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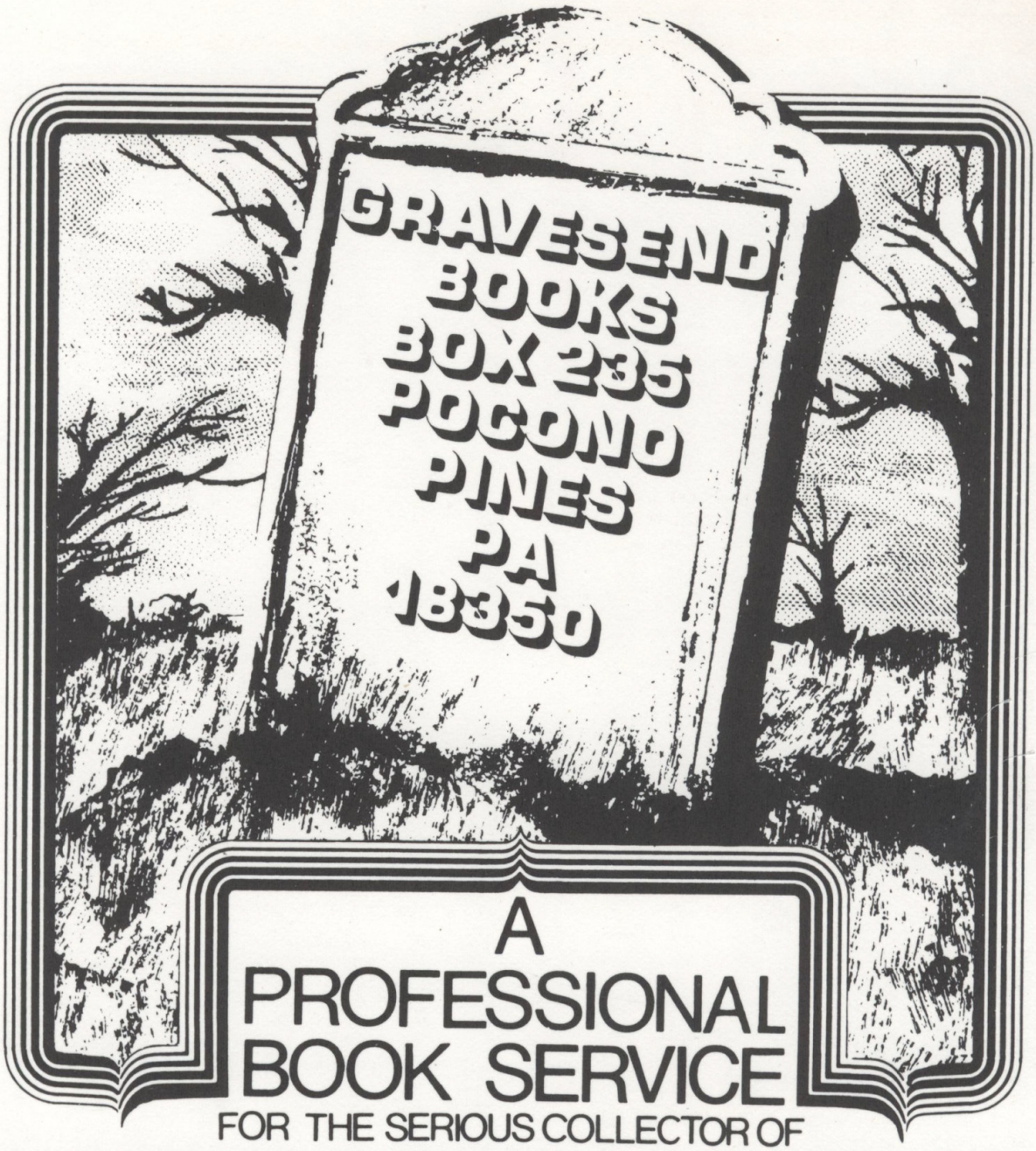

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THE UNEASY CHAIR

Dear TADian:

"Woolrich is not one of the masters. At best his books are period pieces. . . . But nostalgia alone is not enough of a substitute for a real literary style. . ."

These are the words "Newgate Callendar" used to close his (her?) review of *The Black Curtain, The Black Path of Fear,* and *The Black Angel* in a November 1982 column in the *New York Times Book Review* (TBR). Callendar devoted the entire space of the "CRIME" review column to a negative commentary on three reissue titles (in paperback) by someone most mystery readers do recognize as a master. While I recognize the need for revisionist criticism, it strikes me that the comments in that review came not from any understanding of the material or the genre, but rather from a desire to stir things up, a "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" of the 'eighties. Callendar, it must be pointed out, does not have Wilson's wit or style.

It was not, however, simply the caustic tone of the review which has inspired this column; rather, it is all that that review represented.

TBR's "CRIME" column has been rather erratic in appearance lately, as opposed to the old days when it could be counted on to brighten every week's edition. (I will graciously acknowledge that it is not as erratic as sf coverage, and that Westerns, romances, and other categories are not covered at all.) It also seems that the column is now penned by many, rather than by one. While variety is nice, I prefer having a sense of a reviewer, knowing whether we agree or not in general. I understood, usually, Harold Schoenberg's mindset; with his retirement, I have lost the ability to approach the review on an equal footing. Since there is now more than one voice, what I derive from the column is disjointed.

TBR, like most of the mass media book review organs, tends to relegate the paperback to a secondary position, and the paperback *original* to virtual non-existence. While I can grudgingly accept that position in terms of the general pages of the *Review,* I cannot accept it at all when it comes to genre reviewing. True, some of the major lights in our field get their hardcover books reviewed off the "CRIME" page (*viz.,* Ross Macdonald's first-page treatment; of course, his view of society is much more in keeping with the *Times's* stand on societal ills). In the instance of the Woolrich review, TBR did see fit to devote a column to mysteries in paperback. An entire column. On an outright pan. Of reissues.

While the question of running negative reviews is one that plagues editors daily (would the reader be better served by having worthwhile—relative to the other books in a current crop—titles reviewed and damn the weaker entry by ignoring it?), I don't think there is too much room for debate when it comes to running a column which clearly states that the books are a waste of time and money. I would use the space for something else. The entire review could have been reduced to three paragraphs and the rest of the space used to review new titles. It would not have taken much to find some that are in the same general set as the Woolrich titles and, perhaps, use the new titles as counterpoint, showing how, in the reviewer's mind, these are better. Of course, that would demand that the reviewer read and understand the field. Mayhap that is asking too much. And, I guess, it is also asking too much for the august *New York Times* to pay attention to paperback originals. They aren't read by the right people.

Finally, we come to what the reviewer said. After establishing that Woolrich was not a happy man, we learn that the plotting in his books leaves something to be desired and that as a stylist he was not better. We are told that he was an inept imitator of Chandler and Hammett and that while Woolrich did dream up situations in which a central character faced long odds, "there is curiously little tension. . .and one knows that everything is going to come out all right." Really? It always struck me that the one thing you *couldn't* be sure of with Woolrich was how things would turn out. The cost of success to any of his central characters was often far more than the success warranted. But, then, I *read* the books. You only get out of it what you will put in, like jazz.

What Callendar has failed to do is meet the author on the author's terms, the unspoken contract that exists between every author and reader. It is, of course, part of reviewing that the reviewer brings standards to his work. Those standards, however, must be in relation to the book under consideration and reflect an understanding of the genre, of the author's purpose, and of what the reader expects. While certain standards are universal, each category of writing develops its own, peculiar unto itself. When those special standards are debated, one moves from reviewing to criticism. Eight paragraphs in TBR does not represent criticism, nor does this particular incarnation of Newgate Callendar reflect enough understanding to command the title.

It is my hope that any young writer wanting to learn how to deal with suspense, and that any reader who enjoys being taken for a rollercoaster ride by a

master, will not be turned away by the complaints of a reviewer who seemingly has an ax to grind. And I hope TBR will start checking the qualifications of its reviewers a bit more closely, and exercise more judgment in what is being reviewed, and in what manner. I think, too, that it may be time to come out from behind the cute Newgate Callendar cover and let the reviewer be responsible for his or her words.

And in answer to the question which may be resounding in your mind right now, the reason so much space was devoted to the question is that reviews are immeasurably important to writers and that TBR is probably the single most important review medium around today. Far more people, unfortunately, saw that review than will see this column or will have read any of the in-depth criticism of Woolrich in these pages. That kind of influence cannot be allowed to run wild, wreaking havoc. I don't know that Goliath will acknowledge the gnat flying in his face, but we're gonna buzz until swatted away.

* * * * *

By now, I'd assume you are aware of the increase in price of TAD, as well as the additional sixteen pages we've added to each issue. While everything else around us seems to be going up without giving anything extra, I'm proud of being part of something which still gives value for the dollar (and isn't imported). A large part of our ability to do this is a result of the support we get from you. And for that, my thanks and best wishes until next time.

Best mysterious wishes,

Michael Seidman

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THE NOVELS OF MICHAEL INNES

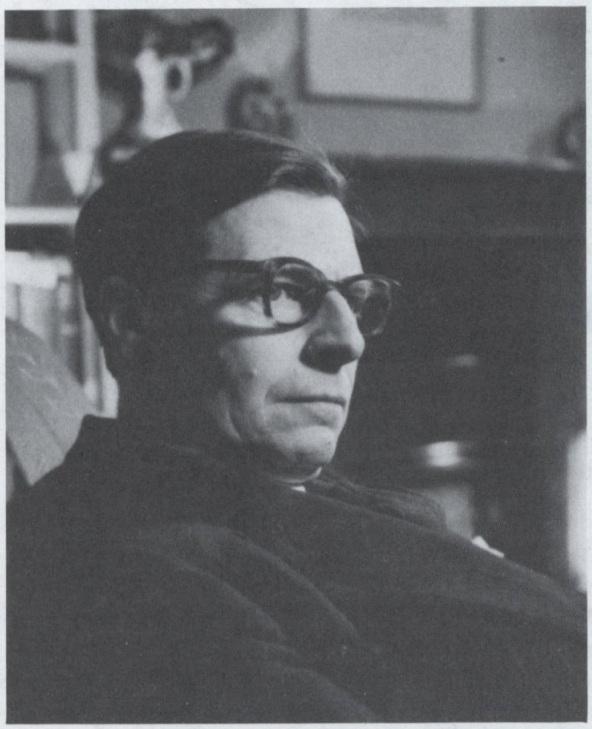
By Leroy Panek

If Mephistopheles were as tricky as he is fabled to be, he would target a middle-aged professor of English at a provincial university who idly dreams of scholarly eminence, literary success, and a comfortable income. Mephisto's part of the bargain would be to give the temptee the bibliography of J. I. M. Stewart. Just think, literary biographies of Hardy, Conrad, and Kipling; a pamphlet on Thomas Love Peacock; *Character and Motive in Shakespeare*; an edition of *Florio's Montaigne*; and *Eight Modern Writers* in the *Oxford History of English Literature* series. Then, to fulfill his fantasies of literary creation, Mephistopheles would toss in Stewart's ten novels: *Mark Lambert's Supper* (1954), *The Guardians* (1955), *A Use of Riches* (1957), *The Man Who Won the Pools* (1961), *The Last Tresilians* (1963), *An Acre of Grass* (1965), *The Alwins* (1966), *Vanderlyn's Kingdom* (1967), *Avery's Mission* (1971), and *A Palace of Art* (1972). For garnish, Old Nick could add two short-story collections. With visions of endowed chairs and immunity from academic perishing, and images of Mercedes diesels, the temptee would dip into his forearm and sign away his soul in redder ink than he uses to mark wretched freshman essays. Versed in the legal quibble, however, Mephistopheles would have the final chuckle, for he would have held back the fact that Stewart also wrote forty-one mystery novels and three collections of short stories under the pseudonym Michael Innes. He would have held back the fact that Innes is likely to be a more significant name in the history of detective fiction than that of Stewart in the worlds of academic scholarship or "regular" literature. Whereupon the endowed chairs would become professorships without tenure and the Mercedeses would shrink to VW Rabbits.

When the young J. I. M. Stewart went up to Oxford in the '20s, he probably had little notion that he could be used in this sort of a bargain. But then he fell in with thieves and murderers. Oxford in the '20s virtually ran its own detective writing school along with its famous and ancient colleges. G. D. H. Cole was a Fellow of University College in 1925, and Ronald Knox was made Catholic Chaplain of the University in the same year. During Stewart's Oxford years, Knox published three detective novels, and Cole, with his wife Margaret, published four. These scholar-detective writers were part of the first movement in the Golden Age of detective fiction, and they expropriated the detective story from hack thriller writers and newspaper serialists and turned it into a respectable, middle-class diversion. They also inspired the next generation of academic and fringe-academic detective writers. Thus we find men who had been undergraduates in the twenties turning to the detective story as relaxation from their serious intellectual endeavors. This is where J. C. Masterman (*An Oxford Tragedy,* 1933), C. P. Snow (*Death Under Sail,* 1932), C. Day-Lewis (*Thou Shell of Death,* 1932), and Innes fit in. During his later years, in fact, Innes tipped a nod to the influence of Knox and the Coles in his own work when, in *Appleby's Answer* (1973), he introduced a detective-writing don who works "in the tradition of Douglas and Margaret Cole or Ronnie Knox."[1] We should not, though, tread too heavily on this part of Innes's background: Stewart did not change into Innes until eight years after his graduation, and, although he puts plenty of academic garnish into his detective plots in terms of character, locale, and throw-away reference, he became a rather different kind of detective writer than Knox or the Coles—or Snow or Masterman or Nicholas Blake, for that matter. He did, though, receive from the don detective writers the notion that writing light fiction was a comely recreation for an academic. But Innes's detective novels emphatically do not derive from the musty, mathematical, logical, serious tradition of Knox and the Coles. Rather they come from a consciousness steeped in *Treasure Island*, convulsed by Wodehouse and *Zuleika Dobson,* and then passed through a course of learning and teaching the technique and craft of

fiction, ancient and modern. In 1935, then, while traveling to Australia to become Jury Professor of English at the University of Adelaide, he wrote a detective novel instead of contenting himself with browsing the inevitable dog-eared English classics in the ship's library. This impulse to his first detective novel became an addiction which eventually produced forty more.

Gosh, forty-one novels. They ought to be mostly formula garbage, repetitious, stale, flat, and cynical. Innes does occasionally write vapid pulp, especially in the detective story mode, as in *There Came Both Mist and Snow* (1940) or *Appleby's Other Story* (1974). Sometimes he gets so tangled in his own cute complexities that his dénouements fail, as in *A Night of Errors* (1948). In the early 1940s, he had to do battle with his own plots and prose style. Most of his novels, though, have surprising life. Partly this came from the fact that after 1938 he stopped being a committed detective story writer: even though in a few later books he uses narrative puzzle machinery, in 1938 Innes gave up the pretense of fair play and clue-dropping. He then became not only the producer of clever, contrived, and amusing detective novels, but he also became a thriller writer dealing with gangs instead of focused questions about who did it. Further, he took up the spy novel in earnest in the '40s. As he wrote, therefore, he found succor from boredom in switching forms, from detective story to thriller to spy novel, back to the detective story, and so on, thereby keeping a bit of freshness and enthusiasm in reserve for each type. Finally, Innes's sense of construction and plotting, traditional and solid but capable of zany effect, removed him from the potentially wearing pattern of the detective novel and gave him the reassurance and continuity which kept his novels fresher than those of most prolific authors.



