and his wife who has taken the murder gun to the bedchamber. But the identity of the murderer is fairly clued by two pieces of information in the body of the story. The title delightfully refers to a bit of hoary misinformation in the detective genre—that the murdered man's eyes retain the image of the murderer—which does work in this magical world; but even this gambit is misleading, when the picture is developed, in this story.

In "A Case of Identity," Lord Darcy investigates the disappearance of the Marquis of Cherbourg, who had been having curious mental lapses before he finally vanishes. Part of the problem is that he is missing from a castle which was locked up on the night of the disappearance. The case is complicated by the death (and apparent murder by blunt instrument) of a double for the Marquis, a simple-

mind workman named Paul Sarto, who is discovered on a street in January clad only in an expensive cape. (An echo of Ellery Queen's *The Spanish Cape Mystery*?) The plot involves foreign intrigue, for the King of Poland (that is, of much of eastern Europe, including some of Russia) has been sending spies into the Angevin Empire, and some of the Empire's ships to the New World have been vanishing *in transit*; the missing Marquis, along with an agent of His Majesty's Secret Service who is also missing, had been investigating this "Atlantic curse" which was scaring sailors off of ships intended to cross to New England (North America) or New France (South America). Lord Darcy not only finds out what has happened to the Marquis and the secret agent, and how Paul Sarto died, and who was the traitor inside the Marquis's castle, but also what has been causing the loss of ships. The final confrontation scene, and the fairly-clued puzzle of the story, is directed at the identity of the traitor in the castle.

"The Muddle of the Wood" (a delightful pun!) begins with the discovery of the nude body of Lord Camberton, Chief Investigator for the Duchy of Kent, in a wooden coffin which has been prepared for the dying Duke of Kent—Lord Camberton's body has been covered, head to toe, with wood, a blue dye worn by the Celts in pre-Anglo-Saxon Britain when they went into battle. This suggests a connection, either true or diversionary, with the Holy Society of Ancient Albion, a secret group trying to revive ancient English practices, including a sacrifice of the king every seven years. Part of the original problem for Lord Darcy is how the body was brought into the cabinetmaker's workshop when all of its entrances were protected by spells (a type of locked-room puzzle in reverse). Soon Lord Darcy has other problems: Lady Anne, the daughter of the deceased Duke of Kent (he dies just before the story proper begins), tells the investigator that she saw Lord Camberton return to her father's castle (Lord Camberton had been on "vacation" in Scotland) late one night a week before his death—and that he had been carrying a green cloak at the time (a hooded green cloak is worn by the leaders of the Holy Society of Ancient Albion); further, after his body was found, she discovered a fragment of green cloth in the remains of a fire in an empty room in the castle. This information leaves another question: where had Lord Camberton—or his corpse—been between the eleventh of May when he returned to Castle Canterbury and the eighteenth when his body was discovered? (Magic could have prevented decay in the body during the period, if he were dead.)

I will not go further through the plot except for three points. Investigation in Scotland (reported to Lord Darcy) shows that Lord Camberton had been checking on the back-



ground of the Duchess of Kent and her brother—was this for purposes of blackmail, or for some other reason? The solution of the mystery turns out to be one of those multiple solutions, like those which Anthony Boucher was fond of in his Nick Noble short stories—that is, in this case, one person was the murderer, and another, not an intentional accomplice, was involved in the cover-up. Even the reason for the woad is fairly clear.

The final story, "A Stretch of the Imagination," is a short story, while the others are novelettes; thus the plot is simpler than the others. Indeed, it is a fairly straightforward locked-room puzzle. Lord Arlen, owner and head of a publishing house, was in the practice of taking a nap in his office during the afternoon. During one of these periods, while three of his staff are in the outer office, a peculiar thump is heard. Lord Arlen is soon discovered, with a rope knotted around his neck, hanging from a beam in his office; a chair is overturned close to his feet. Lord Darcy soon notices that, although Lord Arlen's larynx is crushed, his fall from the chair is not enough to have done it. So it was murder, despite the fact that the single door to the office was under observation and the window to the office could not be opened more than six inches at the top and bottom. This story is more artificial than the others, since it depends on such things as the height of Lord Arlen's chair (the one at his desk, not the visitor's chair overturned by his hanging feet) and the fact that he was afraid of sharp instruments and allowed none in his office or nearby rooms. But it hardly can be said to be more artificial than many of John Dickson Carr's novels; in short, it is like a Golden Age puzzle in which, if the reader will accept the curious restrictions (such as the height of the chair) as givens, then the solution meets the conditions established.

I have not said everything which could be noted about these stories. For example, I have not described Master Sean O Lochlainn, the Irish sorcerer who aids Lord Darcy in these investigations. But I have said enough to indicate their appeal to one section of the mystery-reading public—to those fans of the Gothic puzzles of John Dickson Carr, or such oddly-backgrounded puzzle-novels as those of Peter Dickinson, or such science-fiction puzzles as the three novelettes in *The Long Arm of Giles Hamilton* by Larry Nivens; to these readers, Randall Garrett's puzzles will be great fun.

— Joe R. Christopher

* * * * *

Beams Falling: The Art of Dashiell Hammett by Peter Wolfe. Bowling Green University Popular Press. \$6.95

To begin with, let's understand that author Wolfe knows his subject. Furthermore, in prose sometimes as spare and succinct as that of his subject, he brings that knowledge to his readers. No pedantry here. This book never quite lapses into the Freudian mumbo jumbo and far-fetched dubious analysis of many such works. If you disagree with some of Wolfe's often refreshing and revealing observations, read on. He will convince you. His quote from *House Dick* is typical of the sort

of valuable ore he diligently mines from Hammett's work:

"From any crime to its author there is a trail. It may be...obscure; but, since matter cannot move without disturbing other matter along its path, there always is—there must be—a trail of some sort. And finding and following such trails is what a detective is paid to do." It might be said that from any book to its author there is a trail. And finding and following such trails is what a literary critic is paid to do, and Wolfe does it very well indeed.

He sees through the surface ripples of the best of the mystery genre to the meaningful deep currents below. His book therefore is both sensitive to and appreciative of the deceptive simplicity and parable strength of Hammett's prose. *Beams Falling* explores with sharply focused insight the career of the *Black Mask* magazine pulp writer who has come to be acknowledged as a major American author. (The title is from a peripheral Hammett character named Flicraft who, after being shaken by the near miss of a deadly falling beam, drastically rearranges his life only to find himself eventually back in the same sort of rut in a different locale... "He adjusted himself to beams falling, and then no more of them fell, and he adjusted himself to them not falling.")

From the early short stories through the adroit, evasive *The Thin Man*, Wolfe explains how this pioneer of mystery fiction extended the boundaries of his art to bring to the detective novel the status of literature. Hammett knew that entertainment and art were not at all incompatible, as Wolfe realizes that literary criticism need not necessarily be a plodding excursion into the esoteric and unprovable. This particular critic, a literature professor at the University of Missouri, suits his subject, and the result is a scholarly yet very enjoyable book.

Wolfe is at his best during the section on what many regard as Hammett's finest piece of work, the classic *The Maltese Falcon*. He recognizes and describes for us the essence of detective Sam Spade's enduring appeal: "Alive to surfaces, weights, and measures—the thinginess of things—he knows how to handle physical substances. His ability to search an apartment, roll a cigarette, or slide a key into a lock noiselessly makes him a master of perceptible reality." And he isolates and identifies the true basis of fascination in the novel: "The action the novel describes matters less than the reactions—professional and moral—it provokes..."

If you have read Hammett, you will find this book especially intriguing and illuminating. But its real value lies in the fact that if you haven't read Hammett, it will send you scurrying to the nearest bookstore or library.

—John Lutz

* * * * *

The Three Coffins by John Dickson Carr. With a new introduction by Joan Kahn. Gregg Press, 1979. 306pp. \$9.95

In a recent issue of *Collecting Paperbacks?* (May 1980), Lloyd Busch points out that "John Dickson Carr is the only writer to be

represented in all the major paperback mystery series: the Dell Great Mystery Library (both series), the Avon Crime Classics, the Green Door Mysteries, and the Collier Crime Classics." Carr is also becoming well-represented in the various hardback reprints of detective classics. The Mystery Library includes a fine edition of Carr's *The Crooked Hinge* with important critical and bibliographical material by R. E. Briny. Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor cannot be accounted Carr's greatest enthusiasts, but they reprinted one of his short stories in the volume leading off their Garland series. The first twenty volumes of Ellery Queen's massive short-story anthology, *Masterpieces of Mystery*, contain seven Carr stories. To this list we can now add the Gregg Press edition of Carr's classic *The Three Coffins*, with a perceptive and witty introduction by Joan Kahn. Miss Kahn was for many years Carr's editor at Harper & Row, though, as she admits, Carr never allowed anyone to edit his works.

The Three Coffins has long been one of Carr's most popular books about Dr. Gideon Fell, but perhaps not for the reason most frequently given. Although Gregg Press says that the novel is "still celebrated as the best of the locked room mysteries," by Carr's own standards it does not approach some of his other locked-room stories. Carr said that "the perfect impossible situation... would be one who secret could be explained in four or five lines." The explanation of the central impossibility of *The Three Coffins*, however, is so complex that Carr had to provide a diagram. The solution can hardly be considered "fair" in the sense that a normal reader has any opportunity of guessing it before the detective. In addition, I doubt that the locked-room gimmick would have worked; at least it was absolutely insane of the criminal to have counted on its success. Carr's most effective locked-room/miracle problems depend on subtle misdirection and astonishingly simple (and convincing) explanations. In Carr's great opus, we might point out as high spots the locked room in that late flower, *The House at Satan's Elbow* (1965), and that literally sealed room in *He Wouldn't Kill Patience* (1944). For sheer ingenuity, *Fatal Descent* (1939), written in collaboration with John Rhode, is probably unsurpassed. The miracle problems in *The White Priory Murders* (1934) and *The Curse of the Bronze Lamp* (1945) are mystifying but convincing. Compared with such books, *The Three Coffins* seems clumsy and mechanical.

The Three Coffins, I think, should be celebrated not so much for its locked room as for the fact that it is superbly told. It begins not in *media res* but as though the book is told by a raconteur regaling an audience: "To the murder of Professor Grimaud, and later the equally incredible crime in Cagliostro Street, many fantastic terms could be applied—with reason." What follows, Carr implies, is first and foremost a story, and a fantastic one at that. We see the events primarily through the eyes of a young American who supplies the anglophile warmth so characteristic of the young Carr. The mood of the story is set by the contrast between the

coziness of English townhouses, pubs, indeed of England itself, and the terror of violent, perhaps supernatural crime. Dr. Fell's library at Number 1 Adelphi Terrace is filled with "roaring good-humour" with "firelight moving on crooked walls of books." Fell's famous locked-room lecture is delivered during "that lazy, replete hour of a winter afternoon when the fire is most comfortable and snowflakes begin to sift past the windows." The walls are covered with "armour and armorial bearings." This warmth is contrasted with the terrors of the past, of the victim who came from Transylvania and is writing a book on *The Origin and History of Middle-European Superstitions*, of the three coffins themselves, and the final horrors of two seemingly supernatural murders. What does it matter that the solution is a bit of a let-down? The book is still one of the Carr triumphs.

A final word about the quality of this Gregg Press reprint. The word is: superb. The photo-facsimile from the 1935 first edition is very fine, though the adding of new page numerals to Joan Kahn's introduction botches up the pagination of the original preliminary material. The book is bound in full cloth and sewn in signatures, unlike most books from larger publishers which are bound in cheap paper-covered boards and glued together in what is misleadingly called "perfect" binding. In these days of rising prices and lowering quality, Gregg deserves praise.

— Douglas G. Greene

* * * * *

Aristotle Detective by Margaret Doody.
Harper & Row, 1980. 278pp. \$10.95

Poet John Keats once wrote an ode in which he imagined the "cold pastoral" world

of figures frozen in motion upon an old Grecian urn. Novelist Margaret Doody has surpassed the poet by bringing back to life the warmblooded inhabitants of ancient Athens.

Set in 332 a.c., during the heyday of Alexander (the Great) of Macedonia, *Aristotle Detective* is a beguiling blend of classical ritual, noble rhetoric, and murder most foul.

These storytelling elements were not unknown to the Greeks themselves, as playwright Sophocles once demonstrated by making a sleuth out of a clue-obsessed monarch named Oedipus; but until now, no one has thought of conferring the distinction of detective upon Aristotle, king of Grecian philosophers.

Why Aristotle? For one thing, the classical mystery story has always been optimistic about the triumph of mind over murder, confident that the powers of human reason and ratiocination are sufficient to prevail over the forces of evil.

It is fitting that Doody's detective hero should be a master reasoner, a sublime logician; what is surprising is that her Aristotle is also a warmly appealing and oddly comforting human being, a wise man who knows all, but prefers not to tell us everything he knows until the opportune moment. His patient strategy spins the plot of this richly authentic journey into antiquity.

No mere thinking machine, the philosopher offers the resources of his generous heart and mind to young Stephanos, an ex-pupil badly in need of a fatherly hand.

Family honor has compelled the youth to undertake the investigation of a puzzling crime. Boutades, a leading Athenian citizen, has been discovered with an arrow in his throat. A botheaded cousin is immediately accused, and the burden of proving his

innocence is too heavy a burden for Stephanos to carry alone. Aristotle's assistance is invoked to read the clues, untangle the web of deception, and elicit the true facts in the case.

"The work of the mind is the best and most effective remedy against evil that mortals are given," the master counsels his student sleuth. "Let your mind enter the game."

Athenian detection does indeed become a game of the mind, played suspensefully for the high stakes of saving a life, avenging a death, and restoring the good name of a family under suspicion of offending the gods.

The philosopher promptly sets his eager apprentice in motion, and keeps him moving (sometimes in mysterious ways) until the youth is ready to come into his own during the dramatic trial scene which concludes the novel with the kind of legal fireworks unknown even in a Perry Mason courtroom.

The detection game is played out in the sacred temples, crowded marketplaces, and mean streets of a city which Doody evokes with such exceptional fidelity and loving familiarity that readers may be tempted to wonder whether the author keeps a time machine parked beside her typewriter.

Seldom has "the glory that was Greece" been rendered with greater wit and zest, or with a surer sense of the entertainment value implicit in the classical tradition. Doody's finger is laid unerringly upon the pulsebeat of the distant past, but she also has the gift of keeping today's reader entertained throughout the course of a narrative whose highest virtue is that it makes history as much fun as mystery. In both areas, Doody's detective work is impeccable.

— Howard Lachtman

BOUCHERCON XI

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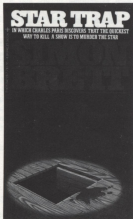
THE PAPERBACK REVOLUTION

CHARLES ALVERSON

San Francisco private eye Joe Goody travels to Monterey, and enters a commune in order to investigate the death of a young girl with a drug problem for her insurance executive grandfather in *Not Sleeping, Just Dead* (1977) (Playboy Press). It's straightforward in its telling, far from predictable, and very entertaining.

SIMON BRETT

Charles Paris lands a minor role in a musical play that is destined to make a star of Christopher Milton, its leading man, in *Star Trap* (1977) (Berkley). But there's a bit more to it. Charles has also been hired (after a few minor accidents) for his sleuthing prowess—and then the misfortunes accelerate.



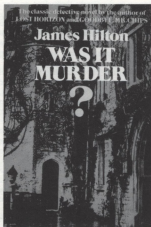
MICHAEL COLLINS

The mugging of a policeman, the murder of a showgirl, and the disappearance of a neighborhood boy who might have been a witness are the ingredients that propel *Act of Fear* (1967) (Playboy Press) to its violent conclusion. This is an extremely harsh and often effective hard-boiled private eye story that seems marred only by excessive introspection on the part of its one-armed protagonist, Dan Fortune.

CARROLL JOHN DALY

We have heard so much about Hammett, Chandler, and Ross Macdonald that it is a welcome relief to introduce this once incredibly popular pioneer of the first person, hard-boiled detective story. Most of Daly's work falls far short of the abovementioned illustrious triumvirate, but *Murder from the East* (1935) (International Polygenics) is an unpretentious, fast-moving, action-filled Race Williams private eye novel in the best pulp tradition. An introductory note is helpful in placing Daly and Williams in proper historical perspective.

By Charles Shibuk



JAMES HILTON

Was It Murder? (1931) (Dover) is listed in Sandoe's "Readers' Guide to Crime," and was recently reprinted in Barzun and Taylor's "Fifty Classics of Crime Fiction" series. Hilton's own opinion of it was rather low. I personally find this British detective story with its academic setting to be a much more than competent work, and certainly worth your time and attention.

RICHARD HULL

I don't know which is the more repellent; the odious Edward or his equally detestable aunt whom he unsuccessfully keeps trying to murder. I do know that the classic *The Murder of My Aunt* (1934) (International Polygenics) is a superb work—inclusive, witty, and ironic—and a very high point in the history of the inverted form.

PETER LOVESEY

The beautiful Miriam Cromer has conspired to poisoning her husband's photographic assistant who had been blackmailing her, and is sentenced to death. A photograph then turns up casting serious doubt on her guilt, and Detective-Sergeant Cribb is summoned to investigate in *Waxwork* (1978) (Penguin). This ingenious Victorian detective novel (set in 1888) represents Lovesey at the very top of his form.

PHILIP MACDONALD

Colonel Anthony Gethryn's investigation of the murder of a cabinet minister in *The Rasp* (1924) (Dover) marked a notable and highly-acclaimed debut to some critics—but not for this reviewer. MacDonald, who did not often repeat himself, would go on to write better detective stories, but here is where it all began. (Note: this edition appears more complete than the reprint of a decade ago.)

CHARLOTTE MACLEOD

The Family Vault (1979) (Avon), located in the exclusive Beacon Hill section of Boston, is opened in preparation for a forthcoming interment, but an unauthorized skeleton is the signal for further examples of violence, blackmail, and fraud. This is an attractive, literate, often charming story, knowingly designed to appeal to a feminine audience.

NGAIO MARSH

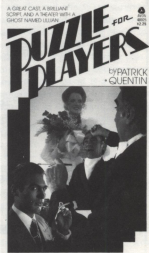
A welcome and pleasurable reminder of the golden age of the detective story is *Grave Mistake* (1978) (Jove). It's set in the small English village of Upper Quinterm and commences with the apparent suicide of one of its most distinguished inhabitants, who is temporarily residing at a nearby rest home. Firmly plotted, well and warmly characterized, and appealing throughout, it's Miss Marsh's best performance in many years.

BARONESS ORCZY

The dearth of short story collections reviewed here is now alleviated by a major work: *The Man in the Corner* (1909) (International Polygenics). This *Queen's Quorum* selection features reporter Polly Burton describing baffling mysteries to an eccentric sleuth in a tea shop, with the latter unraveling them along with the intricate knots in a piece of string he holds in his hands. This is armchair detection in the classic tradition, and there's a major surprise in the ultimate chapter.

PATRICK QUENTIN

Theatrical producer Peter Duluth's attempt to stage a comeback on Broadway is hindered by a series of disquieting apparitions and incidents in an apparently jinxed theater in



Puzzle for Players (1938) (Avon). There are also going to be two corpses—with the promise of more to come in one of the better entries from the Duluth series.

The later *Puzzle for Puppets* (1944) (Avon) presents Duluth as a naval lieutenant enjoying wartime leave with his glamorous wife, Iris, in one of San Francisco's most luxurious hotels. Romance and tranquility are shattered by murder, and the Duluths, who have become the chief suspects, are forced to evade pursuit in such diverse locales as world-famous Chinatown and behind the scenes of a nearby circus.

ROBERT VAN GULIK

The fascinating era of 7th-century China serves as a vivid and intriguing background for the exploits of Judge Dee—an authentic

great detective in the classic tradition. *The Chinese Gold Murders* (1959) shows Dee assuming a new position as magistrate while investigating the murder of his predecessor. *The Chinese Lake Murders* (1960) concerns a few violent deaths and a plot to overthrow the empire. Both are published by the University of Chicago Press.

DILYS WINN

Murderer Ink (Workman Publishing Co., 1979) is the distaff sequel to the highly acclaimed *Murder Ink*. Lavishly illustrated, its wide range covers nearly everything, and includes articles by many famed mystery writers. It's an engaging mixture of the serious and informative that neatly contrasts with the idea that murder can be great fun and games.



PAPER CRIMES

By Fred Dueren

Cold Moon Over Babylon by Michael McDowell. Avon, 1980.

In a moody, sultry work set in the backwoods of the Florida panhandle, McDowell presents the story of the Larkin family. Jim and JoAnn were the first ones to die in the River Styx, bitten by rattlesnakes found in a croker sack while fishing. Fourteen years later their daughter is attacked and drowned in the river. Now the Larkins (or the river?) want revenge. Ghostly shapes appear to several prominent citizens of the town; river sludge and sand are the fleeting evidences of what could be fantasies. A killer is revealed soon enough, but his flight from the horrors that pursue him makes for goose-fleshy reading.

Angel in the Snow by Patricia Welles. Pocket Books, 1980.

Suburban Detroit provides the background for a taut crime tale of the kidnapping of Johanna Miller. Arthur Wetzel, a successful lawyer, and his slow-minded lover, Billy-Boy, form a frighteningly amoral pair. Johanna is the fifth child they've taken. The first four were made to watch their sex acts (Welles shies away from the brutal realism of involving the children in that) and then killed and buried in the snow. Characterizations of Billy-Boy and of the young couple who eventually lead to the downfall of the kidnapers are one of the novel's strongpoints. The other is a driving, suspenseful story line.

Death of a Scavenger by Keith Spore. Belmont Tower, 1980.

Dr. Hugo Enclave is a modern-day Sherlock Holmes. He makes no secret of his admiration for the Master and openly copies his way of

life, but avoids publicity. Sgt. James Foote of the Washington, D.C. police becomes Enclave's Watson when he seeks Enclave's help. Foote's puzzle is the murder of Harland Rockmore during an innocent-seeming scavenger hunt among the affluent suburban set. But what starts out as a "simple" impossible crime quickly changes to intrigue and political maneuvering. Spore writes his own version of Watergate with even more fancy footwork than the original. Enclave's solution is admirable, but his condescension and omniscience make him less than endearing. A little streamlining and less conflict between detectives would have raised *Scavenger* above a

merely acceptable work.

The Floating Admiral by Detection Club Members. Charter Books, 1932.

Charter Books has done the mystery fan a genuine favor in reprinting *The Floating Admiral* even if it plays up to the names of Christie, Sayers and Chesterton. The book itself is, for the most part, cohesive and enjoyable, but also episodic. The low points are slow chapters by Sayers, Crofts and Knox. The plot involves the death of Admiral Penstone, found in a boat on the River Whyn. Inspector Rudge pulls off a trick or two while questioning, and trying to keep up with, his suspects. The suspects are the Vicar, the local retired knighted merchant, an old fisherman, the deceased's niece, and her forceful suitor, among others. Anthony Berkeley's final summing up and tying down of loose ends is a masterful job, deserving an award by itself.

Just Desserts by Tim Heald, Ballantine, 1979.

Simon Bognor's position as an inept spy with the English Board of Trade provides opportunities for varied mystery backgrounds. This time his liking for food opens the door for his investigations into the death of Scoff Smith, renowned chef of the Dour Dragon. But Simon is no match for the beautiful people of international haute cuisine. Nor, apparently, for the gang of waiters and hotel operators who provide an information service of who's going where with whom to the highest bidder. The plot is rather aimless, but a humorous muddle, until Simon triumphantly meddles in too many areas, bringing



the case to a quick conclusion.

Death Dreams by William Katz. Ballantine Books, 1979.

When Crista Spalding's daughter Jennifer drowned in the lake, Crista's horrors were just beginning. Soon after, she was hit by a car and her injuries caused clinical death for over 16 minutes. But Crista came back from "death" and began telling of visits from the other side. Her world fell apart—her husband thought she was crazy, the doctors wouldn't believe her visits. Then one night Jenny told her mother how she died. . . . Katz has concocted one of the most compelling novels in years. The question whether Crista is in contact with the dead or a victim of delusions is held in delicate balance. The other characters, Dr. Hamilton, a well-known psychologist, Larry Birch, a probing reporter, and Marie Neuberger, an aged, unorthodox physician, are finely drawn to add tension and frustration. The ending drops a bit, but it's still a book not to be missed.

Public Murders by Bill Granger. Jove Books, 1980.

Two young blondes raped and killed in Chicago's Grant Park on hot summer mornings set off this crime procedural. Various members of the homicide squad and the prosecutor's office, none of them too likeable, wander in and out, mixing their private lives, politics and the murder investigation. About halfway through, porno star Bonnie Brighton is also killed, and the plot starts to come together. Focusing on detective Terry Flynn and policewoman Karen Kovac, Granger provides some competent detection, realism in police work and a grabbing finish that pits the killer against his fate.

The Cellar by Richard Laymon. Warner Books, 1980.

A chilling prologue introduces the "Beast House," an old mansion where a monster of some sort lives on whoever enters the house after dark. The scene switches then to Donna Hayes, who, with her 12-year-old daughter, is on the run from her husband Roy. He's just been released from prison for raping his daughter and is out for revenge. Meanwhile, two more protagonists are returning to the Beast House to kill the beast. Alternating and intertwining these strands produces a gripping descent into gory suspense and loathsome brutality. Only the two-page epilogue, which almost comes out as a joke, mars this crime/horror tale.