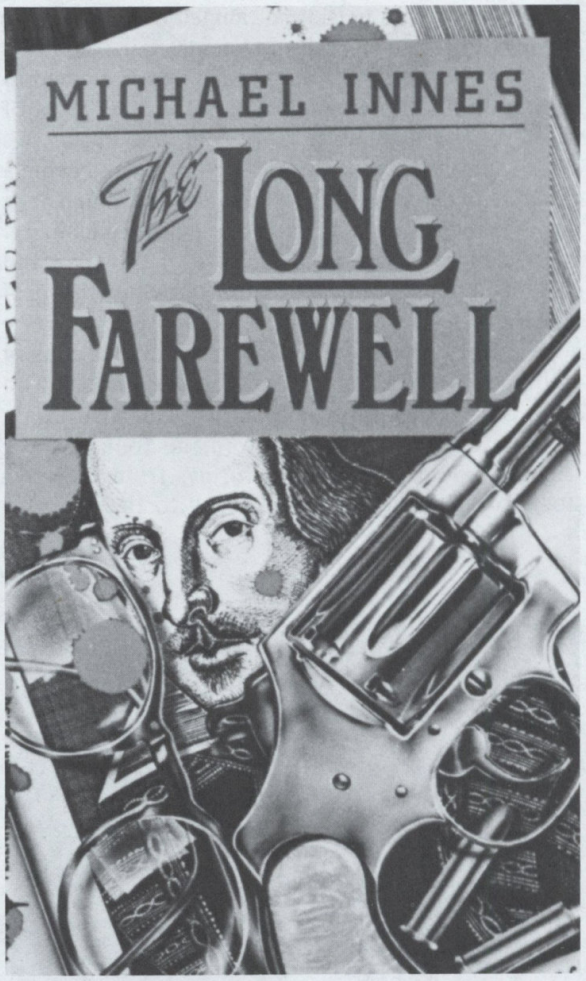
Since Innes wrote so much, it is convenient to divide his books into detective novels and thrillers—keeping in mind, of course, that in reality they do overlap in style and technique. Later, I will skim over his overall development as a popular novelist, but here I want to have a go at definition and classification. Let's start with his detective novels, since this is where he started. Innes began as a detective writer in 1936, and he has continued to write detective novels up to 1978 with *The Ampersand Papers*. By detective novels, I mean those in which a detective (usually, but not always, John Appleby) is the protagonist, in which a reasonably limited and domestic crime forms the central problem, and in which the unraveling unmasks the hidden antagonist. After this, it is pretty easy, for Innes's detective novels define themselves historically and structurally.

In 1936, when he started writing popular fiction, the detective novel presented a number of features which Innes ostensibly followed. Following Lord Trenchard's founding of the Hendon Police Academy in 1934, detective writers increasingly turned from the private investigator to the professional police detective as their hero. While it would seem that this should have led immediately to detailed scientific and procedural interest in the detective novel, it actually had the opposite effect. While writers in the early '20s thought it necessary to describe scientific criminology (how to dust for fingerprints), this was becoming tedious for writers and readers. Thus the professional policeman, as he emerges in novels by Marsh and others, authenticates procedural and scientific detail simply by being a policeman. Many novelists, indeed, were unabashedly anti-scientific, ridiculing the stodgy scientific detective tale. From the late 1920s, the idea of the puzzle as the controlling metaphor of the detective novel began to mesmerize writers: "jigsaw" and "crossword" pepper the prose of a lot of detective writers in the '20s and '30s. Also we can observe writers specifically centering their fictions on the puzzle concept and using old narrative devices and inventing new ones to engage their readers in a puzzle-solving contest. Finally, in the '30s, a number of detective writers, headed by Francis Iles, attempted to make the detective novel into a subspecies of the psychological novel with their main object being to poke around in the sick psyche of the criminal.

Innes, in his works, particularly the early ones, seems to fit right in with these features of the '30s detective novel. First of all, Innes did create the continuing hero as a professional policeman from the educated class, seemingly in response to Hendon and in reaction against the dog-eared convention of the aristocratic private investigator. This same motive holds with other British writers, such as Marsh, and it certainly holds with the American creation of the hardboiled detective. But Innes's detective, John Appleby, is not essentially a policeman, nor was he really meant to be. He does, granted, use the ancillary police services such as fingerprint departments and police surgeons, and we do get a few scenes, like those in *Silence Observed* (1961), at Scotland Yard. Appleby, though, feels more at home conversing with dons, undergraduates, and nutty Peers than he does with policemen. In fact, Innes draws Appleby as a voice without much personality in the early novels, and he does not really become a personality until he retires from the Yard and becomes a private investigator with his own irascibility, his own country house, and his own family. Giles Gott, the don-detective writer in *Death at the President's Lodging* (1935) and *Hamlet, Revenge!* (1937), is in many ways Innes's early detective hero (read as anti-hero), and he is emphatically not a policeman. Likewise, even though he includes fingerprinters and photographers and police surgeons with their technological impedimenta, Innes began and continued to be an anti-detail, anti-scientific, anti-procedural writer. A pretty good sign of this occurs in *Hamlet, Revenge!* in which Innes lampoons the tradition of the scientific detective by darting in a police scientist named Dr. Thorndyke. Now, Innes does occasionally bring in scientific/medical curiosities, like the man with the misplaced heart in *There Came Both Mist and Snow.* These things, however, are just that, curiosities, and they generally have no bearing on the solution to the main problems. When he does use physical detail in the solution to the crime, it usually functions to confuse the investigation rather than to eliminate people. Thus Innes shows not only that the detective novel has passed the stage at which it had to explain procedures and depend on physical evidence, but that he has arrived at the stage at which everybody knows about fingerprints, *et al.,* and at which the villains use these things to compound the confusion which they create when they stage-manage crimes. Along this line, Appleby gives his audience this advice in *Death at the President's Lodging:*

> Here we have an instance of a technical advance in criminology being exploited not once but *twice* in the same case. Which is a good word of warning, perhaps, in the field of "scientific detection."[2]

Just as Innes, like other innovative writers in the '30s, gives us a re-evaluation of scientific/technical detection and detective writing, he also, loose and fast, plays with the idea of the puzzle story. His detective novels, like those of his contemporaries, present us with heroes whose function is to solve problems and to do so neatly, quickly, cleverly, and elegantly. Appleby has a built-in obsession about problem-solving which becomes very apparent in the later novels. Thus Innes gives us this quick look into Appleby in *The Open House* (1972):



> There was plenty of time (thus a small seductive voice from the past seemed to murmur in his ear) to tie the whole thing up before breakfast.[3]

This limited time-frame, dictated by the hero's nature, as well as the closed setting of university or big house, point to the game board and time-limit structure so common to the puzzle detective novel. Particularly in his early novels, Innes uses many standard narrative devices of the puzzle story. In

Death at the President's Lodging, he gives us a room drawing and also directs the reader's attention to crucial spots in the story ("And the moment. . . was the cardinal moment in the St. Anthony's case."[4]). *Hamlet, Revenge!* includes a typical puzzle sign alerting readers to pay attention to everything:

> But soon circumstances were to compel Gott to dredge up every accessible scrap of it [his conversation] from oblivion, to sift and search it as he had never perhaps sifted and searched before.[5]

Innes's detective asks peculiar questions of his characters and readers and tells us that they are strange, as with this passage from *Lament for a Maker* (1938):

> "Whether her uncle ever went in for winter sports."
> "A most enigmatic inquiry."
> Noel Gylby looked up from stuffing his pockets providently with buttered biscuits. "You'll find," he said, "that Appleby has questions like that for us all round. What's mine?"
> "Just this. We've had the message of The Learned Rat. But what was the message of The Unfamiliar Owl?"[6]

And if this dog does not bark, Innes records for us interrogations and lays out chronological and geographical schemes for checking alibis. In addition to these puzzle devices, he employs puzzle methodology in the structure of his detective books. Wilkie Collins bequeathed to Sayers, Christie, and others the use of multiple narrators to cover up facts and to make the simple seem complex. Innes, too, uses multiple narration and the switch from voice to voice as the basis for *Lament for a Maker* and *What Happened at Hazelwood* (1946). As a larger narrative structure, Innes also cleaves to the multiple-solution plot in his early books: the plot which ends in successive accusation, proof, and refutation applied to several characters at the close of the novel. Early on, the multiple-solution plot shows up in *Death at the President's Lodging, Hamlet, Revenge!, Lament for a Maker, Stop Press* (1939), and *There Came Both Mist and Snow.* Finishing off the evidence of puzzle-writing in Innes, we find that he wrote a cluster of novels which hang upon a literary quotation. Nicholas Blake (pseudonym of C. Day-Lewis) with *Thou Shell of Death* brought into repute the detective who solves a crime not because of his knowledge of tobacco ash or denture adhesives but because of his knowledge of literature (in this case, Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*). Innes does the same, using Dunbar, Coleridge, Dickens, and Shakespeare in *Lament for a Maker, There Came Both Mist and Snow, The Weight of the Evidence* (1943), and *The Long Farewell* (1958).[7]

All of these puzzle-related devices put Innes smack in the middle of the detective story as it evolved in the late 1920s and early 1930s. But he, like other superior detective writers, never was a puzzle-writer: for all of the puzzle signs, his detective novels are not reader-writer games intended to exercise logic. Innes, like other progressive detective writers, first of all realized that the world of the puzzle-novel lacked any correspondence with the actual world; as Appleby notes in *The Weight of the Evidence,* detective novels are:

> "A species of fiction in which there would be some logical connection between Pluckrose's meteorite and the Vice-Chancellor's bust. A beautiful world," Appleby sighed.[8]

Going a step further, in *Silence Observed* (1961), Innes makes Appleby continually return to thinking about an old man (who was stomped to death in Steppeny) while he chases the crooks in the faked-up main plot. While he can make these observations, the unreality of the detective story *qua* unreality does not too much trouble Innes, who relishes the most contrived of artificial situations. The reasons which cause him to distance himself from the detective puzzle-story are a bit more technically and psychologically practical.

Now, if Innes does not deal in physical minutae (and he usually does not), this means that, if his books are puzzles, they concentrate upon evaluating the unknowns in human personality—motive, or psychology, if you will—and upon blocking out characters' movements in time and space. His use of movement, as I will show in a bit, does not derive from detective story conventions. Besides, Innes prided himself in devising zany, complicated movements which defy prediction, so his novels are not physical puzzle-pieces. Thus, if they are puzzle-books, the puzzle has to reside in character and motive. But it does not. First, from the villain's side, Innes produces stories in which motive has little meaning: in the multiple-solution plot, everyone can be proved guilty, and it is only the writer's manipulation and not the characters' psychology or the reader's insight or logic which focuses the disparate events. If anyone in the novel can be guilty, then it cannot be a psychological puzzle because the reader cannot put the pieces together. Secondly, Innes's use of heterodox motives, forbidden by rule-writers like S. S. Van Dine (the spy solution to *Hamlet, Revenge!* is a case in point), helps to demonstrate his wandering from standard psychological puzzle dogma. Also, Innes has doubts, grave and whimsical, about psychology as it appears in popular fiction. In his early books, he repeatedly introduces psychologists and psychiatrists who become loonier and loonier as the novels proceed, culminating in the psychologist Master Criminal in *The Daffodil Affair* (1942). In *Hamlet, Revenge!* he demonstrates that the ingenious psychiatric solution is the wrong one, and through-

out his books he adheres to his description in *Death at the President's Lodging* of psychology as "the slightly rummy psychology that most detective stories require."[9] Although late in his career he did write a few detective novels which ask the who-did-it question, none of his novels actually rests on the puzzle assumption that the reader will try to figure out the solution. With Innes, the answers to puzzle-questions either do not aid the reader in doping out the solution, or they are terribly obvious. If, therefore, Innes uses puzzle devices in his narration, he then goes on to vitiate them by exploding a surprise at the end of the plot.

In addition to the rather late phenomenon of the reader-writer puzzle-story, detective novels have long depended on readers finding a species of intellectual fulfillment in watching the circuits trip open in the analytical, problem-solving brain of the detective. From Poe onward, we are supposed to watch the detective think, and say, Wow, what a mind! Now, Innes knew too much about the ways of the creative consciousness to do much with this tradition. Therefore, we find in the books that Appleby may possess facts, but he intuits answers. And this intuition sometimes goes wrong. In *Lament for a Maker,* in fact, we can see Innes dashing the puzzle metaphor to pieces. First he sets us up by having Guthrie order a load of jigsaw puzzles while he formulates his criminal plan. But then the plan fails to work as concocted. In the parallel working toward the solution, Appleby, too, finds the puzzle an inadequate description for problem solving:

> What I could not tell was that the jigsaw metaphor was wholly inadequate; that we were confronted rather by a chemical mixture, complex, unstable, ready to take final and unexpected form only at the adding of the last ingredient of all.[10]

The detective's brain, then, works according to a biochemical analogy rather than a mechanical one, and, this suggests, readers observe not so much a logical construct as an organic one which reshapes itself as the plot proceeds. Perhaps as further denial of the primacy of puzzle thinking or observing in the books, Innes, in his early novels, makes his heroes fail. Thus Gott generates an exquisitely baroque solution in *Hamlet, Revenge!* which is totally wrong, and even Appleby goofs in *Lament for a Maker.*

Fairly early in his career, Innes wrote a description of himself as a detective writer. In *The Daffodil Affair,* Hudspith discusses with Appleby their present weird situation:

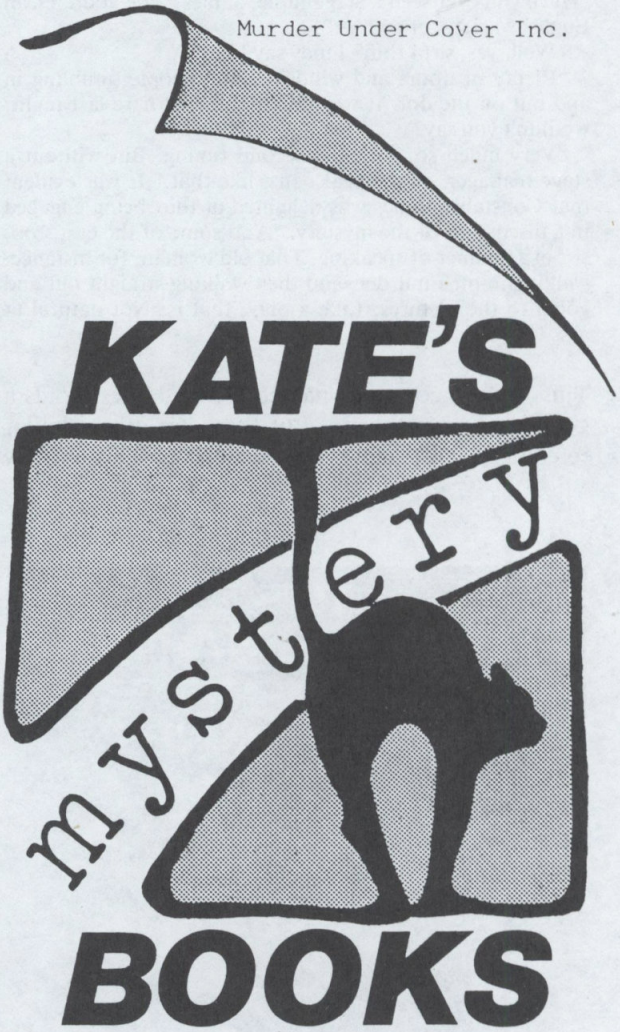
> "We're in a sort of hodgepodge of fantasy and harum-scarum adventure that isn't a proper detective story at all. We might be by Michael Innes."
>
> "Innes? I've never head of him."[11]

Hudspith may be accurate here, but he does not quite get the point of detective stories. Surprise motivates most good detective plots, and it is surprise to which Innes cleaves. His endings, in the early books at least, explode in wild surprises which do, in their own bizarre ways, explain the events in the novels. From his first novel, Innes saw the detective story as the realm of "quiddities and wilie-beguilies."[12] Throughout the 1950s, he demonstrated that he possesses a large capacity for inventing plots which turn upon and end in the craziest possible situations. About the wildest of these to reach fruition is in *The Weight of the Evidence,* wherein a don and a meteorite meet in a squishy puddle. The end of *What Happened at Hazelwood* runs pretty well in the loony sweepstakes, with a sin-obsessed priest violently reacting to a heathen painting coming alive. Even if Innes did siphon the nutty situation and zany ending into his spy novels in the '40s, filling his detective books instead with playful references to art and then evoking Appleby's comfortable middle-class milieu, his early detective books all rest on one sort of jape or another. We can see this most clearly in the fictional detective novels and supernumerary plots which he casually flips into his own books. Take Giles Gott, for instance. Gott is the detective-story-writing don whom Innes introduced into *Death at the President's Lodging* and *Hamlet, Revenge!* Gott has written *Death Among the Stalactites,* "with all that stuff about how long a well-nourished, middle-aged man would take to petrify,"[13] and *Murder at the Zoo,* which supposedly turns on training a gorilla to swallow candy revolvers so that he will eventually ingest the real thing. Along these same wacko lines, Aljo Wedderburn in *Lament for a Maker* recounts cases in which one victim expired from eating haggis injected with sheepdip and another was blown up by a land mine which was then passed off as being part of a geological excavation. Richard Eliot, in *Stop Press,* has written a detective novel in which the victim dies in the desert because the murderer has injected poison into the hump of the victim's camel. Even Appleby joins the fun by propounding a hypothesis about committing suicide with a pistol attached to helium-filled balloons in *The Secret Vanguard* (1941). All of these patently absurd plot suggestions, of course, show the susceptibility of the detective story to ridicule—and Innes's clear consciousness of this. They also show that Innes finds the fulfillment of the form not in the irrefutable logic of its ending but in the free-wheeling creation of alternate hypotheses to explain away unusual combinations of facts. Finally, these zany plots larded into his novels show that early in his career Innes wished to build his plots on improbable surprises. This shows with ample clarity in the bizarre endings of *Death at the President's Lodging, Hamlet, Revenge!, Lament*

for a Maker, There Came Both Mist and Snow, and *What Happened at Hazelwood.* At the close of his novels, Innes expects to evoke delight and surprise, and to this end he manipulates their elements.