The Lair by Louis Charbonneau. Fawcett Gold Medal, 1979.

Worthy of Helen MacInnes, the lair is, in fact, the Mexican hideout of an old Nazi S.S. officer, Ernst von Schoenwald. By unhappy chance, Jeff Blanchard's son, Mike, recognizes Darrell Kinny, one of Jeff's army buddies who disappeared near the end of WWII. Threatened with exposure of Kinny's alliance with von Schoenwald and their hoard of stolen treasure, the evil pair kidnap Mike, setting off a compelling chase and suspenseful novel. A bit of romance, a mini-travelogue of Mexico and characters that bring out hate, compassion and fear combine with skill and ease. If there is any flaw in the retelling of Jeff's attempts to recover his son, it's a delay in explaining some of the subplots. But that's

a minor point and should not hold anyone back from an enjoyable read.

Trigger Lady by Phyllis Swan. Leisure Books, 1979.

A disappointing characterization, Anna J., the private eye of *Trigger Lady*, does not add anything to the ranks of female investigators. Anna and everyone else seems more interested in her sex life (which is non-existent due to a rape incident when she was thirteen) than in her ability to investigate crime. For that matter, there's little crime to investigate. Anna is hired by ex-gangster Leopold Shasta to act as his bodyguard at the first high-society affair he's invited to after going legit. Most of the book involves the buildup to the ball, followed by a fast explosion when an attempt is made on Shasta's life. I hope Anna's third case, *The Death Inheritance*, will present her in better light.

Smart Money Doesn't Sing or Dance by Joseph Mark Glazner. Warner Books, 1979.

The role of a financial consultant, whatever that is, gives Billy Nevers the chance to buy a Rembrandt for \$2.5 million for an anonymous client and then act as private eye when the plan to deliver the painting collapses. Beginning with Nevers' discovery of a body in a bathtub, the plot spins through several conspirators trying to get their hands on the painting that Billy has now hidden. Several killings, a beating or two, and some double-crosses later, Billy reveals the culprit behind it all. There's not much detection as Philip Marlowe practiced it, but action and puzzle-movie move the crime elements to a satisfactory conclusion.

Button, Button . . . by William L. Doty. Our Sunday Visitor, 1979.

An unusual book for those who search it out, *Button* adds Monsignor McGillicuddy to the lists of religious detectives. His investigation into the death of one of his parishioners is related by a traditionally obtuse Watson, Father Paul Peckham. Peckham tries to shield and protect "the oldest monsignor" in the county while he tries to uncover the murderer who left Jack Keller lying in a hunting cabin with his throat cut. But the Monsignor solves it in spite of Peckham's help and presents the culprit to the police in a neat gathering of suspects. Doty's style is rather simplified and uninspired, but Peckham and the Monsignor come to life through humorous banter and pettiness. They make a good pair, performing in the unreal, but enjoyable, confines of an old-fashioned mystery.

Losers Take All by J. J. Lamb. Carlyle Books, 1979.

Zach Rolfe left Las Vegas and his business as a gaming consultant to help an old schoolmate in Canada. Nate Golden had become the editor of a small-town paper and uncovered a fix in the national lottery games. But before Zach got there, Nate was dead and his attractive widow was fighting to keep the paper going. As in his previous cases, Zach is more of an adventurer and catalyst than a detective. To achieve justice he has to take on the Perage, a mob-type organization, uncover a rigged Vancouver waterfront casino, and go a few rounds with the widow. It's a fast-moving story with a taut suspense line, but few surprises.

The Model Murders by Judith Demarest. Carlyle Books, 1979.

Not one of the better paperback originals, *The Model Murders* has a fair plot idea but lacks a good plan of how to get to the finale. The focus shifts from one member of a fashionable New York modeling agency to another, occasionally stopping on the investigating officers. But through either bumping off the models or not knowing how to handle the police routine, none of it has much force. Eventually a few too many clues are given away. The reader easily spots the killer and even knows why; but the police need to see the killer before identification is possible. It's a shame the gimmick and idea behind it all wasn't put to better use.

The Palace by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro. Signet, 1978.

The second of three novels, to date, about Francesco Ragozy, a Transylvanian count, is billed as "an historical horror novel." Unfortunately for the suspense/horror field, the only horror is that produced by Fra Savonarola and his 15th-century Dominican oppression in de' Medici's Florence. Otherwise, the writing is excellent, the characters alive and sympathetic. If Ragozy were a little more evil and less interested in preserving the beautiful and worthy things of life, *The Palace* would fit better into the vampire literature.

The Penny Murders by Lionel Black. Avon, 1979.

Kate Theobald, crack London reporter, and her husband Henry are the detectives in the latest of Black's works to be published by Avon. Attending an auction of rare coins, Kate's interest in Miles Cabral, wealthy businessman and collector, leads to maneuvering an invitation for drinks. When they arrive, Cabral is dead in a locked house, an apparent suicide. Attempts to solve the locked room, the interaction of stock characters (an ex-wife and her new lover, a discarded mistress who was cheated out of a fortune and her lover, a business rival, a shady handyman) and the unveiling of several layers of fraud, blackmail and vengeance make up the bulk of the book. A competently satisfying workup of familiar mystery elements as practiced in England today.



BINOCULAR EYES: CROSS-CULTURAL DETECTIVES

By Margaret J. King

"The detective story is the natural recreation of noble minds."

—Milo Tindle in *Sleuth* by Anthony Shaffer

Xavier Brooke, native West Indian Chief of Police of the island of "St. Caro," in the Caribbean, investigates the manchineel-berry poisoning of a wealthy American businessman on holiday at secluded Mango Beach resort. The poisoning bears all the marks of a Carovian voodoo ritual. His search, leading through a dense network of local racial and political intrigue, finally reveals the culprits to be not locals but white outsiders. A. H. Z. Carr's *Finding Maubee* (1971) is one of the brightest of a growing but still relatively unrecognized sub-genre of popular literature: detective novels dealing with the contact of cultures.

The encounter of cultures at every level is a subject of increasing moment and fascination in literature. So-called "contact literature"—works which express the contact between cultural spheres—often acts as an esthetic bridge to describe and delineate the tensions between cultural groups and traditions, especially between major cultural traditions of the world. Trans-cultural themes in the meeting of East and West are beginning to be recognized and pointed out as they surface in serious fiction, drama, and poetry in Asia, Europe, and America. However, popular forms of literature have been largely ignored.

The world of popular letters has a radically different scope and coloration from the works belonging to academic literature, criticism, and intellectual belles-lettres. Even the so-called "best-seller lists" in the United States, concerned as they may be with popular and general reading habits of Americans, are too restrictive. According to Russel Nye, these "do not accurately reflect the situation in popular fiction: there are always books of literary quality by recognized authors that have appeared on these lists...but what sells in cigar stores, newsstands, drugstores, hotel lobbies, and bus stations is not likely to be reflected in so-called 'best seller' compilations."¹ Grace Metalious's searing exposé of small-town American morality, *Peyton Place*, has long been the best-selling novel in America (since

1956), and the single most popular genre is the detective story, led by writers like Erle Stanley Gardner, Ellery Queen, and Mickey Spillane. The use of serious literature as a guide to an entire culture should be an extremely conditional approach, especially given the evidence that many societies are either pre-literate (in the Third World) or post-literate (e.g., the U.S., where the major leisure pursuits are television and sports).

Broadening the scope of the search for resources about other cultures to include popular literature, television and film can allow for more universal insights about the nature of popular images and concepts of nations about other nations.

Within the realm of popular literature, the "detective" genre strongly suggests itself for intensive study. One of the first and most obvious reasons for selecting the detective novel as a focus for the study of cross-cultural communication is its overwhelming popularity and persistence over the past century. One of every four works published or reprinted in the U.S. each year, and half or more of all library holdings in the U.S., are detective mysteries. In his survey of American popular culture, Russel Nye claims that "of all the varieties of popular literature, the detective-mystery and its varieties undoubtedly occupy first place with the [American] mass reading public."² Works of this type have been the mainstay of light reading in Western Europe and America since their inception, and "a very considerable proportion" of works written in these countries are of this type.³ Thus the genre naturally provokes questions as to its influence and content simply as a result of its persistent popularity.

For all its prominence in the reading life of Americans, Europeans, and others, and for its surprising originality and inventiveness and value in introducing new concepts and consciousness, the detective story has not yet made any great impression on either literary critics or chroniclers of the popular arts. One of the most common allegations made about popular literature as a whole, including both those friendly and unfriendly to it, is that the content and impact of these works are severely limited by their formula approaches and practices, and by the expectations of the reading audience for certain types

of action, setting, and characterization. The aim of such popular fiction as the detective story, according to Nye, is "less to provide a new experience than to validate an older... verification of an experience already familiar" and that this experience takes place only "at the median level of majority expectation."⁵

It is also asserted that the detective novel, "the most conventionalized of any literary form," according to William Aydelotte,⁶ cannot produce surprising insights, or any critical examination of the world, or even "disturb or offend any significant part of [the] public,"⁷ because it is circumscribed by a network of traditions and styles which provide a conventional agreement between writer and reader about the nature of the characters, setting, action, and plot development. Recently, however, critics and literary historians have begun taking a more generous, if not appreciative, view of this literary type, no doubt considering its impressive record of growth and consolidation within the traditions of literate taste.

The progenitor of detective fiction in its present form is generally acknowledged to be Edgar Allan Poe's 1841 short story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," which set the tone and created the formal elements to which later writers adhered. Antecedents, however, include works from the ancient and medieval world, including *Oedipus Rex*, *The Aeneid*, tales in Herodotus, The Arabian Nights, and tales of Chaucer, all containing puzzles and their solutions.⁸ Although tales of crime and tales of mystery are related to each other in the ancestral line, detective fiction as a genre developed only in the late nineteenth century. G. K. Chesterton claims for the detective story the role of "the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life."⁹ In *The Development of the Detective Novel*, A. E. Murch provides this definition:

Basically... a detective story... may be defined as a tale in which the primary interest lies in the methodical discovery, by rational means, of the circumstances of a mysterious event or series of events. The story is designed to rouse the reader's curiosity by a puzzling problem which usually, though not always, concerns a crime.¹⁰

The modern detective tale has a very specific orientation toward the sensibility of modern scientific and urban life. Other factors as well were necessary for the development and rise of the detective format: the adoption of scientific police methods, the establishment of detective forces, principles of scientific inquiry, etc. This form is uniquely associated with and expressive of the texture and ambience of modern life, particularly rich in its portrayal of intimate, close-up details of that life for a broad range of classes, characters, and settings. Somerset Maugham

goes as far as to assign these works the status of the genius of twentieth-century letters:

It may be that when the historians of literature come to discourse upon the fiction produced by the English-speaking people in the first half of the twentieth century, they will pass somewhat lightly over the compositions of the 'serious' novelists and turn their attention to the immense and varied achievement of the detective writers.¹¹

Only in the past fifty years has serious attention been directed to the genre itself, which has become established as a singular and distinctive one beginning with critical essays and systematic observations in the 1920s and '30s in England, France, and the U.S. At the outset considered disreputable and dubious because of its interest in the lurid and perverse features of crime, violence, and the underworld, the cerebral aspects of the detective method, instituted with the creation of Sherlock Holmes in the 1880s, brought the detective-mystery novel into fashion and respectability, continuing, through a variety of strains, into the twentieth century. Its wide and heterogeneous audience includes all classes and tastes, and the genre has come to be known as the light reading—and in notable cases, the craft—of any number of prominent artists and intellectuals, such as G. K. Chesterton, W. H. Auden, and C. Day Lewis (writing under the pen name Nicholas Blake).

Although the origins and settings of the detective story have been dominated by European and American writers and their protagonists, at the periphery of these core works there is to be found a considerable repertoire of international or bi-cultural detectives and/or European/American detectives pursuing their art in far-flung corners of the world.

Along with the more familiar sleuths such as Georges Simenon's Maigret and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot, there are numerous others whose territory extends to more distant lands. The cross-cultural impulse appeared in the detective novel almost from the outset. Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, written in 1868, in the words of T. S. Eliot, "the first, the longest, and the best of English detective novels,"¹² began with the seizure of a priceless Indian gem in an Indian temple by British officers and followed its trail to England. Contemporary instances of international detectives include the following: Sjowall and Wahloo's Swedish detective Martin Beck; H. R. F. Keating's Inspector Ghote of the Bombay Police; Sung dynasty magistrate Judge Pao (recently re-introduced in the West); Robert van Gulik's adaptations of the tales of Judge Dee of the later Tang dynasty; J. P. Marquand's Mr. Moto of Japan; Earl Derr Biggers's detective Charlie Chan of the Honolulu Police; the creations of Edogawa Rampo, dean of Japanese mystery writers, including the wily Inspector Akechi; Australian Arthur Upfield's Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, the half-caste Aboriginal police detective; A. H. Z. Carr's

West Indian Chief of Police, Inspector Xavier Brooke; James McClure's tough-minded Lt. Tromp Kramer of the Trekkersburg, South Africa, murder squad, in tandem with his assistant Mickey Zondi, a Zulu Detective Sergeant; Henry Klinger's Lt. Detective Shomri Shomar of the Israeli Police on loan to the New York Police Department; and, in the U.S., ethnic detectives, mediating between mainstream and minority cultures—e.g., Harry Kemelman's rabbi-detective David Small, John Ball's black detective of Homicide, Virgil Tibbs of the Pasadena Police, and Dell Shannon's Mexican-American Inspector Luis Mendoza of the Los Angeles Police. Such cross-cultural detectives and their cases might constitute "a world atlas of crime."¹³

A typology could be worked out to delineate the range of these detectives (and their author-creators) according to social character: native; native but educated abroad; mixed-blood; member of internal minority; native but hyphenated citizen of a minority group; team of native and non-native, etc.¹⁴

Although much has been made of the intrinsic and implied significance of the detective tale as an outgrowth of scientific worldview and urban life—what it receives of culture—no similar notice has been taken of the implications of this genre for what it can teach its readers about culture. This principle can be applied first to members of a single culture reading novels set within that culture. It can be extended to cover novels set in a foreign culture or in a subcultural milieu which teach indirectly but succinctly about distant or unfamiliar people, artifacts, landscapes, and cultural scenes.

The very nature of the detective genre compels the reader to pay careful attention to cultural artifacts and patterns. The process of detection focuses the reader's attention on the motives, and causes, and consequences of events—however small they may appear at first glance. It is the little things that always lead to the answer, both in the sleuth's investigation and in an appreciation of culture. The plot relies intrinsically on the notion of the discovery of some fact or object or sign which does not appear to be important but is hidden from view by its very obviousness, like Poe's purloined letter.

In cross-cultural detective works, the reader, with less knowledge of what can be taken for granted (or assumed) in culture X than would be the case for his own culture, must be even more careful in his reading of the story in order to let no type of information escape him. Any incidental happening or prop may be important to store and refer to as a possible clue which will break through to the proof.

Quite naturally, then, there is a strong "local color" interest in many of the international or cross-cultural detective works, an interest in what they are able to convey of unusual or exotic places or groups in realistic, descriptive mise-en-scene. These selected

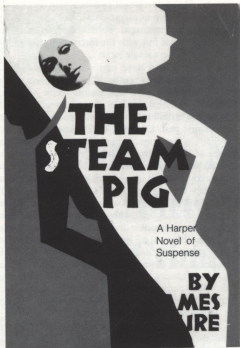
novels of local or regional ambience also occur at the juncture of the local/provincial portrait and the cosmopolitan treatment whose outlook deals not only with place but with the interaction of multiple cultures sharing a single locale.

For example, a large part of the fascination of Upfield's Australian "outback" novels is their setting in an isolated, almost inaccessible sector of a very isolated continent, and in the presentation of its "primitive" tribal inhabitants with roots in a remote prehistoric past. Likewise, Carr's novel of St. Caro, perhaps a fictitious compendium of Jamaica and some of the Windward Islands, recreates the charm of the West Indies and the intrigue and tension of the interplay between American outsiders and local residents both in and outside politics. Marquand's *Mr. Moto Is So Sorry* is set in Manchuria during the Japanese invasion, with American, Australian, Chinese, and Japanese dramatis personae in the tense interplay of wartime espionage. Edogawa Rampo's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* are miniatures in Japanese life of many hues from various eras of Japanese history. In the slightly different terms of historical period atmosphere, Robert van Gulik's chronicles of Judge Dee consciously seek to recreate in detail life in Tang dynasty China.

In view of the timeliness of cross-cultural study and the hegemony of detective fiction in popular culture, an investigation into the description and study of this category of cross-cultural detective novels—that is, works located at the intersection between detective mystery and contact literature—is overdue.

For the portrayal of any single culture, it is particularly the minute attention to the details of everyday existence that makes these novels so uniquely well suited to the popular dissemination of descriptions of foreign cultures. The writer must expose his audience to detailed and closely-textured pictures of chance events and settings in the cultural setting of the story, sweeping the stage from side to side an exhaustive search for the telling clue: a piece of rope, dusty footprint, blood-stain, cigar ash, misplaced book. Stated in the terms of Chesterton's thesis, the commonplace can be startling because it is so often overlooked.

These works are well-adapted to conveying a concrete, specific, fleshed-out version of the cultural scene. This occurs through the description of the setting itself, the author's commentary on the setting, and the setting as perceived through the consciousness of the detective and through the consciousness of subsidiary characters. Keating, through his Inspector Ghoté, provides a vivid panoply of the sights, sounds, and smells of India on Ghoté's train journey across the subcontinent to take in charge a prisoner at Calcutta: "The stone of the platform was



so hot it stung the soles of his feet through shoe and sock. The noise, too, hit with... violence... here in the harshly drying glare there was noise of all sorts."¹⁵ This descriptive principle is brilliantly active through the texts of this detective fiction. Upfield's images of the Western Australian landscape, often softly lit by the glow of meteors, is one of an eerie, other-worldly beauty: "... the Deceitful Land where distance is either magnified or reduced, level land becomes low sand ridges, and great sand-dunes sink to become as level as a billiards table."¹⁶ Marquand depicts the landscape from a Japanese train through the eyes of his American narrator as a "sense of being an outlander in a train that ran through a country unbelievably like that country's pictures, with its tall blue hills, and bamboo, and tiny farms, with its concrete dams and its high tension wires and its factories, with its population half in kimonos and half in European clothes. It was a land of smiles and grimaces, half toylake, half efficient."¹⁷ Carr enhances his local colorism by use of Calypso rhymes, courtroom dialogue, and travel-brochure copy, which describes St. Caro as "the skin at the base of the throat of a beautiful woman in a moment of ecstasy."¹⁸

James McClure's novel of interracial relations in South Africa, *The Steam Pig*, won the 1971 British

Crime Writers' Gold Dagger for the Best of Year. Judith Crist's tribute to McClure's skill with the detective form to convey the feel of the culture is worth a nearly full quotation:

It's a remarkable first novel, one that functions on a variety of levels—as a policier, a beautifully structured thriller and a psycho-sociological text. Using the universal language of the detective story, with the perception of a journalist and the compassion of a humanist, he tells us more about contemporary South Africa, of the rot at the core of apartheid and of the special deadly contamination it carries into the hearts of men of every walk of life, of good will and evil intent. And McClure does all this in the course of telling an engrossing mystery story. . . .¹⁹

And the *Oxford Mail* assesses the story as "a shrewder portrait of South Africa than many a work of nonfiction,"²⁰ as a story, adds another reviewer, not "superimposed" against the cultural background of the country, but "extracted" from it.²¹

For Americans reading the cases of Swedish detective Martin Beck, the local color effect is joined by another: the shock of recognition. Gradually and almost imperceptibly accruing, each tiny detail of Sjöwall and Wahloo's *The Laughing Policeman* and *The Man Who Went Up in Smoke* yields the ambience of alienation and depression so much looked for and admired in Bergman's cinema. The Swedish consciousness of the U.S.—for example, in the frequent references to American social psychology as compared to that of Sweden—is an index to Swedish awareness of its relationship to other cultures within the larger world.

Some works of "contact detective fiction" feature ethnic and religious subcultures rather than national cultures. In his novels of a suburban American Jewish community in the New England heartland of Protestantism, the "rabbi books," Kemelman creates a "world of Judaism." Quite apart from their interest as suspenseful mystery thrillers, these "light" novels have served as an image of Jewish life and beliefs in contemporary America reaching a far wider audience than nonfiction "religious" treatments of the subject. In fact, Kemelman's original impulse was simply a sociological and didactic one: to "explain—via a fictional setting—the Jewish religion,"²² until an editor suggested the detective story format to give this idea added sparkle and style. The resulting first mystery, *Friday the Rabbi Slept Late*, was reviewed by Conservative Judaism as "a more balanced, accurate, truthful description of a contemporary Jewish community and synagogue board than almost any work of serious literature."²³ The *New York Times Review* applauded Kemelman's achievement as "a richly illuminating picture of Jewish liturgy and theology which merits a special award for painless ecumenical communication."²⁴

The building up of a psychological state of being—the mise-en-scene of these works as cultural

artifacts—is one of their major contributions to culture learning and the awareness of cultural milieu.

Authors of these works of detection are of European heritage. The detective form itself is rooted in Anglo-American-French traditions and preoccupations about law and order, rationality, justice, and scientific thought. This is true at least in the novels of cultural confluence featuring detectives which are known and widely read in the West. The detective formula may be historically linked to single cultures or culture clusters, as opposed to forms which may be more suited to archetypal myths embedded in forms shared by East and West, such as the epic. The detective form has definite limitations in fictional elements and technique. However, as a means for articulating cultural interface, even with these biases the formula is remarkably adept.

In cross-cultural detective stories, seemingly trivial details turn out to be significant in the solution of the crime because the detective is able to weigh and evaluate their significance as part of a whole cultural pattern. In addition to the physical setting of the story, the interaction of the characters and the outlines of the plot provide a clear and detailed idea of a culture and its norms as displayed in the interstices of their delicate interfaces. The act of crime, and the unravelling of the events involved with the crime in the process of discovering and unmasking its perpetrator, all converge to reveal the norms of a culture; the crime is the mischance or irregularity against which the normative version of the culture comes to light. Yi-Fu Tuan, philosopher, poses it thus: "What compels us to reflect on experience?—Untoward events."²³

In creating a profile of the expected order of a society, cross-cultural detective stories reveal the workings of culture in its multiple systems of family/friendship ties, love, authority, justice, politics, leisure, and work. Disruptions in the social system set up tensions and conflicts within and between these systems which it is the detective's job to discern and set right. The inner workings of his perception of what has gone wrong and how—the modes of reasoning and of cause-effect chains which are a vital basis for the solving of the crime—also serve to throw these patterns into sharp relief and to explain how they are interrelated.

This contrast between the ordinary, the usual, and the normal as the setting for the crisis incident which is irregular, unnatural, and extraordinary allows the reader to understand the norms of other cultures, so that he can see artifacts and character types of that culture as variations in the holistic pattern of the expected. One of the basic problems in learning about other cultures through isolated and displaced artifacts or ideas is that one has no sense of how these single objects fit into the organic scheme of the

culture "at ease." Detective fiction gives us both the ordinary and the exceptional, showing what kinds of gaps exist, and how large those gaps can be, between the two.

As one dimension of this study, John Cawelti suggests that "the detective story situation works with many different cultural-settings because the investigation of a puzzling crime casts light on the workings of society by catching it in a moment of anomaly and disruption. . . [and] can reveal to us some of the prevailing terms of the social comedy."²⁴ It might be added that the solving of the crime, or the return of society to normalcy, reveals even more its workings and character by pointing to the differences between society in crisis and in equilibrium.

Another more specific approach to the cross-cultural detective novel might be explored through the legal institutions which judge these criminal "disruptions." The detective story and the drama of the courtroom are indirectly related; though the detective story does not necessarily contain scenes of formal justice, novels of the courtroom often involve the detection process. The trial or courtroom scene is the stage setting of the meeting of cultures in their moment of truth.

Justice systems—and the idea of what is important in a culture—are brought to life particularly in the situation of an imposed system of justice (most often British) operating within a colonial country in such classics of contact literature as Forster's *Passage to India*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Woolf's *Village in the Jungle*. These novels each feature the courtroom scenario as a critical turning-point or denouement in their picture of cross-cultural relations. There is a sense in which these examples are "mystery thrillers" of conflict and suspense. Of course, in this type of cultural interaction, the conflict of two legal systems—tribal and customary law, as opposed to written law—is the subject of the work. (This is a complex topic, to be pursued in a later paper.)

For the reader of the cross-cultural detective mystery, there is a double process of detection, for he must educate himself about the cultural setting of the novel in order to solve the crime along with the detective or to understand the solution offered at the end. In this way, the stories offer a double solution to a double mystery: at the same time the reader is discovering the solution to the crime, he is gaining insight into the puzzle of cultural differences. The writer's skill is under special pressure here, since he must educate the reader on two fronts: that is, not only feed his reader information about the intricate pattern of the crime, but at the same time, school him in the norms of a foreign way of life.