For his surprises, he runs through many of the stock techniques used by detective writers in the 1930s. In one book, virtually every character has hauled or mauled the body (à la *Murder on the Orient Express*), in another the narrator is the assassin (as in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*), in still another a freak change in temperature causes a pistol to fire (see Carr's *Fatal Descent*), and in several there are no crimes at all. Understanding this, though, provides little help in fathoming the essential Innes. To do this, we need to understand that the detective novel gave him not a new way of plotting nor a unique array of narrative techniques, but it handed him additional ways of plotting and writing which he could combine with conventions drawn from other, older kinds of literature. Thus, when we look at his entire detective canon, we find that he constantly fabricates stories, mostly for his own amusement, from motif original to the prose romance or the dramatic melodrama, and to these he adds the more modern devices of the detective story. Look, for example, at twins. Twins or twin-like identities appear in *Lament for a Maker, A Night of Errors, Hare Sitting Up* (1959), *The New Sonia Wayward* (1960), *Money from Holme* (1964), *A Change of Heir* (1966), *The Gay Phoenix* (1976), and *Going It Alone* (1980). If we want to, we can connect this with Innes/Stewart's obvious knowledge of Conrad's *The Secret Sharer:* indeed, Innes invites this by saying that his novels are like a combination of Conrad and Wodehouse. But this is balderdash. Innes rings in twins so often because they are a classic device from the romance for complicating plots and causing confusion. This becomes clear when we look at his comically heavy-handed introduction of the Dromios (from Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*) in *A Night of Errors.* In addition to twins, he also employs the chestnut of the returned traveler to stir up confusion and surprise: see for instance *Lament for a Maker* and *What Happened at Hazelwood.* In both of these novels, someone supposed to be abroad and out of the plot picture turns up to complicate matters. Finally, Innes returns again and again to the motif, as old as papyrus, of the hidden heir. This we can find in *Lament for a Maker, Appleby's End* (1945), *What Happened at Hazelwood, A Night of Errors, Christmas at Candleshoe* (1953), and *The Open House.* About confusion, he found, the old masters were never wrong; they knew that it rarely occurred in life but that it was a jim-dandy way to complicate a plot.

Therefore, Innes, in his detective stories, takes puzzle devices and adds them to stock plot motifs



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from the romance and inserts them into plots which do not aim at order or logic but which create narrative farce. Throughout his novels, he continually drops references to dramatic farce. The most extended and most informative of these comes in *Silence Observed:*

"Have you ever seen a stage farce, James? The good, clean English variety, of course."

"Well, yes, sir; I think I may say I have."

"Plenty of doors and windows, and people tumbling in and out on the dot. It was rather like that here last night, wouldn't you say?"

"Very much so, sir. Split-second timing. But without a stage manager, so to speak. Just like that." It was evident that Constable James was delighted at thus being engaged in a discussion of the mystery. "And some of the cast, too, sir, in a manner of speaking. That old woman, for instance, walking in on a murder, and then walking straight out and going to the pictures. Like a play, that is. Not natural at all."[14]

This, from a constable named Henry James, holds a good deal of authority. But there are other similar references. One more should suffice. This is how Appleby sees the library at the big house in *The Long Farewell*:

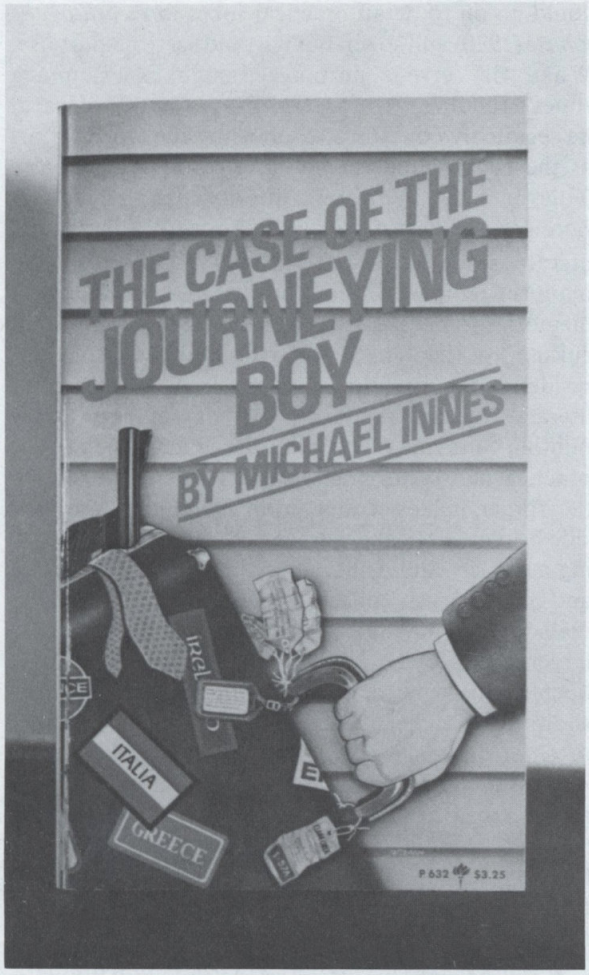
The whole affords an excellent setting not merely for homicide but even for complicated farce, with actors popping divertingly in and out all over the place.[15]

Now, what do we make out of Innes's avowed connection with farce?

Farce is one of those gelatinous literary terms which everyone understands but which wiggles and jiggles when it comes to a precise definition of its history and techniques. The plays of Plautus and Terrence, *The Comedy of Errors,* and even *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* as well as things like *The Importance of Being Ernest* and *Charley's Aunt,* can be called farces. In each case, the drama depends on the vigorous but absurd action and dialogue of fixed character-types which have no message or utility beyond entertainment. Innes's mention of English farce in *Silence Observed,* as well as his allusion to Gilbert and Sullivan's curtain-raiser *Cox and Box* in *Hare Sitting Up,* tie him to the simple sort of action-character farce which intends only to be the occasion for chuckles, snorts, and guffaws. So, too, in the non-dramatic vein, does Innes's link with Wodehouse (specifically named a number of times and influential in Innes's drawing of a handful of peers specifically modeled on Lord Emsworth). Innes's use of farce, however, ramifies in other directions as well. From his very first book, his thinking about comedy pierces simple farce and connects to Ben Jonson's humour comedy. By quoting from *Every Man in His Humour* in the preface to *Death at the President's Lodging,* he points us toward what would historically become comedy of manners. What this suggests is that in Innes three sorts of comedy coexist: farce as simple entertainment, humour comedy based on zany characters, and comedy of manners aimed at depicting culture and correcting social *faux pas.*

Before I try to unscramble all of this about comedy, I want to digress into the influence of dramatic construction and the use of farce comedy techniques in Innes's novels. Basically, he views making a mystery novel as the same procedure as constructing a drama. Thus, in *Appleby's End:* "The affair had all the promise of that extreme tidiness which marks a well-made play."[16]

Externally, one of the remarkable things about his novels is their uniformity in length: *One Man Show* (1952), *Money from Holme, An Awkward Lie* (1971), *The Open House, Appleby's Answer, Appleby's Other Story, The Mysterious Commission* (1974), *The Gay Phoenix, Honeybath's Haven* (1977), *The Ampersand Papers,* and *Going It Alone* are each between 190 and 192 pages long. Cynically, I suppose that we could say that Innes probably only allowed himself a given number of sheets of paper



and simply stopped writing when it ran out. There may be some truth in this, since the uniformity occurs mostly in the late, *pro forma* books. There is, though, another possibility. If we were looking at a series of plays instead of novels, their uniform length would be natural since they were shaped by known attention spans, energy levels of actors, and official constraints on times of performance. Dramatic construction, of course, aims at creating and resolving situations in a limited period. To do so, it has evolved the act formula, as opposed to the more leisurely construction formulae evolved by novelists. Innes uses act construction in his novels: he raises them on the dramatic framework. He writes his books as if they were three-acters or four-acters or five-acters. Most commonly, he uses three-part structure, which we can find in *What Happened at Hazelwood, Picture of Guilt* (1969), *Hare Sitting Up, The New Sonia Wayward,* and *Money from Holme.* They run to epitasis, protasis, and catastrophe. That he views his detective plots from the perspective of drama seems clear when, in *Death on a Quiet Day* (1957), he defines the action as thriller action instead of detective action because "we're decidedly short of *dramatis personae.*"[17] Using dramatic construction comes naturally to Innes/Stewart, just as it occurs to anyone acquainted with classical drama, that detective story conventions pretty much reproduce the critical strictures developed by classical and neoclassical critics. Just look. Van Dine and other prescriptive detective-writer critics of the '20s insist that a detective should deal only with one crime and have only one hero, the detective. This crime, further, should be limited in locale so that the readers can absorb the setting, and the whole business should cover a reasonably limited time. Relevant to this last criterion, Golden Age writers' methods of shoehorning in antecedent crimes pretty much parallel the practice of classical or neoclassical dramatists. What we have here, naturally, are the three unities: action, place, and time. Innes knows all about this, and he builds his books on it. This seems pretty obvious from the following scrap from *A Night of Errors*:

> "For the sake of what used to be called the Unity of Time." Appleby moved toward the door. "The Dromio's tragedy has its roots forty years back . . . But as with some classical drama, its action is to be compressed within a space of twenty-four hours."[18]

The drama, then, gave Innes ways of dealing with overall structure and construction, but this does not give us a whale of a lot of insight into the detective novels. For that, we need to return to farce.

The best known farces, say *The Comedy of Errors* or *Charley's Aunt,* depend, first of all, on mistaken identity. All we need to do here is to insert my list of Innes's twins and twin-like people. Mistaken identity reaches its extreme in his *A Night of Errors,* where we have to witness the havoc and confusion wrought by not twins but triplets. Next, farce depends upon extremely complicated and increasingly rapid rearrangements of characters within a confined space. *Charley's Aunt,* for instance, shoots characters ricocheting around the college gardens, barely missing one another. In vintage Innes, the author does precisely the same thing. Both *Death at the President's Lodging* and *Lament for a Maker* bring virtually everyone to the same spot, where they not only just miss seeing one another but where they also meddle with things so as to provide a new situation for the next entrant. It all depends on Innes carefully timing movement and motive at cross-purposes and jamming it into the most condensed space and time possible. The point of this kind of action, therefore, has little to do with the logical or cerebral associations of the detective story puzzle; the point rests on the audience's surprise and amusement derived from the nature of the action.

As a sidelight to this aspect of Innes's novels, we

should also recall that the author was not only an Oxford don but also an Oxford undergraduate. In *A Picture of Guilt,* he gives us a capsule history of the student rag at Oxford—where, according to the O.E.D., it all began. Now, a rag is "an extensive display of noisy disorderly conduct, carried on in defiance of authority or discipline," and as such it may not seem too relevant to a discussion of Innes's plots. The O.E.D., however, does offer another definition of "rag" which is apposite to his plotting: "to annoy, tease, torment, spec. in University slang, to annoy or assail in a rough, noisy fashion; to create wild disorder in (a room)." Zooks! This is quite what the dons of St. Anthony's do in Innes's first book—they create wild disorder in the President's room in defiance of authority and discipline. And a wise way of seeing Innes's novels is to look at them as rags created by a puckish and literate don.

Connected to the idea of the rag, one other item aids in illuminating his fundamental concept of making mystery novels. In *A Night of Errors,* he provides this simile to explain the nature of the action:

> An elaborate and intricate construction mirroring a fertile but unbalanced mind, rather like a scientific contrivance by Heath Robinson.[19]

Robinson, like Rube Goldberg, draws whimsically comic, complicated machines which do reasonably simple tasks. Thus, in making the comparison, Innes suggests that his plots are loony, impractical contraptions which accomplish a mundane end with the utmost elaboration in order to amuse the reader.

But back to comedy. One of the main elements of farce is the practical joke. One character gets another to dress up, say, as a woman in order to bamboozle the ancient and creaking relative into coughing up the money or giving consent to marry. Now, the practical joke differs from the regular joke in that it has a specific object: the embarrassment of one person or another. Usually, practical jokes work to affront authority or pompousness (the joy-buzzer or the whoopie cushion), but in plays or narratives they also serve to gain something for the perpetrator. Innes specifically brings up the issue of the practical joke in *A Picture of Guilt,* in which Appleby tracks down a series of art thefts which began as a practical joke. Seeing the events in most of Innes's novels, moreover, gives us more insight into his plotting. In the first novel, for instance, we have all seven suspects doing things specifically designed to embarrass other people. *Stop Press,* indeed, is loaded with practical jokes, from the painting on the Birdwire's villa to the impersonations of the Spider. *The Weight of the Evidence* rests on Pluckrose's fiddling with the meteor in order to embarrass another character. I could go on to detail practical jokes in *Death at the Chase* (1970) and so on, but it would serve no purpose. What will serve a purpose, though, is examining Innes's fondness for forgery. From the '50s onward, he seemingly concentrated on using the world of art as the background for his novels, although he also ladles in a few literary world books, too (*The Long Farewell* and part of *Silence Observed*). This art and literary stuff (Innes calls it "top dressing,"[20] i.e., manure) connects the comfortable reader with memories of his education and gives a gloss of culture to the books. Its real purpose, however, resides in the attention given by Innes to artistic or literary forgery. And this sort of forgery, unlike minting funny money, ties to the practical joke. The practical side of forging art works lies in the fact that the forger makes money from his efforts; the joke side brings with it the eternal joke motives of assaulting authority and deflating egos. Thus, the pompous and monied art collector buys a pup and, upon realizing this, ought to psychically shrink. But in the larger realm of comedy, the joke can be a corrective opening the way for recognition and change. Innes shows this practical function of the joke in *A Picture of Guilt,* in which the philistine Meatyards pay one Sir Joshua Reynolds to do a portrait but then, having realized their foolishness, come to a real and substantial understanding not only of themselves but also of fine art. What happens, then, is that Innes nudges the funny business of farce into the socially useful realm of comedy.