Many works have met the challenge posed by "contact mysteries" by creating detectives who are

cultural outsiders, or bi-cultural intermediaries between two systems—that of the majority and of a minority sensibility. These systems come into play by intersecting around the person of the detective, defining one another by contrast.

The detective-heroes of these works are far more than ethnic curiosities. They most often emerge from their sagas as marginal men: that is, personalities at the critical edge of two or more cultures and a fusion or product of these. A positive interpretation of "marginal" is implied in these cases. As detectives, their mastery of more than one system of logic and symbols gives them the advantage necessary to fathom the interaction of culture as it occurs in crime, whether as outside visitors on the local scene, members of a subgroup within a larger dominant culture, or as a link between classes, religions, professions, locales, races, or educational levels. Only a man of multiple cultural orientation can get a three-dimensional view of the situation.

Detective Charlie Chan's popularity, based on a limited number of personal appearances in Earl Derr Biggers's six novels, later spread throughout the mass media to make him an international figure soon after his creation in 1925 in *The House Without a Key*. Chan really combines three cultural modes: Chinese, Chinese-Hawaiian, and assimilated immigrant. Based on an actual Honolulu police detective, Chan was in part designed to counteract previous sinister Chinese figures such as Sax Rohmer's insidious Dr. Fu Manchu. In his literary version (but not so in radio and film), Chan is a rather well-rounded character, mediating and discoursing on justice, liberty, right, tradition, and cultural identity, as well as a range of ethical problems which often focus on racism. But "it is the conflict of Eastern and Western values that makes Charlie Chan an interesting character,"²⁷ centered on the ambiguity and ambivalence of his cultural identity as an Americanized Chinese, and his struggle to maintain his traditional heritage under pressure of demands from a modern Western environment.

His distinctive style of making "Confucian" commentaries on incidents in the story—"The fool in a hurry drinks his tea with the fork"; "Eggs shouldn't dance with stones"—point to cultural contrasts but also to the contrasts between traditional and modern. He is often able to discern motives on the basis of cultural differences, as in the case of his fellow-countryman accused of murder in *Keeper of the Keys*: "'Ah, yes,' nodded Chan, '[Sing has always been the model of] the real virtues. But was murder any great vice in era from which Sing dates? I think not—if the motive was good. The motive—that was what counted then. And would count today, with Sing, I think.'"²⁸

Napoleon Bonaparte, the half-caste government inspector operating in the Australian outback, walks

a thin tight-rope between several classes of people within each of two cultures: the Anglo-white ranchers, businessmen, and government officials, and lower-class white workers, on one hand; the "tame" (assimilated) Aborigines and "wild blacks" on the other.

The loyalties and tensions between these groups structure the plot and action, and their delicate interactions must be understood and plumbed by Bonaparte amidst the complex encounters of primitive and modern sensibilities—colonial and imperial, traditional and "developed." He is able to balance these dichotomies within himself to "penetrate the truth of crime and restore the threatened fabric of society."²⁹ In such titles as *The Bushman Who Came Back*, *The Will of the Tribe*, *The New Shoe*, and *Death of a Lake*, "Upfield at his best gives us a rich and complex sense of aboriginal culture [and] turn[s] the detective story into a rich interaction of cultures and their differing systems of authority, justice, morality, and community."³⁰

In A. H. Z. Carr's *Finding Maubee*, Xavier Brooke, black Chief of Police of the pastiche West Indian island of "St. Caro," is a local boy with slave ancestors whose police training in Washington, and his relations with the American protectorate governors of the island and with local business magnates as well as Puerto Rican and black colleagues and American newspaper editor cohort, make his role in the local culture complicated as well as dramatic. One aspect of Brooke's cultural marginality is something as basic as speech style; this shows the effects of his U.S. education, and must be consciously modified:

...[H]e no longer talked like a Carovian. The litting cadence and broad "a" had almost dropped out of his speech. He was careful, however, not to indulge in refinements of diction or displays of vocabulary which would have separated him even more sharply from most of St. Caro's black community, and in the line of duty he could match the local patois in any part of the island.³¹

The intimate sociology of island culture, with its mix of European, black, and others, in addition to a thriving tourist industry, added to the richness of colonial and slave histories, along with religious and economic systems, provide the intricate setting for the sensitive, creative mind of detective Brooke in his search to prove the innocence of local legend David Maubee in the murder of an American tourist. His manhunt must contend with pressure from all sides and with appearances of a local crime which obscure a frame by not one but several people, outsiders of one degree or another. Both guilt and innocence—of this crime or others—are uncovered in the lives of each of his many suspects.

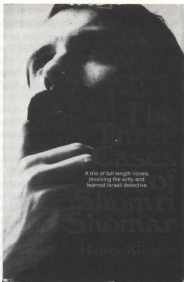
In *The Three Cases of Shomri Shomar*, Henry Klinger has created another sort of outsider or

marginal man—the visitor from another country, who is often privileged to see things more clearly than natives can. Shomar is Lt. Detective on an exchange program to New York from the Tel Aviv police department. He is a scholarly, almost old-world figure who quotes the Old Testament (each chapter opens with a biblical epigram) and draws upon ancient Herbraic laws of evidence and conviction for the wisdom of the “Shomar Private School of Crime Detection.” A law school graduate, master of four languages, biblical scholar, and three-time war veteran, Shomar is a cosmopolitan super-sleuth who brings his background in ancient civilization, religion, and the Middle East to bear on modern secular American crime in the big city. Anthony Boucher judged Shomar to have “much of the lively mannered color of the Great Detective.”³²

James McClure's world-weary, battle-scarred Afrikaaner Tromp Kramer of the Trekkersburg police murder squad in South Africa, assisted by Zulu Detective Sergeant Mickey Zondi, investigates an interracial murder in *The Steam Pig*. The cultural milieu is permeated with the ethos of apartheid, which dominates every scene, most of the interactions, and is both both the starting and end-point for the crime. Murder is discovered, beginning with a mix-up of corpses at the morgue and mistaken racial identities; it has been done in apparently Bantu style but turns out to have been instigated by whites. It is Kramer's canny understanding and unusual familiarity with the workings of apartheid and its political machinations in the strict socio-political system of race relations which allow him to be so effective. Judith Crist calls Kramer “one of the most interesting flesh-and-blood detectives to join the ranks of fictional sleuths.”³³

Another treatment of the color bar is John Ball's *In the Heat of the Night*, more widely known in movie form with Sidney Poitier in the starring role. Homicide detective Virgil Tibbs of the Pasadena police department, on vacation to visit his mother in Mississippi, is the middle-man in the confrontation of North and South, rich and poor, urban and rural, educated and unlettered, as well as the racial clashes of black and white.

An important new “subcultural” detective in American fiction is Harry Kemelman's Rabbi David Small. The rabbi acts as detective to unravel crimes involving members of his temple congregation in the small New England town of Barnard's Crossing, Massachusetts. In one case he finds himself in conflict with a major donor to the temple over a question of Jewish burial law. The rabbi resolves the conflict by proving that a “suicide” was actually a murder victim; working with Irish Catholic Chief of Police Lanigan, he traces the murderer by using the subtle reasoning of Talmudic logic, which allows him to see the third side of every question.



A trio of full-length novels involving the witty and learned Israeli detective

Cast in the mold of the religious detective whose prototype is Chesterton's Catholic priest-detective Father Brown, this type has been given a singular twist in the introduction of a wise man of notably minority religious and cultural orientation. Through the use of an “outsider” figure such as the rabbi, the novels offer an unexpected stripe of social commentary on American life and subcultural relations, drawing on an unusual source having ancient and foreign roots and a relatively alien perspective on the American scene. In this sense, the “rabbi books” serve as an especially arresting and apparently unlikely case of contact literature.³⁴

In this setting of cultural contact, the rabbi acts as a point of cultural convergence between traditional Judaism and modern American middle class secular and Christian life. As teacher and philosopher of Judaism, young Rabbi Small finds himself in the uneasy position of mediator between the dominant Christian culture and his Jewish congregation. In the course of solving a series of murders by the use of Talmudic logic, the rabbi finds himself having to explicate to his Gentile fellow-townsmen the Jewish view on a whole universe of topics ranging from suicide to prayer, emphasizing, for the characters as well as for the reader, the often radical differences between Jewish and Christian doctrines and orientation. At the same time, he must constantly remind his assimilation-minded congregation of their own distinctive Jewishness. In performing his dual role, the rabbi is revealed to be an isolated man of uncompromising integrity and inventive intelligence. He is set off from the Gentile community, on the one hand, by his Jewish beliefs, and from his own temple, on the

other, because of his refusal to strive for the accommodation of his religion to the American Way of Life.

The *Jewish Observer* called the insights given by the Kemelman novels into American Jewish manners and mores "an eye-opener for many people."¹⁵ Finally, through his detection, the rabbi is able to demonstrate the relevance of Jewish principles of justice and ethics as an ideal philosophy for modern man within a secular civilization: "So after thousands of years it appears that our way is at last coming into style,"¹⁶ he tells his Jewish Philosophy class.

The search is on for the "binocular eye," the insightful man with "double vision" who can bridge the gaps between cultures. An ongoing collection and appraisal of the works of cross-cultural detection will give shape to this new classification of literature as a lively resource of culture-learning. These novels may demonstrate that "formula" literature can in fact be effective in communicating ideas about culture as an intermediary channel, allowing in the process considerable literary and even mythic creativity.



Notes

1. Russel Nye, *The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970), p. 54.
2. Nye, p. 268. "There can be no doubt of the permanent popularity of the detective-mystery, in whatever form. . . . They make up half or more of the books stocked by the 50,000 rental libraries in the country and probably account for a third of all public library borrowings."
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EYES ON THE SCREEN



By Mary Groff

In more than thirty years of television, a great many mystery and crime shows have appeared: police dramas, spies and even little old ladies doing their amateur stuff for the amusement of the Great American Public. But in all this creative outpouring of basest passions, there have been very, very few Private Eye shows; in fact, they number just over forty in these years.

Just over forty Eye shows in thirty-three years is not a very sparkling record and cannot have left the Eye fan in a state of high tension and excitement, even with an occasional indulgence in re-runs to soothe the troubled nerves. Very few of the series could be called hard-boiled, even if they were originally written by practitioners of this art. Most eyes were watered down for TV into a passable, and sometimes even gentlemanly, sleuth.

The listing which follows considers shows up to the 1978 season.

Archer. NBC 1/30/75-3/13/75. 60 mins. Music: Jerry Goldsmith. Setting: Melrose, California.

Archer (Brian Keith) was based upon Ross Macdonald's character of an ex-policeman who became a self-employed Eye. He was an analytical and thoughtful detective who did not resort to violence too often. Maybe that's why this series did not last very long.

Banacek. NBC 9/13/72-9/3/74. 90 mins. Music: Billy Goldberg, Jack Elliot, Allyn Ferguson. Setting: Boston.

Thomas Banacek was a Polish-American detective

played by George Peppard repeating his 1972 movie role. He specialized in recovering stolen goods for 10% of the value to be paid by insurance companies and made a reasonable living this way.

Banyon. NBC 9/15/72-1/12/73. 60 mins. Setting: Los Angeles.

Banyon (Robert Forster) worked for \$20 a day in a 1930s-era show. His office was conveniently located in a building housing a secretarial school, and the owner provided him with a new secretary each week. He undertook to solve a variety of cases, some of which were murder.

Barnaby Jones. CBS 1/28/73- 60 mins. Music: Duante Tatro, Jerry Fielding, Jeff Alexander, John Elizade. Setting: Los Angeles.

When his detective son was murdered, Jones (Buddy Ebsen) came out of retirement to solve this crime. A longtime eye, he stayed on in the business when his son's murderer was found, and he was assisted by his daughter-in-law. Jones runs his own crime laboratory.

Cannon. CBS 9/14/71-9/19/76. 60 mins. Music: John Parker. Setting: Los Angeles.

Cannon (William Conrad) was a middle-aged, overweight eye who spent a great deal of his earnings on good eating and other luxuries. This was a non-violent show, as Cannon's figure was not suited to activity.

Charlie Wild. CBS, ABC, DuMont. * 12/50-6/52. 30 mins. Setting: New York City.

Charlie Wild was played by two actors—(1) Kevin

O'Morrison, who played in the original radio show and (2) John McQuade. This was a fighting detective who worked City cases only.

Charlie's Angels. ABC 9/22/76- 60 mins.

Three females who had been police-trained usually work from health spas or in places where very little clothing need be worn. They are supervised by "Charlie," who is only a voice. Death features quite often. This was the show that brought Farrah Fawcett-Majors into fame and good fortune.

Checkmate. CBS 9/10/59-9/19/62. 60 mins. Music: Pete Rugolo, Johnny Williams. Setting: San Francisco.