If Innes makes his mysteries depend upon dramatic analogues for their structure and plot patterns, his settings also have certain similarities to settings in comic drama. For many of his settings, he creates locales which either aid the complex dramatic movement of his novels or else add to their comic tone. Of all of his detective novels, he sets only one of them, *Silence Observed,* in the city, and only one, *Appleby's Answer,* in generalized countryside. All of the rest take place either at a university (*Death at the President's Lodging* and *The Weight of the Evidence*) or, more frequently, at a big house. Both the big house and the university (or, more properly, the college) provide ideal settings for the closed detective story, giving a limited number of suspects to cover. More importantly for the action, both places supply lots of doors and windows through which people can pop. Ultimately, though, the university and the big house become places which license comic behavior from the student rag to the Woosterish raid to puncture a friend's hot water bottle. In this light, Innes transforms the big house normal to the detective story so that it becomes comic in itself. Thus his big houses are not just big houses; they are huge, immense, elephantine houses. In *The Weight of the Evidence,* therefore, Appleby drives interminably, simply

trying to find his way into the Duke's pile; in *Hamlet, Revenge!* the narrator tells us that Scamnum Court "has a sort of little brother in Blenheim Palace";[21] and Benson Court in *Christmas at Candleshoe* has "water steps—so charmingly reproduced in miniature at Chatsworth."[22] He does the same thing with placenames and latches on to their comic potential. Consider these names, gleaned from his books: Little Limber, Pigg, Sneak, Long Canings, Gibber Porcorum, Dream, Boxer's Bottom, Long Snarl, Little Sneak, Abbot's Amble, King's Yatter, and Drool. We can hardly expect much beyond comedy to come from these places.

Innes's variety of comedy, of course, depends also on standard characters who evoke laughter from their own persons as well as from their collisions with other people. He deals in several repeated stereotypes. First, there is the dialect character. In *The Weight of the Evidence,* we get a comic Welshman who transposes his p's and b's as readily as does Shakespeare's Fluellen. More consistent, though, is Innes's attachment to a combination of American, Yiddish, and British diction. This strange tongue comes in first with Properjohn in *The Unsuspected Chasm* (1946):

> "Natchly," said Mr. Properjohn. "I can say I met few several kinks myself and they looks like maybe lorts of creation you go into them first. But start talking business and they acts like they were you or me."[23]

Innes transfers this lingo to Braunkopf (*One Man Show, Silence Observed,* and *Money from Holme*), one of his few continuing minor characters.

In addition to the dialect character, he repeats a couple of other type characters. From the beginning, he looked to the academic character to provide stereotypical bungling and eccentricity fused with a high degree of ambition and cunning. We can also line up a file of characters whose consciousnesses are locked in the past, people who imagine themselves living in the days of Rob Roy or Gladstone. He also likes to drop in a Wodehousean peer or two, dithering around his ancestral estate. From the time of *Appleby's End,* and especially in the novels of the '70s, he took to portraying slow-moving and tortuously-thinking rustics, like old Hoobin.

As comic as he makes the setting and draws his character types, Innes does not quite create comic romps for his readers. With characters, especially, he draws few thoroughly cuddly people, and Appleby becomes less and less of an amused observer of human action. Indeed, in *Death by Water* (1968), Innes tells us that Appleby "seemed to become more, not less, censorious as he grew older."[24] Throughout, we find that, instead of fulfilling romantic gratifications about people, he withholds them. For example, he often uses the young male lead who seems to be headed for marriage and success at the end of the plot, but then he yanks away part of the reward. In *Stop Press,* therefore, this character deflates into dishonesty, and, in *The Secret Vanguard,* boy does not get girl. What happens here is that Innes jolts farce into comedy of manners. His plots aim not simply at entertainment but also at publishing and correcting vice. Thus, in *Stop Press,* one of the jokes perpetrated on the house party is the daubing of "Folly Hall" on the pediment of Eliot's mansion, and this description is accurate. Almost all of Innes's characters can be foolish or vicious, and they hardly deserve the inheritance or any other sort of big payoff. Innes, as a consequence of this, often brings in the unsuspected heir at the conclusion in order to deny him the boodle. All of this snaps into focus in *The Ampersand Papers,* in which the sought-after and fought-over treasure turns out to be a huge collection of theology books. Here the author has fabricated a large practical joke which turns farce into reproof. In doing this, he simply comes back half-circle to Jonson, for in the Prologue to *Every Man in His Humour,* which he quoted in his first detective novel, the dramatist makes it clear that

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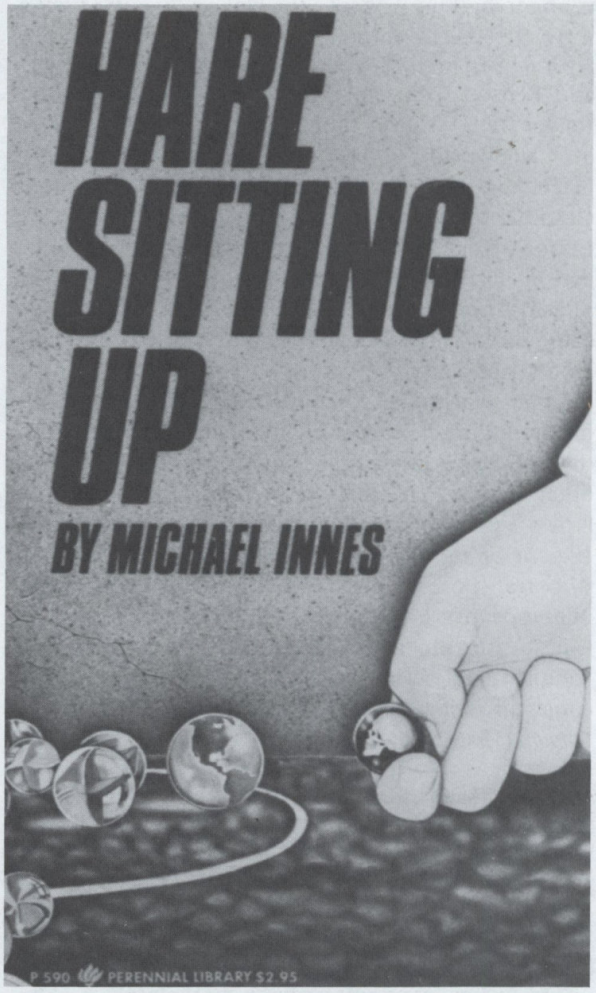
comedy's function is to "sport with human follies, not with crimes." Thus Innes, like his contemporaries in the '30s, moves the detective novel away from the moral considerations of human sin and guilt into a cloud-cuckoo land of Big Houses and funny people. World War II never enters his detective books even in the '40s. He does not, however, entirely create a world bereft of purpose, resting on artificial questions and silly people, for he has to sustain the traditional uses of comedy. He applies satire and jokes to the follies of human beings. This is the answer of reason to unreason as witnessed by eighteenth-century writers such as Congreve or Pope. The Age of Reason, however, never had to deal with Hitler or Hiroshima.

Now, this should provide a neat transition to Innes's thrillers. It does not, in fact, do this, for his thrillers do not deal with substantive evil either. But, nevertheless, I will take the opportunity and say a few things about his non-detective novels. From the subplot of *Death at the President's Lodging,* which involves undergraduates chasing around the countryside and adapting *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to their own purposes, he displayed as much interest in narrating adventure action as he did in describing detective situations. It is not that easy to separate adventure from detection in Innes, because his detective novels usually involve some hunt-and-chase business, and his adventure novels usually include some rudimentary detection. *Hamlet, Revenge!* for instance, has all of the conventions of the detective novel, is a detective novel, but rests on a motive of international intrigue; *Appleby on Ararat* (1941) seems much like one of those contrived murder-on-a-desert-island detective stories, like Cox's *Mr. Pidgeon's Island,* but then it opens out to become a spy story. Even with these difficulties, though, we can pretty easily separate Innes's thrillers from his detective novels. First, the thrillers structurally violate the unities which he sets up for his detective novels: the detective tale is a twenty-four-hour affair limited to one environment, while the thriller takes in a longer time and involves travel—often, in fact, locomotion, as locomotion, is important. The problem in the thriller, hence, can only be solved by action, while in the detective story it can be solved by thought, intuition, and small social maneuvers. In the thrillers, the exotic locales and the travel assume large, sometimes overwhelming importance. *Appleby on Ararat* takes place in the South Seas, *The Daffodil Affair* in South America, *The Unsuspected Chasm* goes from London to Scotland to the United States, *The Case of the Journeying Boy* (1949) bounces from London to Ireland, etc. In terms of time, too, Innes's thrillers consume more than the allowed twenty-four hours. Not only does duration differ between his detective novels and thrillers, he also connects his



thriller characters with personal distortions in time. Thus, in many of them (*The Secret Vanguard, Christmas at Candleshoe, The Unsuspected Chasm*), we meet characters trapped in chronological confusions: folks who think that they live in the Middle Ages, etc. In addition to this time and place difference, he defines his non-detective books by the natures of the problems which confront the heroes. The detective novels have problems which depend on known motives, observable effects, and are capable of solution—albeit cracked solutions. On the other hand, the thrillers present problems which are at once larger—international or criminal conspiracy—and are much more vague. Innes, for instance, rarely specifies in his spy novels the source of the ultimate threat to international peace and stability: the cold war books from *The Case of the Journeying Boy* to *Hare Sitting Up* do not point the finger at the Soviet Union or Paraguay or anyone else. Finally, the thrillers focus upon character development which is at once specific and acknowledged to be artificial, while with the detective book, as we have seen,

change, if it occurs, comes only after the trap at the end has been sprung. I will deal with character development in a minute, but first I will substantiate acknowledged artificiality by citing one passage from *A Change of Heir*:

> Were the present a narrative conducted upon philosophic principles, or dedicated to the unravelling of intricate states of mind, it would be necessary at this point in an attempt to determine whether Gadberry as he contemplated the facts, became—obscurely, subliminally, subconsciously, or unconsciously—possessed of a substantial part of the true state of the case.[25]

This story, however, is not conducted on "philosophical principles," or dedicated to "unravelling intricate states of mind." The detective story does, at least, the latter, but Innes's thrillers do not. They are too intent on movement.

All of these things, then, separate his thrillers from his detective novels. But the term "thriller" is not, after all, a very precise description. Let me be a bit more precise. After *Appleby on Ararat,* he wrote a number of spy novels which run on threats to the world's security (*The Secret Vanguard, The Daffodil Affair, The Case of the Journeying Boy, Operation Pax* [1951], *The Man from the Sea* [1955], *Appleby Plays Chicken* [1957], *Hare Sitting Up,* and *Awkward Lie* [1971]). He also wrote novels of the same pattern which depend on gangsters rather than foreign governments to provide the motivating threat: *The Unsuspected Chasm, Christmas at Candleshoe, The Mysterious Commission* (1974), and *Honeybath's Haven.* Another group of novels, responding to a clear movement in mid-century British fiction, are picaresque books which do not feature actual crimes but concentrate on the adventures of a rogue hero. These books include *The New Sonia Wayward, Money from Holme, A Change of Heir,* and *Going It Alone.* Finally, he wrote one treasure-hunt book, *Old Hall, New Hall* (1956).

Although all of these novels differ from his detective books, Innes does employ some of the same techniques to make his detective plots and thriller plots work. Thus the devices of the lost heir, the double, and the practical joke cross boundaries. The thrillers, though, come from slightly different literary traditions. If not genetic, Scots have a heavily environmental inclination which equips them for adventure writing. For one thing, Innes grew up during the heyday of John Buchan, and his adventure books owe much to Buchan. Two novels, *The Secret Vanguard* and *The Unsuspected Chasm,* allude directly to him. In the latter, Innes makes clear the difference which Buchan makes between the worlds of the detective tale and the thriller: "Now you are beckoning me heaven knows where—say out of Anthony Trollope into John Buchan."[26] Buchan, of course, is the master of the hunt-in-the-heather type of adventure yarn, and the hero's experiences in Scotland in *The Secret Vanguard, The Unsuspected Chasm,* and *The Man from the Sea* all come pretty directly from *The Thirty-Nine Steps* or *Mr. Standfast.*

If you are Scottish, though, you get more than Buchan—you get Scott and Stevenson, too. Stevenson plays an important role in Innes's thrillers. He gave Innes the displaced heir story with *Kidnapped* (which is also a hunt-in-the-heather book), but, more importantly, he gave Innes *Treasure Island.* Virtually all of Innes's adventure books mention *Treasure Island.* And most of them depend on Stevenson for their plotting. Sheila Grant, in *The Secret Vanguard,* overhears a bit of code being exchanged between German agents and gets tossed into a salad of capture and escape which comes fairly directly from *Treasure Island.* Indeed, *Treasure Island* is in many ways the archetypal spy story, introducing as it does the struggle for possession of a secret paper, eavesdropping, plot and counterplot, capture and escape,

and the race to the objective. We can find these things in countless spy novels, and we can find them in Innes, too. Stevenson's book also, obviously, supplies Innes with the idea of the treasure hunt, which enters *Christmas at Candleshoe, The Long Farewell,* and *The Ampersand Papers* and which dominates *Old Hall, New Hall.*

Treasure Island, we should also remember, is a book for boys. The modern spy novel comes, mostly because of Buchan, from the Victorian schoolboy story, which used exciting adventure in order to provide a moral example about duty and manliness for adolescent boys. Innes stands very much in this tradition. In *Eight Modern Writers,* Innes/Stewart makes it clear that one of the chief functions of "escape literature" is to inculcate proper behavior:

> Yet escape is of a special, and perhaps precious, quality when it is into an ideal world. Stevenson follows Scott. He hands on to innumerable popular writers a tradition in which it is important that a gentleman should know just when to draw his sword or punch a gangster on the jaw.[27]

In his thrillers, therefore, he demonstrates the morally uplifting quality of adventure, its vital place in the life of the boy or the man. At the same time, however, he suggests that adventure enhances character only in an ideal (or juvenile) world and that, to our loss, it does not help much in the complex and bewildering world of adults.