Checkmate Incorporated was run by Don Corey and Jed Sills (Anthony George and Doug McClure). Mostly the case were those in which individual lives had been threatened. Top dollars were charged to solve these cases. The series was created by Eric Ambler.

City of Angels. NBC 2/3/76-8/10/76. 60 mins. Setting: Los Angeles.

This was a 1930s period private eye series based on the movie *Chinatown* (director: Roman Polanski), featuring Jake Axminster (Wayne Rogers). The movie, made in 1974, was a Chandler/Hammett type of production, and the man in the television show was not too law-abiding and penniless. His office help ran a switchboard for prostitutes on the side.

Cool Million. NBC 10/25/72-7/11/73. 90 mins. Music: Billy Goldberg. Setting: Lincoln, Nebraska.

A former government agent turned detective, Jefferson Keyes (James Farentino) charged one million dollars for each case he solved. 30-30100 was the number to call to get in touch with him.

Detective's Wife. CBS 7/7/50-9/29/50. 30 mins. Setting: New York City.

Adam Conway's (Donald Curtis) wife, Connie (Lynn Bari), always interfered with his cases, making endless difficulties for everyone and adding to their complexity and confusion.

Faraday and Company. NBC 9/26/73-8/13/74. 90 mins. Music: Jerry Fielding. Setting: Los Angeles.

Frank Faraday (Dan Dailey) had served 25 years in a South American prison before he escaped and set out to prove his innocence. He met his son (James Naughton), who was born to his secretary while he was incarcerated. He joined Steve in his old trade of private eye. The two men had totally different attitudes to their job, and Steve was often upset by his father's use of physical force when he preferred more analytical methods to solve cases.

Griff. ABC 9/29/73-1/4/74. 60 mins. Music: Elliot Kaplan, Mike Post, Pete Carpenter. Setting: Westwood area of Los Angeles.

Wade "Griff" Griffin (Lorne Greene) was an ex-



police captain, and as an eye he was involved in pretty much the same sort of cases again.

Harry-O. ABC 9/12/74-8/12/76. 60 mins. Music: Kim Richmond, Billy Goldberg. Setting: San Diego.

When shot in the back and disabled, Harry Orwell (David Janssen) retired from the police. Orwell lived on the beach front and used public transportation, an unusual feature in detective shows. This series was a spin-off from a TV movie, *Smile Jenny, You're Dead*, also with David Janssen (1974). The setting was transferred to Los Angeles in the later episodes.

Hawaiian Eye. ABC 10/7/59-9/10/63. 60 mins. Setting: Honolulu.

Three detectives, played by Robert Conrad, Anthony Eisley and Gregg MacKenzie, worked out of an expensive hotel. Connie Stevens played the part of Cricket Blake, a singer at the hotel, and her songs were accompanied by Arthur Lyman.

Honey West. ABC 9/12/65-9/2/66. 30 mins. Setting: Los Angeles.

Honey (Anne Francis) worked out of a TV service truck and tried to solve the cases in a scientific manner. She inherited the family detective business and became one of the first female eyes on TV. A karate and weapons expert, she also owned a pet ocelot named Bruce.

International Detective. Syndicated 1959. 30 mins. Music: Sidney Shaw, Leroy Holmes. Setting: The world.

This show presented the international investigations of Ken Franklin (Arthur Fleming), who worked

for William J. Burns Detective Agency. The stories were based upon true crime files.

The Investigator. NBC 6/58-9/58. 60 mins. Setting: New York City.

Jeff Prior (Lonny Chapman) learned his sleuthing from his father, Lloyd, a retired journalist (Howard St. John). Prior was efficient at collecting clues and putting the pieces of each puzzle together quickly to solve the crime.

The Investigators. CBS 9/21/61-12/28/61. 60 mins. Setting: New York City.

With offices in a very expensive block, Steve Banks and Russ Andrews (James Philbrook and James Franciscus) investigated insurance cases.

It Happens in Spain. Syndicated 1958. 30 mins. Setting: Spain.

Joe Jones (Scott McKay) was an eye who assisted American tourists when they fell into trouble while visiting European countries.

Johnny Staccato. NBC 1959-1960. 30 mins. Music: Elmer Bernstein. Setting: New York City.

Staccato (John Cassavetes) was a jazz musician turned detective who worked from a Greenwich Village cafe.

Johnny Midnight. Syndicated 1960. 30 mins. Music: Joe Bushkin, Stanley Wilson. Setting: New York City.

Johnny Midnight (Edmond O'Brien) was an actor who turned to detection to make a living.

Khan. CBS 2/7/75-2/28/75. 60 mins. Music: Morton Stevens, Bruce Broughton. Setting: San Francisco's Chinatown.

Khan (Khig Dhiegh) was a Chinese private eye in the Charlie Chan style. He worked with his son and daughter to solve his cases.

Man Against Crime. CBS, DuMont, NBC 10/4/49-10/2/53. 30 mins. Setting: New York City.

Hard-boiled Mike Barnett [(1) Ralph Bellamy and (2) Frank Lovejoy] made free use of his fists in these city-based cases. He was the usual loner.

Man in a Suitcase. ABC 5/3/68-9/20/68. 60 mins. Music: Albert Elms. Setting: London.

John McGill (Richard Bradford), a former intelligence agent, had been accused of letting an important scientist defect from the United States. This series recounted McGill's strenuous efforts to prove his innocence. The show was produced in England.

Mannix. CBS 9/67-8/75. 60 mins. Music: Lalo Schifin. Setting: Los Angeles.

Mannix (Michael Connors) was a loner often in conflict with his superior, Lou Wickersham (Joseph Campanella). Intertect was an agency that preferred to use computers, and its man Mannix preferred less scientific methods of crime solving.

Martin Kane, Private Eye. NBC 9/11/49-6/17/54. 30 mins. Music: Charles Paul. There were two separate productions of this show, which was based upon the popular radio show of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Kane [(1) William Gargan, (2) Lloyd Nelson and (3) Lee Tracy] performed first in a New York City setting, and crimes were solved by persistent sleuthing.

The second series had Kane (Mark Stevens) assisting the police of various European countries with their crime problems.

Meet McGraw. NBC 7/2/57-10/9/59. 30 mins.

McGraw (Frank Lovejoy) wandered around the United States working on the crimes and investigations that he was either hired to do or that he wished to work on.

Michael Shayne. NBC 9/30/60-9/22/61. 60 mins. Music: Leslie Stevens. Setting: Miami Beach, Florida.

This show offered sophisticated murders with strange facets, usually in a plush setting. Shayne was played by Richard Denning. Brett Halliday, the creator of the character, acted as a consultant during the series.

Mike Hammer. NBC 1958-1959. 30 mins. Music: David Kahn, Melvyn Lenard. Setting: New York City.

Mike Hammer, played by Darren McGavin, was a quick-tempered and poised private eye. He wasn't quite the violent and foul-mouthed hero of Mickey Spillane's novels because he'd been tidied up for television.

My Friend Tony. NBC 1/5/69-8/31/69. 60 mins.

John Woodruff (James Whitmore) met a waif during WWII in Italy. When he grew up Tony Novello (Enzo Cerusico) came to the United States, and he and Woodruff travelled the country solving crimes. Novello did most of the footwork, and Woodruff the brain work.

The Outsider. NBC 9/18/68-9/10/69. 60 mins. Music: Stanley Wilson. Setting: Los Angeles.

David Ross (Darren McGavin) was an embittered ex-convict always short of money and living hand-to-mouth. As an ex-con, he was a complete outsider in society and therefore able to bend an impartial eye to crime solving.

Philip Marlowe. ABC 9/29/59-3/29/60. 30 mins.

As an impersonal, unattached eye, Marlowe (Philip Carey) moved around freely but played in a more genteel manner than the original Raymond Chandler character. He had the usual murder, kidnap and extortion cases, but they were somewhat less than hard-boiled.

Richard Diamond, Private Detective. CBS, NBC

7/11/57-9/20/59. 30 mins. Music: Pete Rugolo, Richard Shores. Both series had David Janssen as Diamond.

1. Setting: New York City. Diamond worked always without any police assistance, and his telephone operator was played by Mary Tyler Moore. Nothing was seen of Moore except her legs, and she was at all times aware of Diamond's exact location and of his safety.

2. Setting: Hollywood. Investigations done in Southern California by Diamond, ably assisted by his girl friend, Karen Wells (Barbara Bain).

This was originally a radio show on NBC, where it played from April 24, 1949 until 1950, when it transferred to ABC and ran until 1952. Here Diamond was played by movie star Dick Powell.

Richie Brockleman. NBC 3/17/78-8/24/78. 60 mins. Brockleman (Dennis Dugan) was a youthful college graduate who began solving crimes when he started his own agency. The show was a spin-off from *The Rockford Files*, in which Brockleman appeared in some early installments.

The Rockford Files. NBC 9/13/74- 60 mins. Music: Mike Post, Pete Carpenter. Setting: Los Angeles.

Jim Rockford (James Garner) is an ex-convict and another innocent one. He solves crimes that have been abandoned by the police, and he works out of a house trailer that serves also as his home.

77 Sunset Strip. ABC 10/10/58-2/26/64. 60 mins. Music: Warren Barker, Frank Ortega, Frank Perkins, Paul Sawtell, Jay Livingston, Ray Evans. Setting: Hollywood.

Jeff Spencer and Stuart Bailey (Roger Smith and Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.) operated out of expensive offices. The series provided crimes, chases and adventures with lavish productions.

Shaft. CBS 10/9/73-9/3/74. 90 mins. Music: Johnny Pate. Setting: New York City.

Richard Roundtree played the same part as in the movie *Shaft* (1971). This streetwise detective also travelled to other cities to solve crimes. He took up a wide variety of cases in the eight episodes, which were interspersed with other series.

Steve Randall. DuMont 11/7/52-1/30/53. 30 mins. Randall (Melvyn Douglas) was a disbarred lawyer who solved private eye cases until he was reinstated as a lawyer at the end of this series.

Surfside Six. ABC 10/3/60-9/24/62. 60 mins. Music: Frank Ortega, Frank Perkins, Paul Sawtell, Mack David, Jerry Livingston. Setting: Miami Beach.

Three detectives were played by Troy Donahue, Van Williams and Lee Paterson. The title came from the name of the houseboat that they worked from

and which was moored among the yachts of the rich and famous.

Switch. CBS 9/75-9/78. 60 mins. Music: Stu Phillips, Glen A. Larson. Setting: Los Angeles.

Two detectives played by Eddie Albert and Robert Wagner set up con-men in order to beat them at their own games by pulling switches on them. This show was based on the movie *The Sting* (1973).

Tenafly. NBC 10/73-8/74. 90 mins. Setting: Los Angeles.

This was a very unusual series because the eye was a happily married man who was not involved with women. Tenafly (James McEachin) had a pleasant domestic life and was not involved in his cases in the way the loner type of eye usually was.



21 Beacon Street. NBC 7/2/59-3/20/60. 30 mins.

David Chase (Dennis Morgan) worked from this unspecified town address which might have been Everywhere. Chase was a detective who preferred the scientific approach to crime investigation. He had a small staff to work with, and the type of crime was quite conventional.

Los Angeles, with its active memories of Raymond Chandler, was obviously the favorite setting for these productions, although very few of them even approached a hard-boiled standard. Sometimes humor or even conscience slipped into the plot, which could never have happened in that harder era in the 1920s and 1930s. And TV's violence was more remote-controlled: guns, helicopters, and cars were used to inflict pain and death instead of the knives, fists and feet of the past. New York City had its fair share of these shows, particularly in the early days of television. Its settings of streets, tenements and public transportation were far removed from California glamour and sunshine. The Midwest never seemed to catch on as a suitable production area somehow; producers' feet did not seem to twitch for Kansas City or for Iowa, nor did cameramen show eyes glazed with desire to go to Milwaukee or Detroit.

It seems that police-based shows are usually more popular and longer-running than private detective shows. Is there some great conspiracy afoot to keep Eyes away from the screen? Is the cynical, unloving loner to be rejected even further by lack of interest in the inward bitterness that makes him so efficient in tracking down other outsiders? Perhaps these shows stop the sales of life's necessities of homes, junk food, bicycles and plastic floor coverings, or maybe advertisers just don't like Private Eyes on the screen.

* DuMont was an early network run by an engineer, Dr. Allen B. DuMont. DuMont marketed the first large-screen—14 inches—television set in the United States, but financing troubles ran DuMont off the screen in 1955.



CRAIG RICE: Merry Mistress of Mystery and Mayhem

By Mary Ann Grochowski

Rumor has it that this controversial and unorthodox mistress of mystery and mayhem was born in a horse-drawn carriage at the corner of Chicago's Michigan Avenue and 12th Street in 1908. Christened Georgiana Randolph Craig, she was the daughter of Harry Moschlem Craig, alias Bosco, who came from Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin to study painting at Chicago's Art Institute. Her mother was Mary Randolph, the wealthy daughter of a Chicago physician.