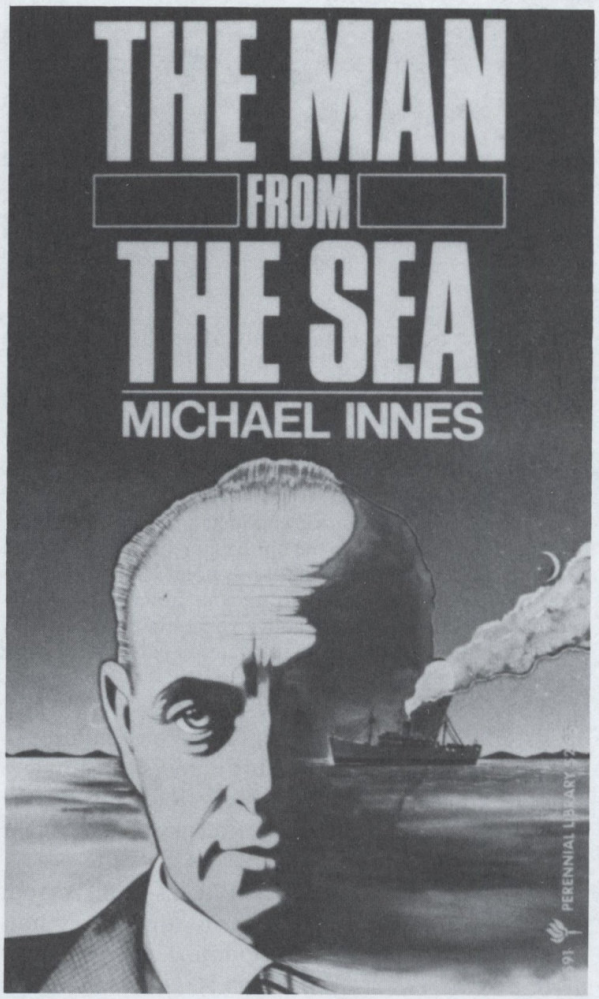
One of the obvious character-building motifs which Innes's forebears derived from the Victorian schoolboy story was the notion that action in the world is better than passive, lotus-eating self-indulgence. Buchan's hero, Richard Hannay, repeatedly finds his real self by getting off of his duff and doing strenuous things. Innes takes this self-knowledge-through-action theme and inserts it without much alteration into several of his adventure books. Don Pedro, in *The Unsuspected Chasm,* in fact, gives this theme a specifically Victorian connection when he tells Meredith that:

> "I suggest that the quadrangles of Oxford and reading rooms of great libraries have never satisfied you. Your generation was brought up under the shadow of Pater. As undergraduates you taught yourselves that your business in life was to burn with a hard, gemlike flame. Not the fruit of experience, you know, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life."[28]

The narrator of *Appleby on Ararat* makes quite the same point when the Nazis start to attack the soft-living people at the hotel. Here, he discusses what they have missed in having missed excitement:

> [T]hey would have learnt that physical danger is often less daunting in actuality, when nature poured the appropriate chemicals into the blood, than it is in prospect and when operating only upon the imagination. They would have learnt—so unsearchable is the human heart—that when one is oneself actively engaged there may even come certain rare moments to be classed among the Good Times.[29]

Now this business of "do something to find yourself" operates in all of Innes's adventure books which have middle-aged, academic heroes: Meredith in *The Unsuspected Chasm,* Thewless in *The Case of the Journeying Boy,* Honeybath in *The Mysterious Commission* and *Honeybath's Haven,* and Averell in *Going It Alone.* Whether it means getting mixed up with spies or gangsters, action jerks the hero out of his sedentary, complacent, intellectual existence and flings him into the rapids of adventure and self-knowledge. *The Case of the Journeying Boy* is almost a morality play on this theme. Mr. Thewless (get it, without thews) pooh-poohs his pupil's awareness of ever-present danger only to discover that the world does actually run on principles of violence right out of a Bulldog Drummond book. Responding



to his charge's need, and assisted by one Miss Liberty, Thewless finds that he does have an identity equal to coping with this new world. Although he rarely uses young men as heroes for his traditionally-patterned thrillers, in the one case in which he does this, *The Man from the Sea,* the hero, Cranston, learns precisely the same lesson about the personal use of action in tying one to one's worthwhile self.

For Innes, as I've said, few young men serve as heroes, and when they do he typically treats them in a manner different from the middle-aged hero. For one thing, he always resists the unreal, romantic convention of handing out women as rewards for virtuous acts. In some cases, the male lead does not get the girl because he does not deserve her: *Stop Press,* and *Old Hall, New Hall,* for instance. Other novels, like *Operation Pax,* resemble *Love's Labors Lost* in that they hold out the promise of future weddings, but these unions will not be based merely on the actions in the novel. Many of Innes's male leads, moreover, do not get the girl because for the author the picaro was not a hero worthy of reward. Thus in all of the picaresque books except *Going It Alone,* the rogue plans and executes certain less-than-upright deeds, but at the end of the novel he is left empty-handed, or he receives some kind of punishment for creating all of the untoward action in the first place. Both in *A Change of Heir* and *The Gay Phoenix,* the heroes bug out after being subjected to certain unpleasantness; Petticate ends up shackled to a harridan in *The New Sonia Wayward,* and Cheel literally becomes enslaved to Rumbelow in *Money from Holme.* Action, therefore, may be therapeutic and character-building, but, Innes acknowledges, action can also have something invidious about it—it can be juvenile.

Whan Charles Honeybath gets involved with crooks in *The Mysterious Commission,* the narrator gives us this insight into his motivation:

> He was no longer Honeybath R.A. He was once more Honeybath Minor... and his main ambition in life was one day to become a King Scout.[30]

Here, Innes says, is the final displacement of the adventure story. Adventure tales, to gain credibility, need to shunt their readers into a world which is not their own, usual, humdrum one. Thus, they take us to other places and to other epochs. But the most important displacement is moving the hero, and the reader, out of the adult world into the world of childhood. Children, first of all, need to learn things about danger, commitment, and action which adults are supposed to know. Children also supposedly derive enjoyment from risk and danger while adults know that these things are foolish. For these reasons, the adventure story is almost always some sort of growth story. With these things in mind—and remembering Buchan's Gorbals Die-Hards in *Castle Gay*—Innes shifts focus from the adult hero to the child hero. In *The Case of the Journeying Boy,* it is Humphrey who first recognizes the dangers and at the end demonstrates his identity by spelling out his name in huge letters on an Irish hillside. Groups of young people also play significant roles in *Operation Pax, Appleby Plays Chicken, Christmas at Candleshoe,* and *An Awkward Lie.* By using them in these books, Innes not only shows us those who naturally engage in adventure and whose fantasy lives can benefit from it, he also shows the limits of the spy story or the adventure yarn as simple escape entertainment. As Appleby notes in *Death by Water,* "spy stories, unless recklessly romanticized, are necessarily so disagreeable."[31] Here, Innes's purposes in his detective novels hold for his adventure novels. They intend to comically entertain us and to add a seasoning of character-shaping action, as the detective books add problem-solving. They do not intend to introduce us to real life with its excessive violence and difficult moral decisions. Just as in the detective books, therefore, his thrillers show us people remote from us learning about life, and they also punish minor foibles and small dishonesties, leaving real causes of evil, whether personal or international, unexamined. By a strange twist, however, Innes realized the pathos of modern life and its moral dwindling from the resolute action pictured in the adventure story. In *Eight Modern Writers,* after considering the moral tradition of Stevenson and Scott, Innes/Stewart remarks that:

> If gentlemen are no longer put to making these calculations [when to punch a gangster]—except, indeed, in conditions of mass slaughter—it is perhaps the gentlemen who are doing the escaping, after all.[32]

In his thrillers, however, he is too sophisticated and aware of himself to be able to provide muscular examples for his gentle readers.

Although Innes's purposes and some of his techniques remain constant over his forty-five-year writing career, he does change, and we can trace several stages of development in his mystery novels. He began writing in the '30s, and, in response to the spirit of that decade, his early novels are witty, ingenious, spoofish detective stories. By the end of the decade, however, he grew restive with the puzzle-centered detective novel. *There Came Both Mist and Snow* in 1940 is a dispirited novel which even its crazy conclusion cannot save. With *Stop Press,* he tried to move deeper into the novel of manners than his early detective books had permitted him to go, but, in spite of some riotously funny academic stuff, this novel hobbles on too long, and its conclusion has a marked limp. Sensing that only portraying academe could save his detective novels, he wrote *The Weight of the*

Evidence (one of his best books), but then he decided to drop Appleby and the detective novel as well. The title of *Appleby's End* (1945) suggests this, as does Appleby's retirement at the end of the novel. In none of the detective books written during the war, from *Stop Press* to *Appleby's End,* does Innes so much as mention the conflict in Europe, but he did, in fact, stop writing mysteries for three years. Instead, he turned to the spy novel with *The Secret Vanguard* in 1941. This book, mostly from its Buchan connection, has some life to it, but his other wartime spy novels, *Appleby on Ararat* and *The Daffodil Affair,* fail pretty miserably, because (1) they do not come to terms with the war, and betray some awkwardness because of this; (2) they use the worn-out Master Criminal formula; and (3) they contain the worst of Innes's prose, which can be at once too complex and too elliptical. He realized this, I think, in *Appleby's End,* when he commented on Ranulph Raven's prose:

> There's something rather fascinating about the extreme badness of Ranulph's prose. Facetious and polysyllabic—and clearly he thought it just the cat's whiskers. An awful warning, I should say, to cultivated persons who believe themselves to have a talent for writing in a popular and condescending way.[33]

In the late '40s, Innes got back to a leaner prose style, but he did not quite know where to go with his entertainments. He dashed off a non-Appleby detective novel, *What Happened at Hazelwood,* which creeps to a brilliant surprise, and he brought Appleby out of retirement for the overly-complicated nonsense of *A Night of Errors.* Even though Appleby put back on his official bowler in 1948, Innes wrote no detective novels for ten years. From 1948 to 1958, he turned to the thriller, involving spies, crooks, and treasure hunters. After 1958, we find an alternation of detective books with various sorts of adventure novels, but, in the '60s and '70s, Innes stayed pretty clear of spy yarns. Instead, he worked on the picaresque hero and the gangster thriller. The late detective novels have some pretty marked characteristics which separate them from the early inventions. First off, they largely take place in the country. They involve not only the retired Appleby but also his wife Judith and his son Bobby—note that *A Picture of Guilt* is also entitled *A Family Affair* and that *An Awkward Lie* focuses mostly on Bobby. In almost all of Innes's late detective books, Appleby invokes Sherlock Holmes: *The Mysterious Commission,* further, consciously uses "The Red-Headed League." Finally, his latest books, although they still run to the unusual conclusion, do not have the crazy complexity which is at once the strength and the bane of Innes' writing.

His work, in sum, derives in an essential way from popular fiction in Britain between the wars. It is escapist entertainment for cultivated people which does not quite deny, although it ignores, the unfathomable tangle of human personality and the gut-wrenching horror of events. He wrote his novels as play, using scraps and patches from his knowledge of literature and putting them into a form which gave scope to jokes and elaborate high jinks. His audience reads his books in the same spirit as play, appreciating his ingenuity even if it is pointless and perking up whenever a literary or cultural allusion swims by. This takes them back to the safe and joyful past of their own reading and education. The tag "literate thriller" applied so often to Innes's books is apt.

Notes

1. *Appleby's Answer* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1973), p. 37.
2. *Death at the President's Lodging* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 221.
3. *The Open House* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972), p. 92.
4. *Death at the President's Lodging,* p. 173.
5. *Hamlet, Revenge!* (New York: Collier, 1962), p. 45.
6. *Lament for a Maker* (New York: Collier, 1961), p. 169.
7. Also see the thrillers *The Secret Vanguard, From London Far, The Case of the Journeying Boy, Hare Sitting Up,* and *The Mysterious Commission.*
8. *The Weight of the Evidence* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1943), p. 146
9. *Death at the President's Lodging,* p. 5.
10. *Lament for a Maker,* p. 170.
11. *The Daffodil Affair* (New York: Berkley, 1964), p. 182.
12. *Death at the President's Lodging,* p. 5.
13. *Ibid.,* p. 96.
14. *Silence Observed* (New York: Ballantine, 1971), p. 71.
15. *The Long Farewell* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958), p. 85.
16. *Applebys End* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1945), p. 100.
17. *Death on a Quiet Day* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1957), p. 108.
18. *A Night of Errors* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1947), p. 104.
19. *Ibid.,* p. 137.
20. *The Case of the Journeying Boy* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1949), p. 32.
21. *Hamlet, Revenge!* p. 11.
22. *Christmas at Candleshoe* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1953), p. 3.
23. *The Unsuspected Chasm* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1946), p. 97.
24. *Death by Water* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1968), p. 11.
25. *A Change of Heir* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1966), p. 195.
26. *The Unsuspected Chasm,* p. 60.
27. *Eight Modern Writers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 5.
28. *The Unsuspected Chasm,* p. 183.
29. *Appleby on Ararat* (New York: Berkley, 1964), p. 156.
30. *The Mysterious Commission* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1975), p. 124.
31. *Death by Water,* pp. 12-13.
32. *Eight Modern Writers,* p. 5.
33. *Appleby's End,* p. 32. □

SPENSER

The Illusion of Knighthood

By Carl Hoffman

One of the lingering problems for mystery writers in recent years has been what to do with the private eye. Philip Marlowe, exemplar of the species, died with creator Raymond Chandler in 1959, after a long period of creeping obsolenscence; as early as the publication of *The Long Goodbye* (1953), it was becoming apparent that Marlowe's code of wisecracks and courage was a relic of the '30s and '40s which looked increasingly laughable to readers in the morally ambiguous postwar period. In the last twenty years, only the two MacDonalds [sic] can lay claim to even partially filling the gap left by Chandler's death, and they seem the rearguard of the rearguard; Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer pokes obsessively into the sordid Freudian histories of his clients, while John D. MacDonald's Travis McGee begins and ends every case surrounded by clichéd multitudes of hot-and-cold running women. Perhaps the problem of updating the sleuth is insoluble; perhaps he has simply gone the way of the Buick Roadmaster and the black lace garter belt. But that hasn't kept dozens of writers from attacking the problem in one way or another, with varying degrees of success.

A case in point is Robert B. Parker. His novels featuring the Boston-based detective Spenser (he has no first name) all grapple with the problem of the private eye, and the series has earned widespread respect and occasional raves from critics on both sides of the Atlantic. All the books owe a debt to Chandler in that the writing style is similar and much of the action takes place in the same *film noir* underworld which was inhabited by Philip Marlowe; indeed, Parker is a former university professor who wrote his dissertation on the works of Hammett and Chandler. But there are also major differences from the books of the master. For one thing, Parker's characters often use the jargon of counseling and social work to comment directly on the action of a book, a technique which makes for a great deal of face-to-the-camera exposition. The author is also fascinated by the idea of winning, and the novels more often than not climax with violent confrontations resembling ritualized athletic events. And, while Parker probably did not set out to create a deliberate pattern, the books arrange themselves rather neatly into three successive phases: the first three novels find Parker identifying and zeroing in on his themes; the next two have him—unsuccessfully, I think—bringing them to full flower; and the latest Spenser book shows the detective, now that the battles have all been won, settling into a more relaxed persona which may carry him for decades. A detailed study of the first six books will trace the ups and downs of the Massachusetts sleuth:

The Godwulf Manuscript (1973), the first in the series, sends Spenser scrambling through a succession of hair-raisers in search of a medieval manuscript stolen from a Boston university. Along the way, he meets the standard collection of gangsters, student radicals, and steamy beauties, but we also learn the rudiments of Spenser's background: he jogs and lifts weights regularly, likes to cook, and once worked for the DA's office, where, like Philip Marlowe, he was fired for insubordination. Reviews of the novel ranged from mixed to unfavorable, many of the commentators decrying the book's derivativeness from Chandler, an accusation borne out by even a superficial reading. By the end of chapter 5, for instance, there have been a fistful of references to *The Big Sleep*, *The Long Goodbye*, and *The Little Sister*, and whole swatches of dialogue which seem to be lifted from Chandler:

> "Can we count on you, Mr. Spenser? Can you get it back?"
>
> "Win this one for the Gipper," I said.
>
> Behind me Tower gave a snort and Forbes looked as if he'd found a worm in his apple.
>
> "I beg your pardon?"
>
> "I'm thirty-seven years old and short on rah-rah, Dr. Forbes."[1]

Probably the most damning review was printed in the London *Times Literary Supplement*, where critic T. J. Binyon dismissed the book as a "straight Chandler pastiche. In a literary sense, this might represent the

difference between debt and bankruptcy."[2] On the other hand, Binyon, like most of the other reviewers, acknowledged Parker's obvious sentence-by-sentence writing skill; the plot is a series of clichés, he implied, but at least it is told vigorously.

If *The Godwulf Manuscript* shows an immature Parker and an underdeveloped Spenser, it also contains, embryonically, every major element of the later works. Among the people Spenser encounters on his quest are the Orchards, a well-to-do suburban couple whose marriage is falling apart; their disaffected daughter Terry, who has turned to student activism as a form of rebellion against her parents;

Joe Broz, a two-dimensional underworld kingpin; and Phil, Broz's gigantic henchman, who becomes Spenser's adversary in the bloody *mano a mano* which climaxes the book. All these characters recur later in different forms and under different names. Also present is a nostalgic interlude in the closing pages in which Spenser, having secured the release of the falsely-accused Terry Orchard, buys her ice cream and then drives along the Charles near Boston University Field, remembering the days when his father took him there to watch the Boston Braves. This motif of childhood, stadiums, and sports also recurs and eventually assumes a great deal of importance in Spenser's worlf-view.

Before leaving *The Godwulf Manuscript*, it would be profitable to point out the ways in which it differs, despite all the *homages* to Chandler, from the Philip Marlowe stories. Most obviously, Spenser tends toward violence; in *Godwulf*, he kills three men, three times the number dispatched by Marlowe in all seven of his novels. Spenser is also invincible in hand-to-hand combat; where Marlowe was beaten up regularly, Spenser rather handily wins all three of his fistfights, and in one of them, on the day after sustaining a bullet wound, strangles with his bare hands Phil the Ogre, a man five inches taller and many pounds heavier. Finally, Spenser has a curative effect upon his corrupt clients that Chandler never granted Marlowe; where the latter effected equivocal reforms on his employers in *The Big Sleep* and *The High Window*, and watched the rest sink into complete moral collapse, the implication at the end of *Godwulf* is that Terry Orchard's soul has been saved by Spenser's shining example; she's going to give up her vain allegiance to radicalism and start living her own life. There are also distinctly burlesque elements in *Godwulf*, reflected in the names of two characters: Joseph Broz is the given name of the late dictator of Yugoslavia, a man better known by his assumed name Tito, and radical professor Lowell Hayden's monicker is apparently a combination of the names of two well-known leftists of the 1960s, Robert Lowell and Tom Hayden. These burlesque tendencies are dropped in succeeding works, but *Godwulf* puts Parker on the track of his major themes.

God Save the Child, published a year later, represents a quantum leap over its predecessor in terms of quality, and stands as probably the best book in the series. From page one, it is apparent that the prose is denser even than in the first book's, the plotting less artificial and hackneyed, the allusions to Chandler more under control. The most striking example of the author's newfound fluency comes early on, in an extended description as Spenser drives north out of Boston:

> On the right was Old Ironsides at berth in the Navy Yard and to the left of the bridge the Bunker Hill Monument. Between them stretch three-decker tenements alternating with modular urban renewal units. One of the real triumphs of prefab design is to create a sense of nostalgia for slums. At the top of the bridge I paid my toll to a man who took pride in his work. There was a kind of precise flourish to the way he took my quarter and gave me back a dime with the same hand.[3]

Chandler himself excelled at this kind of potent writing, and, if the intensity of this passage does not quite equal that of the descriptions of Los Angeles's Bunker Hill in *The High Window*, or Sunset Boulevard in *Farewell, My Lovely*, it is certainly

getting there. Reviews for *God Save the Child* were almost universally favorable, with such distinguished magazines as *Time* and the *New York Times Book Review* predicting that "Spenser...will be around a long time."[4]

Plotwise, *God Save* revolves around Spenser's search for the missing son of a wealthy North Shore contractor. Some of the novel's best twists—a ransom note in the form of a comic strip, a dummy corpse planted in a homemade coffin—grow out of the confusion as to whether fifteen-year-old Kevin Bartlett has run away or been kidnaped, and a clever last-minute revelation gives the book the surprise ending others in the series lack. A major flaw, however, occurs about halfway through, when Spenser interrupts his quest for Kevin to serve as bodyguard to the boy's parents. During the long day the detective follows them through errands, shopping, and a cocktail party, the book stops being a mystery and becomes a comedy of manners satirizing the Barletts' suburban lifestyle.

On the other hand, this section represents the first fullblown statement of Spenser's world-view, which sees traditional values disintegrating in the face of the all-pervading excesses of modern America. Roger Bartlett is an amiable clod who enjoys working with his hands and is interested in making money; his wife Margery is a vainglorious fool who describes herself as "a very creative person. . . . If I didn't express myself, I couldn't be as good a mother and wife."[5] Her methods of self-expression are alcoholism, artsy-craftsy classes at the local schools, and adultery. The Bartletts with their surburban mansion hark back to Terry Orchard's parents in *The Godwulf Manuscript*, but they are much more fully developed; whereas the Orchards' failure to cope represented just one of a myriad of corruptions encountered by Spenser in the first book the Bartletts' predicament is pushed to center stage. In fact, disgust with his parents is the reason that Kevin has run away to a local commune run by a homosexual weightlifter and initiated the kidnap hoax. The preoccupation of American grownups with materialism and physical gratification, Parker seems to be saying, is bound to create a generation of fed-up kids, and the only possible outcome is the breakup of the family.

But if the family is in trouble, turning to lifestyles such as the commune in the book is no solution either; such experiments are just another form of excess. Muscleman Vic Harroway is a thirty-year-old teenager who knows as little about moderation as Kevin's parents:

> He was...a body builder gone mad. He embodied every excess of body building that an adolescent fantasy could concoct. His hair was a bright cheap blond, cut straight across the forehead in a Julius Caeser shag. . . . The white shorts were slit up the side to accommodate his thigh muscles. . . . My stomach contracted at the...number of weights he'd lifted to get himself into this state.[6]

Harroway, then, is an evil Hercules, just as Mrs. Barlett is a witch, and it gradually becomes clear that the commune is nothing but a reflection of the elder Bartlett's living arrangements. Kevin's sister, for instance, a ravenous consumer of junk food, is mirrored by a shabbily-dressed girl who is forever sitting outside the commune eating Twinkies; even the Bartletts' dog finds a counterpart in the mongrel that hangs around Harroway's place. At this point, however, Parker's instincts as a writer overcome his penchant for dialectics, and he invests the evil Harroway (who works, by the way, as a pimp and thug for the local mob) with an altogether surprising emotion: love for Kevin. Whenever we see the two together, Harroway displays nothing but affection for the boy, and, even when it is implied that they are having a sexual relationship, the suspicion lingers that the weightlifter cares more for Kevin than his own parents do.

With this exception, then, Spenser sees the suburbs and the commune as two heads of the same snake, and the genuine counterpoint to American excess is sounded by the relationship between Spenser and Susan Silverman, Kevin's high school guidance counselor, whom Spenser meets during the investigation. If excess trademarks the other characters, Spenser and Susan display admirable restraint and balance. They are both self-contained, devoted to their jobs, but not so obsessive that they cannot mingle with the suburban elite at the Bartlett cocktail party. In contrast to Margery and Harroway, they also display a good deal of sexual discretion; Susan will not make love the first time Spenser asks her to dinner because "momma [said] only dirty girls did it on the first date. I come from a different time." Spenser answers: "I know...I come from the same time."[7] This doesn't mean total abstinence, however; by the end of the book they are going to bed together happily, with none of the vulgar randiness of Margery Bartlett and her lovers. But it should also be noted that Parker plays straighter with Susan than he does with the others. The book's most embarrassing scene is her first meeting with the detective, in which she spouts jargon like a Freudian psychologist: "A dominant, but largely absent mother, a successful but essentially passive father. Strength seems to be associated with feminity, resentful submission with masculinity, and love, perhaps, with neither."[8] The reader keeps waiting for one of Spenser's wisecracks to puncture this babble, but it never comes; gradually, we understand we are supposed to take it seriously. Margery Bartlett or the college president of *Godwulf* would never have gotten away with it, but Susan does it repeatedly, not just in this book but in all those that follow, too.

God Save the Child climaxes with a fistfight between Spenser and Vic Harroway, a battle which reprises the *mano a mano* with Phil the hitman in *Godwulf*. This time, however, in line with the general thrust of the second novel, the conflict is much more schematized, taking on ritualistic overtones of good versus evil, right living against wrong living, all set against a background of all-American athletic competition. Spenser has at last located Kevin in Boston and drives Roger and Margery Bartlett into the city. They come upon Harroway and Kevin jogging on the Fenway; the youngster flees when he spots his parents, but Roger Bartlett catches him on the fifty-yard line of a nearby football field. Harroway follows and bastinadoes Roger and then Margery while Kevin watches and cheers; finally, Spenser is drawn into the fight to "beat your man... so you'll know it can be done."[9] The result is Spenser by a knockout and Kevin returned to his family with the knowledge that perhaps he still loves them.

The allegorical overtones of this encounter are clear: Parker is illustrating the triumph of Spenser's moderation over the false modern excess represented by Harroway, after Harroway has vanquished the boy's parents. But the outcome is not as convincing as it might be, first of all because physical prowess does not necessarily mean moral superiority, as any ten-year-old knows. Parker also glosses over the fact that, up to this point, Harroway has been the only one to display any real affection for Kevin and ignores the hard reality that, once the boy is home again, he is going to have to live with the same parents he so loathed before; given the degree of Margery's vanity and Roger's passivity, there's no particular hope they will be any happier. But most outlandish, perhaps, is Parker's basic suggestion that the fistfight is any sort of solution at all, that problems of the human spirit as complex as those faced by the Bartletts can be settled by violence so long as the violence is formalized into a kind of athletic event. No one would argue the benefits of Spenser's life philosophy, but the only way the Bartletts can possibly learn it is through day-to-day contact and example; the brief association and isolated acts of violence in which Spenser has engaged may leave them more traumatized than anything else.

All this is a bit of an overstatement, even nit-picking; if, as in *Godwulf*, Parker suggests that Spenser has solved everybody's problems by beating up a tough guy, the detective himself casts doubt on it in the final chapter, and the overall impression of *God Save the Child* is that it is highly original and entertaining.

Moral Stakes (1975) is not nearly so original a piece of work as its predecessor, but it culminates the first phase of the series, as the thematic undercurrent of the previous works—the debasement of American values by excessive avarice, excessive lust, excessive what-have-you—becomes even more explicit, and Spenser confronts outright his self-appointed role as champion of the traditional. Once again, sports and stadiums form a major backdrop, this time *the* major backdrop, to the action. Hired by the management of the Boston Red Sox to find out if star pitcher Marty Rabb is shaving points, Spenser discovers that Rabb's wife is an ex-prostitute, which fact is being used by Bucky Maynard, broadcast voice of the Sox, to blackmail the pitcher into deliberately losing a game now and then; Maynard in turn is controlled by maniacal loanshark and gambler Frank Doerr. Instead of reporting the situation and collecting his fee, Spenser decides to rescue Rabb's career, taking Doerr off Maynard's back with a shotgun, Maynard off Rabb's with his fists.

In terms of narrative drive and storytelling aplomb, *Mortal Stakes* is the best book to date; Parker has honed his instinct for the nuts and bolts of suspense writing to the point at which he knows exactly how long to keep a scene going, exactly how to mix up the plot elements so that something interesting is always happening. None of this is to say, however, that the book is anything new; the vast majority of the characters hail from the Great Mystery Pantheon in the Sky. The cops are all tough and deadpan, the madam who runs the house where Linda Rabb once worked is a noble-souled aristocrat despite her profession, Spenser's contact at the front office is a straight arrow too dumb to get the detective's jokes or comprehend his knightly code. In contrast, the most original portions of the novel, though relatively brief, describe Red Sox personnel, from smartmouth catcher Billy Carter to bland announcer Doc Wilson to star boy scout Marty Rabb himself. Parker obviously has a deep affinity for jocks, and he succeeds in transferring it to the page.

This is to the good, because the traditional American institution Spenser defends this time is the sport of baseball. In the opening pages, watching the Red Sox, the detective muses once again about his youth, and the times his father took him out to the ballgame; later, he sneaks onto the pitcher's mound and pretends there are two out in the last of the ninth. Many more incidents illuminate his vision of baseball as a kind of Garden of Eden that he does not want corrupted by gamblers and loansharks. Marty Rabb shares this spirit; it is several times stated that he loves the game for itself, not for the "big bucks" he is making, and, in case anybody has missed the point about the sport's importance to the American value system, he delivers a little speech:

"[Baseball is] a nice clean kind of work. You're important to a lot of kids. You got a chance to influence kids' lives

maybe, by being an example to them. It's a lot better than selling cigarettes or making napalm."[10]

But Maynard and Doerr, with their relentless avarice, threaten to play Satan in the Garden.

With these villains, however, Parker falls flattest, is the least convincing, and this represents a major flaw, because it calls into question his entire scheme. If he has to create such obviously make-believe bad guys as broadcaster Bucky Maynard, the logic runs, is not Spenser's defense of Rabb and the sport of baseball reduced to a fantasy? Is it not just a put-up occasion which gives Spenser a chance to demonstrate his goodness? Take a look at Maynard's credentials: a cross between Howard Cosell and Kingfish Huey Long, he has surmounted the handicap of a thick southern drawl to become a living legend to Boston-area fans by "telling it like it is." Never mind that broadcasters even in the depths of Mississippi and Alabama work to expunge traces of regional accents from their voices, or that it seems incredible that the fanatical followers of the Boston Red Sox would accept an accent from anyplace farther removed than the Back Bay. What is more, Maynard can give *Dallas's* J. R. Ewing lessions in manipulation, and he has the entire ballclub walking in fear that he'll put the badmouth on them. He is also greedy to the point at which he does not care about his physical well-being; he is grossly fat, and probably a homosexual. While some of these traits are unimportant and might be overlooked under other circumstances, in *Mortal Stakes* they point to a put-up villain, a character who is completely a product of the author's imagination, an unfortunate trait for someone who has to carry as much symbolic weight as Maynard.

Equally artificial are the other villains of *Mortal Stakes*. This book's ogre figure is Lester Floyd, black belt in Tae Kwon Do, who serves as Maynard's driver, thug, and, probably, lover, and who is nearly beaten to death by Spenser in the fisticuffs that close the book. Like Maynard, Lester's villainy is apparent from the first time we see him: he snaps bubblegum, reads gossip sheets, and dresses oddly, modeling himself after a cowboy one day, Che Guevara the next. In his spare time, he listens to Top 40 radio, "music with the enchantment and soul of a penny gum machine."[11] The gangsters, loanshark Frank Doerr and his henchman Wally Hogg, are Typical American Racketeers, the kind who have been stalking detective stories since Jimmy Cagney shoved the grapefruit in his gun moll's face. Their major problem is that they are not very tough, certainly not as tough as Parker tells us they are. Despite the facts that Doerr is supposed to have "dis-goddam-membered" one of his enemies and that some of the most powerful writing in *Mortal Stakes* describes Spenser's fear of going up against the mobster, Doerr is nothing but a pussycat whenever he is actually onstage. Spenser solo has no trouble facing down and then disarming both Doerr and Wally Hogg is a pair of confrontations before the shootout in which he kills them; Doerr actually weeps from frustration on one of these occasions.

As usual, that final controntation turns into an athletic event, Spenser setting it up so that it takes place in a park outside Boston, in a wooded natural amphitheatre "the size of a basketball court and the shape of a free-form pool."[12] He and the racketeer enter from different sides, like players on opposing teams. Even the book's title points to the athletic aspects of the shootout; the complete line, from Frost, reads, "'...the work is play for mortal stakes," and this is literally what happens: the confrontation turns into a game involving life and death.