Georgiana's chaotic childhood environment changed as swiftly as did her love life in later years. The first three years of her life, her parents were touring Europe, so Georgiana lived with Bosco's mother. From 1911 to 1914, from the time Georgiana was three years old until she was six, her parents remained in Chicago. This was the longest period of time Georgiana was ever to spend with her parents since they then returned to Europe, leaving their daughter behind again, this time with the people who were to become the only real family in Georgiana's life, Bosco's brother-in-law and sister, Mr. and Mrs. Elton Rice.

While with the Rice family (from whom Georgiana obviously derived her famous pseudonym), home changed from Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin to a ranch in Okanagon County, Washington and then to San Diego. She was educated by her uncle, Elton Rice, who liked to read Georgiana the poems of Edgar Allan Poe, and by a Jesuit missionary school. At one time Georgiana was sent to Miss Ransome's school in Piedmont, California, but, never a candidate for conformity, she ran away.

Although Mary Randolph Craig, Georgiana's mother, had two more children, Georgiana was 25

years old before she met her brother Christopher, and, reportedly, never met her half-brother, Alexander Randolph.

When Georgiana arrived at the worldly-wise age of eighteen, she bravely set out to make her fortune in Chicago's Bohemian literary society. Supporting herself in a variety of ways—publicity manager for a wrestling troupe, newspaper reporter, radio script writer, and freelance writer—she was an extremely versatile woman. As one of her friends from her Chicago days remembers her, "She was the only woman I ever met who could crochet, play chess, read a book, and compose music all at the same time—and hold a highball, I almost forgot that."

Even after she achieved success, Georgiana's heart-shaped face was rarely to be seen without a smudge on her cheek, her dark hair worn in loose curls away from her face, and deep dimples showing at the corners of her mouth as she smilingly wiped her ink-stained fingers on her slacks.

By the time she was thirty, Georgiana had learned to rely heavily on liquor and on a succession of equally unsuccessful, unstable husbands. The first man of her dreams was appropriately "a dreamer type," Arthur John Follows. Another was Albert Ferguson, a talented newspaperman, many years older than she, who died shortly after she divorced him. How many more marriages there were is a mystery which may never be solved, since Georgiana stopped counting after the second. However, there were at least four marriages and possibly as many as seven. One marriage was decided on the toss of a coin and lasted only three days.

One very positive result of these early marriages was Georgiana's three children, Nancy, Iris, and David, who were the inspiration for her semi-auto-

biographical novel, *Home Sweet Homicide*, published in 1944. *Home Sweet Homicide* is about a mystery author whose three children cunningly work together to capture a killer while simultaneously trapping a handsome police detective for their mother to marry.

The last of Georgiana Craig's attempts to find happiness in marriage was with Lawrence Lipton, a fellow author who regarded writing as a very serious occupation. It required, for him, an office in downtown Los Angeles, while Georgiana was content to write at her Santa Monica home in the company of her many cats and her aunt, Mrs. Elton Rice, who resided with them. The three children spent most of their time at boarding schools.

Georgiana Randolph Craig suffered an abrupt and tragic death on August 28, 1957, at the untimely age of 49, caused by an overdose of barbiturates combined with alcohol. However, the irreplaceable Craig Rice lived on to delight, amuse, and mystify thousands in her madcap mysteries.

The combination of booze and books was as healthy for Craig Rice's literary career as it was unhealthy for Georgiana Craig personally. With the successful advent of Craig Rice's first book, *Eight Faces at Three* in 1939, a booze-swilling trio, Jake Justus, John J. Malone, and Helene Brand tottered and tumbled their way into the public eye. Alcohol induces Rice's literary sleuths brazenly to undertake courageous adventures and acts as a catalyst of ingenuity for her detective-heroes. Clues forgotten or overlooked become, with the help of a friendly little bottle, clear keys to the solution of the crime. The madcap antics, Keystone chase scenes, and hilarious homicides can somehow be made more credible by the popping of a cork.

In *Eight Faces at Three*, Jake Justus, publicity agent and theatrical manager, meets for the first time Rice's alter ego, Helene Brand, an elegantly tall, thin, ivory blonde with blazing blue eyes, who is ultimately in command of every situation, no matter how unique. A first class chauffeur, bartender, lover, nurse, and amateur detective, Helene loses the murderer in *Eight Faces at Three*, but gains a very devoted husband in Jake Justus. Their romance flourishes throughout subsequent novels, in spite of the changes in their lives such as Jake's becoming the proud owner of a nightclub named The Casino (which is the scene of the crime in *The Big Midget Murders*) and very much involved in most of the other murders which this romantic duo encounters.

The ultimate brains of Craig Rice's friendly trio is the red-faced, rough-and-ready lawyer, John J. Malone, who persistently tracks down the criminals, in spite of many personal misadventures, and ultimately untangles the complicated maneuvers and theatrical police-dodging tactics engaged in by Helene and Jake in the pursuit of justice. Despite Malone's habit of scrambling and combining old

sayings into uniquely inappropriate quips like "the early bird makes hay while the sun shines," or "there's more to the eye than this meets," his smooth tongue and underworld contacts keep him one step ahead of the police, especially Captain von Flanagan, who had never wanted to be a policeman in the first place. He had always wanted to be an undertaker, but the alderman had owed his uncle so much money he almost had to go on the force. Von Flanagan's retirement plans vary from being a psychotherapist to owning a mink ranch or being an actor, depending on his feelings of competence at the moment he launches into his familiar tale of woe.

The strength of the Craig Rice novels lies in the rich blend of strong, colorful characters and classic mystery puzzles set in an atmosphere of zaniness that makes death anecdotal, homicide hilarious, and the police bungling buffoons.

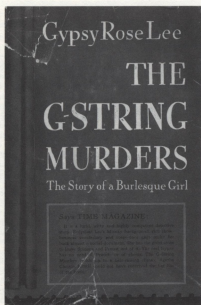
The other character team which Craig Rice created to undertake amusingly chaotic adventures are Bingo Riggs and Handsome Kusak, partners in the International Foto, Motion Picture and Television Corporation of America, or, to put it bluntly, street photographers. This pair first invaded our sensibilities in *The Sunday Pigeon Murders*, followed by *The Thursday Turkey Murders* and last seen in *The April Robin Murders*, which was completed by Ed McBain after Craig Rice's death.

Typical of Georgiana Craig's wacky way of life was her reaction to a *Who's Who* request for a biography and picture of Michael Venning, her pseudonym male identity, who wrote three novels about Melville Fair, a New York private detective who is also an astute criminal psychologist. Donning her husband's coat, a false goatee, and a wide-brimmed hat, Craig posed for a very handsome portrait, pipe in hand and tongue in cheek.

In 1945, as Daphne Sanders, Craig wrote *To Catch a Thief*, a Frank Packard-type tale of a man of two identities who engages in acts of thievery to avenge himself against a group of unscrupulous stock swindlers and then turns the profits over to the swindlers' victims.

One benefit of Craig's employment at RKO while working on the Falcon series was her novel *Crime on My Hands*, published under the name of George Sanders, who was playing the Falcon.

Perhaps even more outrageous than any of the Craig Rice novels are the two which Craig wrote but published under the name of Gypsy Rose Lee, with whom she was living at the time. Both *The G String Murders* and *Mother Finds a Body* are bawdy, sexy, suspenseful, hilarious, and set amidst the colorful trappings of a traveling striptease show. What more marvelous way for a publicity agent to promote her client than to ghostwrite a book or two for her, for Gypsy Rose Lee's publicity agent and manager at that time was none other than Craig herself.



Besides her 24 novels and two true crime books, *The Los Angeles Murders* and *45 Murderers*, Craig Rice wrote countless short stories for numerous mystery magazines. Among these was a series of six stories in collaboration with Stuart Palmer which combined the efforts of John J. Malone and Hildegarde Withers and which were published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. These stories were collected in 1963 as *People vs. Withers & Malone*.

In an informal introduction to this book, Ellery Queen revealed that one of Craig Rice's literary ambitions was to write a detective farce using all the mystery clichés in a single story—including “the hard-boiled private eye who starts out broke and invariably gets a beautiful blonde client who pays off in hundred dollar bills; the heiress bride who wonders, until almost too late, why her shifty-eyed husband spends so much time digging in the basement; the girl who knows something that will give the murderer away, but can't think what; identical twins; a homicidal butler; and, for full measure, an old lady in a wheel chair who walks around when everybody is asleep. . . . I'll bet (her stake—“all the rice in Craigland”) it would be a best seller!” Unfortunately, she never lived to undertake this challenge.

Stuart Palmer, a longtime friend and fellow worker of Craig's at RKO studios, describes her as wanting to experience everything and to keep nothing. “She was born with the gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad.” . . . “Craig was absolutely unique as a storyteller, anywhere, anytime. No matter what befell her in her dizzy life as news-

paper sob sister, poetess, radio writer, author, or whatnot, she could send her listeners into stitches with her account of the disaster. She was, when at her best, absolutely the funniest woman I have ever known.”

A final tribute paid to Craig Rice by Ellery Queen in the introduction to *People vs. Withers & Malone* reads: “Oh how she is missed these unfunny days; she was a wild, wacky, wonderful woman; she was gay, impulsive, generous, often reckless; she was fearful and courageous; and she was foolish and wise beyond her years.”

Checklist of Craig Rice Books

AS CRAIG RICE

Eight Faces at Three
The Corpse Steps Out
The Wrong Murder
The Right Murder
Trial by Fury
The Big Midget Murders
The Sunday Pigeon Murders
Having Wonderful Crime
The Thursday Turkey Murders
Home Sweet Homicide
The Lucky Stiff
The Fourth Postman
Innocent Bystander
Knocked for a Loop
My Kingdom for a Hearse
But the Doctor Died (paperback original)

True Crime

The Los Angeles Murders
45 Murderers

with Stuart Palmer

People vs. Withers & Malone

with Ed McBain

The April Robin Murders

AS DAPHNE SANDERS

To Catch a Thief

AS MICHAEL VENNING

Jethro Hammer
The Man Who Slept All Day
Murder Through the Looking Glass

AS GEORGE SANDERS

Crime on My Hands

AS GYPSY ROSE LEE

Mother Finds a Body
The G String Murders

Bibliography

- Palmer, Stuart and Rice, Craig. *People vs. Withers & Malone*. Doubleday, 1963.
 Penzler, Otto and Steinbrunner, Chris. *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection*. McGraw-Hill, 1976.
 Time, January 28, 1946.

RETRO REVIEWS

Alan Hunter. **Gently Down the Stream.** New York: Roy, 1957. 186pp.

I have often wondered about the effect of the clever blurbs invented by reviewers and publishers to describe detective stories and their authors. The description of Ruth Rendell on the Ballantine paperbacks as "in the grand tradition of Agatha Christie" may have helped sales, but I question Bantam's wisdom in describing John Dickson Carr books as gothics ("a modern masterpiece of ancient evil"). Vivian Mort's famous comment that Patricia Moyes "put the who back into the whodunit" has been enthusiastically appropriated by her publishers, but (to get to the point of this review) the British description of Alan Hunter's Superintendent Gently as "our native rival to Simenon" didn't make me rush out and buy the books. Frankly, rivals of Simenon are not my cup of tea. However, when our local library had for sale a very shelfworn copy of *Gently Down the Stream* for 25¢, I decided that I no longer had an excuse to avoid making up my own mind about Gently.

I was very pleasantly surprised. If this book is typical of Hunter's work, the similarities between Gently and Maigret are superficial: Both smoke pipes and both gain much of their knowledge of the case by questioning witnesses; but Maigret is basically an intuitive detective, while Gently uses evidence and reasoning. The plot of *Gently Down the Stream* is a nicely complex combination of the disappearance of a long-suffering husband from a nasty family situation, a body found in a burned-out boat, infidelities, a seemingly motiveless murder of an old lady who lives on a houseboat, a now-you-see-him-now-you-don't chauffeur who may be responsible for the mayhem, and a surprising amount of physical evidence. Experienced readers of detective fiction will be able to discover part of the solution before Gently does, but I was not prepared for the final denouement. The best part of the book is a careful evocation of small boat handling on the Norfolk broads and the wide variety of characters associated with the titular "stream." Hunter writes with warmth and sensitivity; and any reader would be foolish to wait for another 25¢ book sale before becoming acquainted with Superintendent Gently.

—Douglas G. Greene

Laurence Meynell. **The Evil Hour: A Chronicle of Our Days.** Collins, 1947.

The Evil Hour is extremely well-written—perhaps even better than one might expect from this unpredictable (and sometimes erratic) author. However, it does move a bit too slowly for its own good, and does not lend itself to reasonably rapid reading. More skillful editing should have reduced several points that Meynell seems to belabor to an unnecessary degree.