Once the blackmailing bad guys have been killed or incapacitated, however, an unexpected turnabout occurs; Marty Rabb's ultimate savior is not Spenser at all, but his own wife, ex-hooker Linda Rabb, who confesses her former line of work to a sympathetic newspaperwoman, thus defusing the blackmail threat

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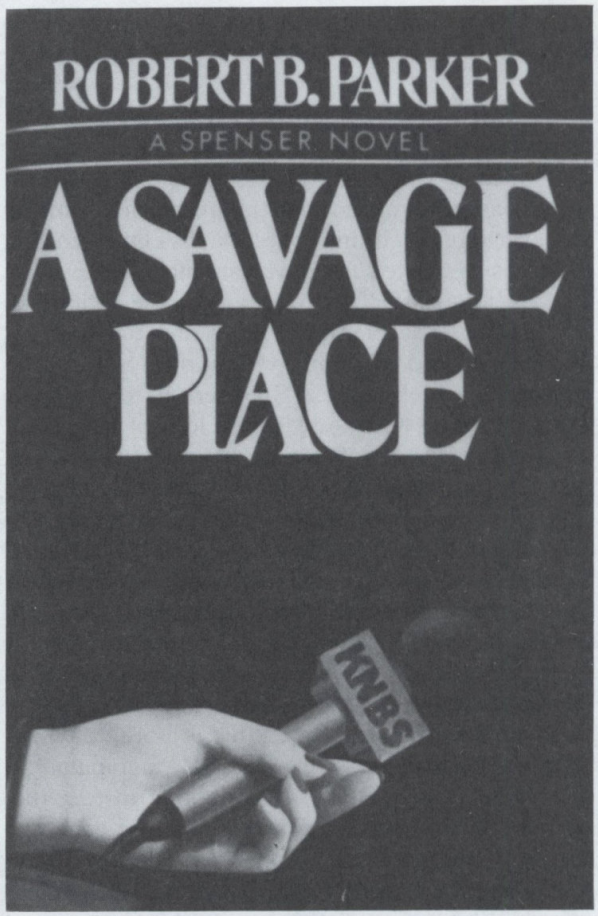
in a way tough guy Spenser could never manage. During the last chapter, Spenser and Susan Silverman engage in some overly-detailed and rather embarrassing analysis of Spenser's code of ethics, and how it failed in this particular situation. Susan says in part:

"[T]wo moral imperatives in your system are never to allow innocents to be victimized and never to kill people except involuntarily . . . [But] this time you couldn't obey both those imperatives . . . You will live a little diminished, won't you?"[13]

T. J. Binyon in particular[14] has decried this passage as self-conscious to the point of laughability, a charge difficult to deny; Chandler, for example, never let his hero lapse into anything nearly so blunt, though Marlowe lugged around as many "moral imperatives" as anybody in modern literature. Susan's highflown language contributes to a pervading air of falseness in this chapter, a sense that her words are just rhetoric, and that she and Parker both think Spenser has actually performed admirably in an impossible situation. Nor is this the first time that someone in *Mortal Stakes* goes out of his way to tell the detective how good he is. The madam in New York, for instance, sees immediately what kind of man she is dealing with: "You are not, I would guess, ever, in anyone's hands, Spenser..."[15] Later, after Doerr and Hogg have been found dead in the natural amphitheatre, police Lieutenant Quirk calls Spenser in and tells him he knows he did it: "But if I had to guess I'd guess it might have been to take the squeeze off someone else."[16] So Quirk too knows instinctively that Spenser's motives are pure.

With *Mortal Stakes*, Parker has turned a corner, embraced wholeheartedly an idea touched on by his essay "Marxism and the Mystery."[17] In it, the author emphasizes that hardboiled heroes like Sam Spade, Philip Marlowe, and, by implication, Spenser too, belong to the chivalric tradition, the tradition of the man of honor in a world without it. Looking back over the first three books, it seems obvious that in *Godwulf* and *God Save*, Parker was writing his way slowly up to this theme, perhaps discovering it little by little, and in *Mortal Stakes* bringing it into explicit focus. From this perspective, the negative judgment on Spenser's code at the close of the book assumes greater importance, because the recurring problem with chivalric heroes from Robin Hood to John Wayne has been their goodness, their unfailing strength and purity, which sets them so far apart from the rest of the human race that they become unbelievable. Hammett and Chandler both fought hard against this tendency in their characters, Hammett by leavening Spade with a healthy dose of simple greed, Chandler by making Marlowe a hard-drinking cynic who attains financial success only by marrying money. Parker may be doing something



similar at the end of *Mortal Stakes*. But, as noted, there is a curiously insincere feel to that final chapter, as if the author is just going through the motions of pointing out the detective's faults, as if he only half-believes the words he's putting in the mouths of Spenser and Susan Silverman. The suspicion lingers that this last chapter is a *pro forma* exercise which frees Parker to indulge his fascination with the code hero in the next two books—indeed, to let this fascination run wild, because, in the second phase of the Spenser series, what we get is not so much a code hero as an all-conquering fantasy figure.

Published in 1976, *Promised Land* won the Edgar for Best Mystery Novel of the year, and certainly represents the most complex book of the six. A number of elements set it apart from its predecessors. For one thing, no stadiums appear in this novel; the closest we get to a ballpark is Spenser watching the Red Sox in his motel room. Possibly this omission is Parker's recognition that physical strength is not the same as moral strength, a distinction blurred in *God Save*; in any case, *Promised Land* concentrates mainly on the detective's ethical prowess, and leaves the theme of violence-as-athletic-event until the following volume. Another difference is that

Promised Land is first in the series to take place substantially outside the Greater Boston area, almost as if Parker had determined that Spenser needed a change of pace. As a result, we are treated to an assortment of backgrounds stressing the color of historic Massachusetts: the whaling museum at New Bedford, the restored Puritan settlement at Plimouth Plantation, the Cape Cod vacation country. Since the novel's time frame is the Bicentennial year of 1976, Parker also wants to counterpoint these historic locations with the cheap modern-day lifestyle of the American middle class, for, despite the new locales, the book's major theme remains the debasement of life in these United States. But, most significantly and disturbingly, three quarters of *Promised Land* indulge Spenser in an extended paean of self-glorification, parading and emphasizing every flaw—the setup plot, the over-explicit philosophizing, the moronic clients—which marred the previous books.

The most obvious symptom of this malaise is the outlandish storyline, though just *how* outlandish it is does not become apparent until after the first forty pages. Pam Shepard, wife of a Cape Cod real estate developer, has grown disgusted with her husband's stifling affection and preoccupation with money and abandoned him and their three children. Spenser traces her to a commune in New Bedford, where she is living with a pair of militant feminists—probably lesbians, too, by the way—named Rose and Jane. So far so good: these opening chapters feature breathless pacing and a series of well-etched minor characters replacing the stereotypes of *Mortal Stakes*. But suddenly, a number of twists send the plot jetting into fantasyland. Rose and Jane, so submerged in radical cant that they have lost touch with reality ("Disarm phallic power!" is one of their favorite slogans), recruit Pam to help raid a bank for funds for the movement; they murder an elderly guard during the robbery. Spenser, meanwhile, discovers that Pam's husband Harv owes $30,000 to yet another maniacal loanshark, King Powers. Though the odds against both these misfortunes occurring simultaneously to the same family seem astronomical, Spenser brokers them into a gun sale between the feminists and the mobster, the $100,000 from the bank job for 450 Army M-2's, and then tips the cops about the transaction thus neatly—in fact, contemptuously—defeating his twin demons of materialism and fanaticism and rescuing the erring Shepards from their self-created trap.

A half-dozen logical gaps denounce this plot as blatant evidence that Parker tinkered with common sense to make everybody but Spenser look bad. For instance:

The apparent inspiration for the novel's bank robbery was a real-life 1970 incident in which three Brandeis University radicals, two of them women, teamed with a pair of professional criminals to rip off a bank, killing a policeman in the process. The Brandeis women also were feminists, but their primary commitment was to anti-Vietnam militance, a crucial point which Parker loses by the way he transforms the real heist for his own purposes. By setting *Promised Land* in 1976, he eviscerates the Vietnam motive and places the action in an era when political terrorism in the United States, never overwhelming, had shrunk to miniscule levels. So his credibility is marred from the outset, but he pushes it even further by making Rose and Jane's sole motive their mindless feminism. They are the only women's libbers I have ever heard advocating the armed overthrow of the U.S. government; whatever the faults of the feminist movement, a penchant for revolutionary violence is not one of them, and Parker simply is twisting things to score points in his ongoing commentary on the foundering U.S. marriage. What is more, the robbery as described in the book could never have netted $100,000; the militants rifle just one cash drawer. Even Parker senses this incongruity, for when Pam recounts the raid she doesn't mention the exact amount of loot; Spenser slips it in casually some pages later. We don't know where he got the figure, but it soon becomes obvious why it has to be so high: only a large sum could tempt King Powers into personally selling contraband weapons, which he has to do for Spenser's scheme to succeed. Even then, it is rather stupid for so "cunning" a gangster to trust somebody like Spenser; for that matter, it is pretty dumb for Rose and Jane to blow all their cash on 450 carbines when there are exactly three people in their gang. But, by this time, it is clear that the gangster and the radicals do not exist as believable characters, only as literary figures, morality-play personifications of Avarice and Fanaticism whose sole function is to be vanquished by Spenser's Moderation.

The fix also shows in the way Parker treats the hapless clients, Pam and Harv Shepard, who emerge as the most deluded pair of middle Americans ever to believe they have bought happiness along with their dream house in the suburbs. Harv is forever congratulating himself on his salesman's skills for sizing someone up but refuses to recognize that he is in deep trouble with the loanshark until Spenser browbeats him into accepting help. When Harv is finally reunited with his wife, he continues plying her with the same lovey-dovey clichés that drove her away in the first place. Pam herself comes off somewhat better, but there is an odd inconsistency in the way she is portrayed. Sometimes she is a perky if frustrated housewife looking for a better life, sometimes she is as dumb and imperceptive as her husband: the characterization seems to depend on the point Parker wants to make at that moment, with Spenser and/or Susan Silverman as the truth-giver. In Pam's first

meeting with the detective, for instance, she recounts the ambivalences and adulteries of her marriage, and Spenser cross-examines her with a sophistry that Clarence Darrow would admire, challenging and condemning her every move. This bullying does not enhance one's estimate of Spenser's character, but it does point up another serious problem: there is far too much explicit talk in this book. Pam analyzes her marriage; Spenser analyzes Pam and his own code of honor; Susan Silverman analyzes the code of honor, Spenser, and her relationship with him. The reader begins wondering whether this novel is about a private eye or a traveling social worker. And so much has to be spelled out to the Shepards that they emerge as two-watt dimwits; it is very hard to believe that Spenser's ministrations will help cure them, as the novel's conclusion implies.

Another problem: self-congratulation abounds. More even than in its predecessor, the secondary characters of *Promised Land* become Spenser's cheering section. Early on, for instance, he needles a loutish drunk into a tavern brawl, and the awestruck bartender congratulates him on his punch rather than inviting him to leave for scaring away customers. Later, the detective encounters an important new character, a black enforcer names Hawk who works for King Powers and resembles actor Louis Gossett in one of his "superfly" roles:

> [He was] a tall black man with a bald head and high cheekbones. He had on a powder blue Levi-cut leisure suit and a pink silk shirt. . . . The shirt was unbuttoned to the waist and the chest and stomach that showed were as hard and unadorned as ebony.[18]

Hawk and Spenser, it develops, go back twenty years, to the days when they were both young boxers, but, despite the two-decade gap, Hawk knows immediately that Spenser is still as tough as he used to be, that he can't be whipped. He tells another hardguy whom the detective is badgering: "[Y]ou gotta take . . . whatever he give you 'cause you can't handle him. . . . He is tough, he may be damn near as tough as me."[19] Later still, at the book's climax, Hawk refuses to kill Spenser when King Powers orders him to because "There ain't all that many of us left, guys like old Spenser and me. He was gone there'd be one less . . ."[20] Strange talk for a professional hit man. Finally, as usual, Susan Silverman cannot stop her praise for Spenser's goodness. She tells Hawk: "He does what he must, his aim is to help."[21] Later, she admires Spenser to his face: "You constantly get yourself involved in other lives and other people's troubles. This is not Walden Pond you've withdrawn to."[22] And again: "Much of [you] is very good, a lot of it is the best I've ever seen."[23] And yet again: "You are the ultimate man, the ultimate adult."[24] A little of this would be tolerable—perhaps—but, when it starts turning up every few pages, it is hard to keep from suspecting that Spenser is an insecure phony who needs to be stroked constantly and just happens to have God, in the form of the author, pulling strings for him.

Much more can be said about the flaws of *Promised Land*—for instance, about Spenser's cranky social criticism which declares war on every element of popular culture which has evolved since 1955 and which is as abrasive as listening to one's father decry that newfangled rock 'n' roll. But by now the trend should be clear: Spenser has gone completely out of control. In striking to demonstrate the detective's ethical prowess, Parker has contrived a hopelessly artificial novel.

The Judas Goat (1978) contains only a fraction of *Promised Land's* turgid philosophizing; it is less a tract on American mores than a straightforward novel of violence. On the other hand, it brings to full flower the theme which the earlier novel left in suspension, that of bloodshed as a kind of athletic competition. By the time the new book is finished, Spenser walks away with the gold medal; there is no doubt whatsoever about who is world champ.

The story line is simple. The family of Hugh Dixon, Massachusetts industrialist, has been blown up in a terrorist explosion in London. The millionaire offers Spenser $2,500 a head for the nine bombthrowers, and the detective, aided by Hawk—here transformed into a full-fledged sidekick with a sawed-off shotgun slung under his jacket—chases the gang through much of northern Europe, blood and bodies dropping along the way, before finally crossing the ocean for a sanguinary climax at the 1976 Montreal games.

Though the familiar virtues—extremely smooth writing, snatches of witty dialogue, the loving renderings of cuisine which have by now become a Spenser specialty—are present, *The Judas Goat* is marred by an overriding sense of superficiality, as if Parker were not trying as hard as he should. For one thing, the plot is more monotonously lineal than that of any of the previous books, quickly falling into a repetitive pattern of violent encounter, followed by pursuit, followed by violent encounter. The reader soon finds himself wishing Parker would do something to vary the rhythm of the action, to twist the story line back on itself. Opportunities abound, but he doesn't and for the standard reason: to do so would prove that someone besides Spenser has brains. In the first shoot-out, for example, the investigator dispatches two terrorists in a London hotel. Scotland Yard is called in, and we might legitimately expect a little old-fashioned police procedure in tracking down the rest of the gang. But no investigation is forthcoming; in fact, the two dead men are never identified, let alone investigated, and Spenser is

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left on his own with a mild warning to try not to hurt anybody else. Within 24 hours, he has disregarded the advice, in an ambush almost identical to the first, and still the police do nothing.

Flat background and characterization compound the problem. It can be argued that suspense writers such as Frederick Forsyth, for instance, are not very good at these aspects either, but Forsyth manages to infuse his books with a tactile grittiness by highlighting the technical details of espionage work. His people are constantly showing the reader how to obtain a false passport or smuggle a weapon across international borders, a background often so absorbing that we forget about the wooden dialogue and obligatory sex scenes. In *The Judas Goat*, with its no-frills plot, such fascinating detail is nonexistent, and the European backdrop, a continuation of *Promised Land's* trend toward new scenery, is wasted: Spenser never gets "inside" London or Copenhagen or Amsterdam. His descriptions are the notes of a perceptive tourist. The bad guys and other bit players fail to convince, with two exceptions: early in the book, Spenser runs up against a humane English cop who disappears after two or three brief scenes but leaves the reader wishing he had more space; later, there is Hawk. Like Spenser, the black man has an abrasive penchant for self-congratulation, but he is also slyly humorous, and, if somewhat romanticized, he is still a more believable bounty hunter than the private eye. As for the other characters, write them off. The chief villain, a mercenary named Paul who wants to make Africa safe for "us" (meaning the white race), delivers the sort of lines Peter Lorre was hissing at Humphrey Bogart on the Warner soundstages in 1940. "I am not big," he says at one point, "but I am quick and I know many tricks."[25] The members of his gang are shadowy thugs whose sole distinguishing features are their names, Hans, Fritz, and Big-Nose, while the *femme fatale*, like Pam Shepard, has gotten politics confused with her sex life; she mouths vile slogans about dominating blacks and wears Frederick's of Hollywood lingerie.