Stress is placed on characterization, with

good results. Protagonist Charles Hambrey is the owner and operator of his own publicity agency. He is as stalwart and reliable as any hero can be, and a gentleman.

He is in love with the extremely beautiful heroine Stella de Winton, whose twin brother Gerald provides the complications.

Gerald left the R.A.F. under a cloud because he lacked moral fiber. He also drank excessively, and has now become a hopeless alcoholic. He is desperately in love with the sensual Mavis Lorden, the wife of a Member of Parliament, who is no better than she should be, and has publicly been branded a nymphomaniac by her evangelical brother-in-law.

The Evil Hour concentrates on Charles's love for Stella, which is counterpointed by Gerald's debacle until the latter's last desperate attempt to avoid the break-up of his affair with Mavis.

On page 223 (of 256pp.) we learn that Mavis has been murdered in Gerald's home. He claims that she was alive when he left to purchase a bottle of his favorite stimulant, but Divisional Detective-Inspector Dyson suspects otherwise, and the net begins to close in on Gerald.

The spine of this book is labelled "Mystery" in very large letters, but crime fiction specialists have a long (possibly too long) wait for the murder to occur, and may grow restive before reaching page 223.

(It might be noted that the murder in Cyril Hare's superb *Tragedy at Law* (1942) does not take place until near the end, but there are other crime elements present to engross the reader until the final tragedy.)

Meynell's painful conclusion seems completely logical in terms of character, but it might strike many readers as regrettable. His solution to the murder problem has absolutely nothing to do with fair play detection, either, but does seem to be an organic outgrowth of character.

The Evil Hour is a very worthwhile attempt to write a different type of mystery story, and it has many fine things to offer, but it cannot really be judged a complete success.

—Charles Shibuk

* * * * *

Francis John Thornton. **The Snake Harvest.** Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1978. \$9.95

Mainstream bestsellers in the United States, from *Gone with the Wind* to *The Godfather* to *The World According to Garp*, have traditionally followed a strong-willed central character and his family through years of struggle to the summit of their chosen area of interest, be it the post-Civil War South or the world of organized crime. Along the way, scrupulous attention is paid not just to power struggles and infighting, but to the technical details of making a living, and to basic human matters such as births, deaths, marriages. This family-in-struggle model apparently strikes a chord deep in the

American national character, perhaps because as immigrants we all were families-in-struggle once, and lately the pattern has been spilling over into the mystery-writing world; from Robert Ludlum to Ross Macdonald to Lawrence Sanders, everybody's taking a shot at writing a "big" novel or two, and the results have ranged from trash to triumph. Ludlum's *The Gemini Contenders* doesn't relate to any kind of human life that's ever been lived on the planet Earth, while Sanders' *The First (and Second) Deadly Sin* is as close to *War and Peace* as anything the crime-writing demimonde is ever likely to produce.

All of which is the long way around for approaching Francis John Thornton's *The Snake Harvest*, the story of the hunt for a mass murderer of prostitutes in Philadelphia in 1898. Where this novel is best is in its depiction of the day-to-day lifestyles of supersleuth Dr. Ian Blakeley, his family, and the cops he's helping to search for the West Philadelphia Butcher. Where it falls flat is in the elements that make it a "mystery"; the villain is revealed almost from the start, the detection is purely run-of-the-mill, and the solution is as outlandish as anything televised on the tongue-in-cheek TV shows *Wild, Wild West* or *Night Stalker*, except that Thornton wants to be taken seriously.

To make matters worse, not even the day-to-day sections are completely under control. It takes Thornton a hundred or so pages to set up his characters and get the plot rolling, and during that time, while Blakeley is not much more than a shadow at the periphery of the story, Thornton creates and then kills off the most vital and sympathetic character in the entire novel. Regis Tolan is an Irish-American police captain who has raised himself from the poverty of the Pennsylvania coalfields but never forgotten the corruption of public office holders or the mercenary whims of the yellow press, which periodically whips itself into a bigoted frenzy simply to sell more newspapers. When the first suspect is arrested, an extraordinarily unpleasant German exchange student who aloofly refuses to help the police prove his innocence, Tolan is the one who champions him against the bloodthirsty newsman clamoring to see the German hanged. In these early pages, in his unassuming way, Tolan becomes the moral and human center of *The Snake Harvest*, the kind of character most authors sweat to create, and then treasure and nurture. But on page 84 he drops dead from a stroke and leaves a void that Thornton never quite manages to fill again. In fact, there is an amazingly high death rate among the good guys in general—a pair of accidental deaths, a murder-suicide, a broken neck in the penultimate encounter with the Butcher, all in addition to the expected copious slaughter of prostitutes and accomplices—which tends to jar the reader and leave him just a little grumpy. It's as if when Thornton doesn't know what to do next, he throws in a death to

get the adrenalin flowing. It doesn't work.

On the other hand, after Tolan's death, things settle down for 175 pages or so, and by and large it *does* work, sometimes astonishingly well. For one thing, Thornton's historical research is impeccable; this may not be what it was actually like to live in turn-of-the-century Philadelphia, but he certainly had me fooled. He manages to portray the physical circumstances of a whole cross-section of the city's inhabitants, from the shanty Irish of Grundy's Patch to the *nouveau riche* plutocrats of Devon, with absolute verisimilitude, and set them all against the perfect backdrop, the xenophobia of the six-month "splendid little war" with Spain. Individually, many of the characters tend to be caricatures—there's the regulation dumb cop, for example, this time a bonehead named Wilmer Fatzinger who speaks in an outrageous Pennsylvania Dutch accent—but all the characters, even the stereotypes, tend to grow on the reader in an altogether disarming way. Though Tolan is never satisfactorily replaced, we get plenty of interesting people and relationships to think about, from the running battle between Blakeley's pompous butler and perfectionist cook, to the chaste love life of scholarly detective Nathan McBride, to the suffragette zealotry of Blakeley's daughter Rosalie. It's the kind of parade of characters and situations that appeals because it mirrors our own lives; something is always happening to somebody, and we start thinking of these characters as real people, this one rather obnoxious, that one a bit of a bore, but this one over here totally lovable, until we become as absorbed in their day-to-day struggles as we are in those of our friends and relatives. During this section, too, it's not clear that the solution to the crimes is going to prove as ridiculous as it eventually turns out, and we're content to let Blakeley take his time in weaving the nets around the evil Dr. Max Toberman.

Unfortunately, the outlandish solution and attenuated climax (Thornton must really discover the virtues of compactness when plotting a suspense novel) undercut the power of this long section, and they lead inevitably to the conclusion that although Francis John Thornton is a fine writer, he's not a fine mystery writer. At least not yet. A great many of his mistakes can be assessed to inexperience—a more practiced author would have massacred Blakeley, Fatzinger, McBride, and the rest of the cast before he harmed a hair of Regis Tolan's—and as such, will probably be cured in his next volume. But it's also possible that suspense books just aren't Thornton's meat, that he's actually an historical novelist *manqué*, or even a "serious" author. At any rate, the one thing he needs to develop most right now is a sense of just how good a writer he really is, and how that power can best be applied. From there it's the moon.

— Carl Hoffman

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Archibald Marshall and Horace Annesley Vachell. *Mote House Mystery*. Dodd, Mead, 1926; Hodder, 1926 as *Mr. Allen*.

I must confess, I haven't the faintest idea why I picked up *Mote House Mystery* in The Mysterious Bookshop.

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The authors, Messrs. Marshall and Vachell, are far from famous, and not mentioned in any of the usual reference works—with the honorable exception of the prescient Otto Penzler's brief essays in the *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection*.

In any event, this turned out to be a serendipitous find.

The first half of the novel describes narrator James Pollen's acquisition of a summer house in rural Essex, and his settling in with his sister and her two young daughters.

Rarely, if ever, have I fallen under the enchanting spell of such an appealing setting—with characters to match. I was utterly overwhelmed by this novel's remarkable attractiveness and charm.

The latter quality, alas, is in extremely short supply today, and we are the poorer for its loss.

A. A. Milne's slightly earlier *The Red House Mystery* (1922) is the only mystery story I know that is consistently cited for its charm, but that quality is far more abundant in *Mote House Mystery*.

If charm were the be-all and end-all of mystery fiction, then this novel would be one of the genre's supreme achievements.

Unfortunately, the crime fiction elements—fraud and attempted murder—present in the second half of this work are both overly obvious and some ten or fifteen years behind their time.

The authors had been responsible for several mystery novels and volumes of short stories previous to this, their only collaborative effort, and their conception of crime fiction is very much a pre-golden age view.

Vachell went on to contribute a volume of crime shorts in 1929, and probably another one in 1932. Both authors published their last mystery novels in 1934—the year of Marshall's demise at 68. Vachell went on to live until 1955, when he died at the ripe old age of 94, but appears to have made no further significant contributions to the genre.

On the basis of *Mote House Mystery* and Vachell's short story, "My Double," contained in the anthology *My Best Detective Story* (Faber, 1931), the work of both these authors appears to be very much worth seeking out.

If only the charm and ambience of *Mote House Mystery* had been matched by its crime fiction elements, this novel would never have been allowed to lapse into obscurity.

—Charles Shibuk

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Retrospective Mini-Reviews

Dictatorship of the Dove by Francis Gerard. Rich, 1936.

Inspector Meredith seeks to unmask the head of an organization of murderous pacifists. A forecast of the Ivor Drummond books, and just as entertaining.

Sleep, My Love by Robert Martin. Dodd, Mead, 1953.

Jim Bennett tracks down the knife-slayer of two women responsible for the break-up of the marriages of two business executives in this expanded pulp novelette from five years earlier. Similar in some respects to John D. MacDonald's "The Drowner."

The Exploits of Fidelity Dove by Roy Vickers. Newnes reissue, 1935.

How often has one read a classic short story in an anthology, eagerly wanted to read others, and been disappointed? Too often, but not this time. Fidelity, an injustice adjudicator, thwarts loan sharks, con men, unscrupulous financiers, etc., and still manages to avoid the clutches of the police in this most entertaining and readable collection.

Devil in the Belfry by Russell Thorndyke. Dial, 1932.

Whenever the bellringers play Herod's Peel, someone gets strangled. The victims are persons that a different ringer has a motive for killing; despite witnesses saying the killer looked like the one with the motive, that one has a perfect alibi. Conspiracy, a cleverly disguised killer, or the supernatural? After a promising start, it degenerates, despite a surprise later used by Carr, into an Edgar Wallace-type thriller by the introduction of a master criminal known only as The Wizard.

Slice of Hell by Mike Roscoe. Crown, 1954.

Kansas City private eye Johnny April goes to San Francisco on two separate cases which eventually become one. As the corpses pile up, the only question is how many of the characters are on the side of the angels. Routine hard-boiled stuff.

Death on the Center Court by George Goodchild. Furman, 1936.

The bookies stand to lose a pile of money if the underdog wins the Men's Singles Championship at Wimbledon. When he drops dead

during the finals with Inspector McLean as a witness, the book starts to go downhill because the tennis premise turns out to be a flashy showpiece having nothing whatever to do with the plot.

Inspector Rusby's Finale by Virgil Markham. Farrar & Rinehart, 1933.

Rusby is invited to spend the weekend in the country. The morning after his arrival he awakens to find the house deserted except for the corpse of someone he's never seen before. Early surprises cause him and the authorities to doubt his sanity until...

Oh, Murderer Mine! by Norbert Davis. Handi-Books, 1946.

Doan and his Great Dane Carstairs are on a college campus bodyguarding a much-too-handsome-for-his-own-good scientist whose older wife runs a high-class beauty salon. Peopled with the usual screwballs one expects from Davis. It's unfortunate that there were only three Doan and Carstairs novels, especially these days when the only humor-with-homicide books are those by Carter Brown.

John Smith Hears Death Walking by Wyatt Blossingame. Bart House, 1944.

Formerly blind, private eye John Smith now has super-sensitive senses of hearing, smell, and touch. Unfortunately, in these six pulp stories, the author fails to exploit them to their fullest extent, if at all; hence they are written with the erratic quality one expects from the pulps—two very good, two average, and two not so good.

—Angelo Panagos

Gahan Wilson's Fu Manchu print (TAD cover for Winter 1979 issue)



A letterpress print of Gahan Wilson's cover illustration of Dr. Fu Manchu is available from The Mysterious Press. Printed on hand dampened yellow Curtis Tweedweave 70-pound text stock, it was pulled on a hand press at The Angelica Press. Each print has been numbered and signed personally by Gahan Wilson and is offered in a 9- by 12-in. mat. This printing is strictly limited to 350 numbered and signed copies. The price is \$20.00.



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