The same thing is happening here which happened in *Promised Land:* Parker is shunting aside everything in favor of contriving the climax, the showdown at the Olympics. But this time, obviously, he wants to demonstrate Spenser's physical supremacy.

The battle is anticipated from the opening chapter, wherein the author beings careful construction of a hierarchy of violence, with Spenser sitting on top like national champion. "I'm not only the best you can get," he tells Hugh Dixon in their first interview. "I'm the best there is."[26] Not even *Promised Land* claimed so much. Spenser also is clearly out of the league of the gang he is stalking, who are several times described as "dangerous but . . . amateurs."[27] As the hunt proceeds, Hawk and the detective do not encounter any worthy opposition until running into Paul in Copenhagen. Then Spenser recognizes immediately that the mercenary is another member of the killer elite. "He's a lot heavier article than we have been dealing with before. He's a real revolutionary. . . . . He's trouble. . . ."

"So are we, babe," Hawk replies.[28]

Paul shares a reciprocating opinion of the Americans and actually aids them by murdering two of his own men and handing the bodies over to the bounty hunters in the mistaken expectation that this will make them give up the hunt; his primary error seems to be the taunting note that accompanies the corpses. After reading it, Hawk remarks, "I don't like [him saying] how he was gonna kill us, and I don't like him saying he will if we keep after him. . ."[29] So honor has been challenged, the gauntlet cast, and it is on to Montreal for the final showdown. At this point we hear of the ogre-to-end-ogres of the entire Spenser series, Paul's gigantic henchman Zachary, who stands 6'7", weighs 305 pounds, and, oddly enough (or not so oddly, considering the Spenserean world view), is not only a killer but also a weightlifter "like those Russians. . . the champion of somewhere."[30]

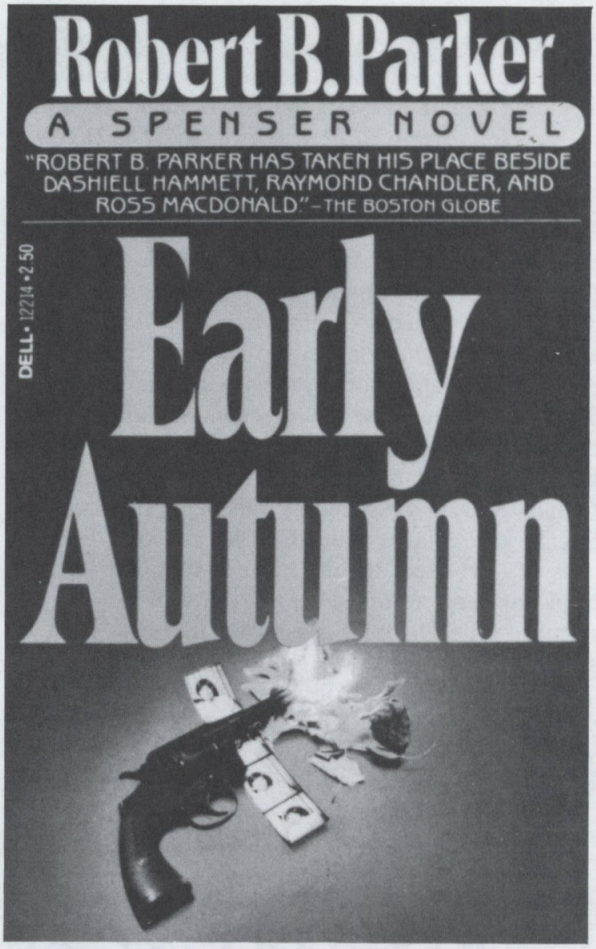
Paul's scheme for disrupting the Olympics is disappointingly simple; he and Zachary plan to walk into the stadium and shoot down the medallists as they stand on the awards platform. But Hawk and Spenser spot the bad guys as they are setting up for the assassination. Paul dies by gunfire in the ensuing fracas, and the three survivors, in sight of the Olympic stadium, engage in an epic fistfight which lands all of them in the hospital, but not before Hawk and Spenser slap skin above Zachary's inert body. They have "copped the gold medal in outdoor scufflling,"[31] and the violence-as-sport motif has reached its culmination. Spenser can finally claim world-class primacy.

By now, it should be clear that the biggest problem of this second phase of the Spenser series is artificiality. For a good percentage of *Promised Land* and the bulk of *The Judas Goat*, Spenser lives in the stylized realm of King Powers and the ogres, where sneering hardguys bait each other like knights of old and shoot it out in sleazy hotel rooms (or at big-time sporting events, as the case may be). This territory was invented fifty years ago by the first hardboiled authors and perfected in the 1940s by Raymond Chandler, whose sheer creative genius gave it such an aura of reality that many readers still believe in his fictional mean streets the way they believe in the avenues of their own hometowns. Unfortunately, Chandler was not the only one working the territory; countless hacks did too, leaving behind a half-

century of debris which author Parker cannot seem to clear away, as evidenced by his inability to create believable villains or an original milieu. And, despite the fact that a large portion of *Promised Land* has Spenser venturing into another world completely—the uneasy frontier where marriage counseling meets the suburbs—the detective remains much more a highly artificial denizen of the hardboiled underworld, artificial because he lacks such humanizing traits as Philip Marlowe's talent for fouling up. Spenser proclaims himself the "best there is" and then proves it, with a little help from his creator; his consistent infallibility kayoes any claim the detective may have to being "realistic." Like James Bond and a hundred lesser fantasy figures before him, he triumphs over all comers because the reader and author *want* him to. Exempt from the remorseless laws of human existence, he is a stand-in, an embodiment of our own dreams.

Granted all this, why the fuss? Why go into such detail about the contrivance of these novels when no one complains about the contrivance of the James Bond books? The answer is that Ian Fleming never took his hero half so seriously as Parker takes Spenser, never exalted him as an ethical as well as a physical champion, the example we all should follow in setting our own lives straight. In *Promised Land* especially, but also in *The Judas Goat*, the author is saying that the detective's unworldly victories in Raymond Chandler country qualify him to pass judgment on the all-too-real moral folly of modern America. The obvious retort is that expecting us to take the word of a dream figure on any aspect of life as it is actually lived is no more than condescension.

Fortunately, things start getting better with 1980's *Looking for Rachel Wallace*, the latest book in the series, which exhibits neither the brilliance of *God Save* nor the smugness of *Promised Land* and may well represent the start of a third phase of the Spenser series. This time, the detective is back in Boston, signing with Hamilton Black Publishing to guard Rachel Wallace, feminist author and unabashed lesbian, on the publicity tour for her latest book, *Tyranny*. Rachel has been threatened by unknown parties if the book is published, and, indeed, her life seems to be one unending confrontation: during the three days Spenser protects her, she is chased by cars, splattered with a pie, picketed by prudes, and grilled by a bitchy TV newswoman. Most of these encounters afford Spenser the opportunity to punch somebody, but at First Mutual Insurance Company he goes too far, throwing a pair of corporate security men over a cafeteria serving counter. Rachel would have preferred passive resistance, and she fires him on the spot. Several weeks later, no longer under his protection, she is kidnaped, and Spenser goes after



her abductors with relentless violence, here bullying a misfit barber, there taking on a quartet of Klansmen (who administer the one-and-only beating the detective receives in any of the six novels), and finally breaking into a mansion and shooting down two of Rachel's captors.

Parker seems to have turned another corner, perhaps because Spenser's ego is secure after the conquests of the two previous books; in any case, *Rachel Wallace* is much less exasperating than its predecessors, though the detective is more eager than ever to use his fists. There are at least eight violent encounters in this novel, more even than in *The Judas Goat*, with Spenser winning all but the KKK fracas (in which he nonetheless gives a good account of himself) and raising to nine his series total for men killed. The excess of violence is disturbing—fistfights and shootouts seem too damn easy, and we have been told that one of Spenser's "moral imperatives" is to hurt people only involuntarily—but, on the other hand, the philosophizing is a good deal less obtrusive, and the bad guys are a good deal more convincing. Rachel Wallace's captors are a strait-laced Harvard snob upset that his sister has been

going to bed with the lesbian author; the rich man's retainer, a Boston thug with vague Mafia connections; and an assortment of blue-collor bigots, including a pair of Sears warehousemen. In books such as *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* and *The Digger's Game*, George V. Higgins has given us more realistic glimpses of Boston lowlife, but the villains of *Rachel Wallace* are at least recognizable human types, ten times more believable than the terrorists in *The Judas Goat*, who popped up like targets in an arcade just to give Spenser someone to shoot at.

Even better, the relationship between Spenser and Susan Silverman is portrayed with a genuine warmth obscured in the past by the endless jargon-laden discussions. For the first time, watching the couple going about their domestic business—shopping in Quincy Market or spending the night in front of Spenser's fireplace while the Blizzard of '78 rages outside—produces the charm it is supposed to; the book takes on a homey-ness, a sense of visiting old friends, which hallmarks many of the best mystery series.

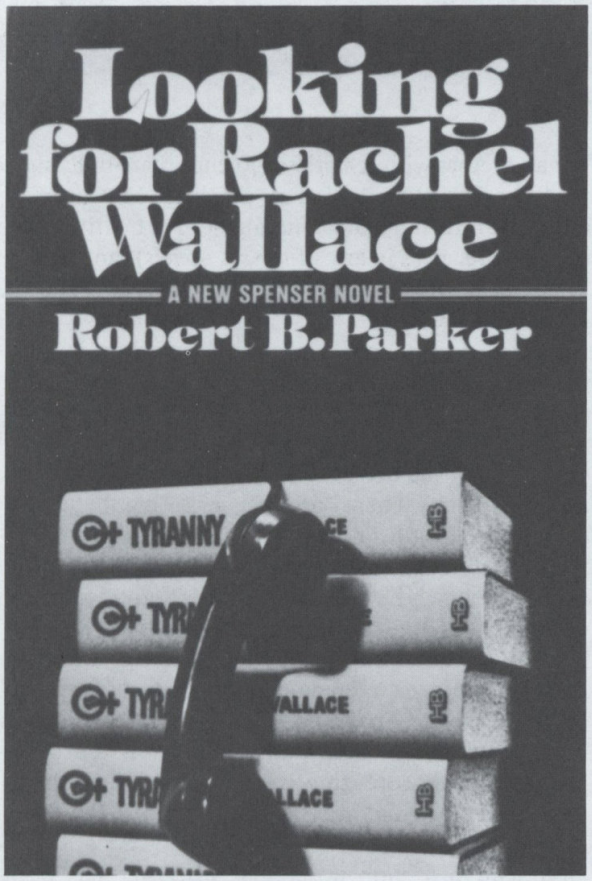
Best of all, there are occasional flashes of excellent writing as Parker stretches the Spenser character in ways it has not been stretched since *God Save*. One scene in particular comes to mind: Spenser enters the hotel room where Rachel Wallace and one of her lovers have been having sex:

> I didn't belong there. There was something powerfully non-male in the room, and I felt its pressure. . . They both smiled. Neither of them said anything. I went to the door at a normal pace. I did not run. "Don't forget the chain," I said. . .
>
> They both smiled at me. [The lover's sarong] seemed to be shrinking. My mouth felt a little dry. "I'll stay outside until I hear the bolt turn."
>
> Smile. Nod.
>
> "Good night," I said, and went out and closed the door. . . . I went down in the elevator and onto Arlington Street with my mouth still dry, feeling a bit unlovely.[32]

Not even Chandler placed his detective in a situation like this, nor managed to convey the conflicting emotions—wariness, apartness, a hint of lust—with such skill. The novel features several more comparable passages. Unhappily, not all of them work, and the character-stretching is not so extensive as it might be; for most of the book, Spenser is still rather infallible, still something of a bully, still decidedly cute. But the sense that Parker has made a new departure is unmistakable.

All of which leads to the question of where Spenser will go in the future. The big battles have all been won, and the persona acquired in *Rachel Wallace* seems mellower, built for distance. Parker may well have found the correct note for bringing the character back year after year; it is not hard to imagine this Spenser plying his trade in 1986, 1992, or, for that manner, 2001. There are worse things than growing old with a character like this.

On the other hand, it seems to be that the detective is still too artificial, still too much a fantasy fulfillment. Up to now he has never suffered any really important defeats, never faced any first-rate opposition, ogres or no. And the whole arrangement that now exists, with the wise, devoted woman friend in Susan Silverman and the supportive community of fellow tough guys like Hawk and Lt. Quirk, is just a little too snug for my taste. To gain in believability and authority, Spenser requires a massive, unmitigated defeat, and the best possibility is making him responsible for the death of Susan Silverman, having his obsession with "honorable behavior" lead somehow to her murder. Even better, Hawk could be the agent of her death, for "honorable" reasons of his own. This would blast away the insulated community in which Spenser now resides and force him to confront his code in a way authorial stringpulling has spared him in the past. What is more, it would plunge him into a duel to the death with the one man who, given the way the Spenserean world is constructed, might kill him. Their confrontation could be a hair-raiser, and one wonders how well Spenser's self-image would hold up, whether in the face of being



blown into hamburger he could keep embracing the code so smugly. The possibilities are endless, provided Parker does not rig any *Promised Land*-style fixes which let Spenser off the hook, or lapse into his accustomed rhetoric.

In short, then, though Spenser has come a long way from the two-dimensional champion who debuted in *The Godwulf Manuscript*, and, though nobody can deny that he is one of the most important private eyes in the business right now, he is still a long way from being a true knight like his predecessor Philip Marlowe. Chandler's detective, tainted by alcohol and human failings, lived in a city of relentless adversity which made his victories, when they came, seem triumphant. For Spenser, in contrast, living in a paler copy of the same underworld has been a succession of too-easy conquests; he simply has not been forced to endure the hardships every true knight must. When, around 1976, with events manipulated blatantly in his favor, he embraced the plastic trophy of superhero-dom as if it were the Grail, he was succumbing to the kind of worldly illusion that never fooled Philip Marlowe. Spenser took his prize home and put it on the mantel, and by now has probably convinced himself it's genuine. It isn't. The real thing is still out there, maybe not so far away, but fading, gleaming fitfully above Boston Common, vanishing into the air above the Charles.

Notes

1. Robert B. Parker, *The Godwulf Manuscript* (Boston: Berkley, 1975), p. 4.
2. T. J. Binyon, "Follow That Manuscript," *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 August 1974, p. 933.
3. Robert B. Parker, *God Save the Child* (Boston: Berkley, 1976), p. 6.
4. Newgate Callendar, "Crime," *New York Times Book Review*, 15 December 1974, p. 10.
5. *God Save the Child*, p. 3.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
10. Robert B. Parker, *Mortal Stakes* (Boston: Berkley, 1977), p. 35.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13.
14. T. J. Binyon, "A Lasting Influence?" in *The World of Raymond Chandler*, ed. Miriam Gross (New York: A & W, 1977), pp. 182–83.
15. *Mortal Stakes*, p. 89.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
17. Robert B. Parker, "Marxism and the Mystery," in *Murder Ink*, ed. Dilys Winn (New York: Workman, 1977), pp. 123–25.
18. Robert B. Parker, *Promised Land* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 13.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
25. Robert B. Parker, *The Judas Goat* (Boston: Berkley, 1979), p. 98.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 101–2.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
32. Robert B. Parker, *Looking for Rachel Wallace* (New York: Delacorte/Seymore Lawrence, 1980), p. 66.

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Mortal Stakes:
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AJH REVIEWS

Allen J. Hubin, Consulting Editor

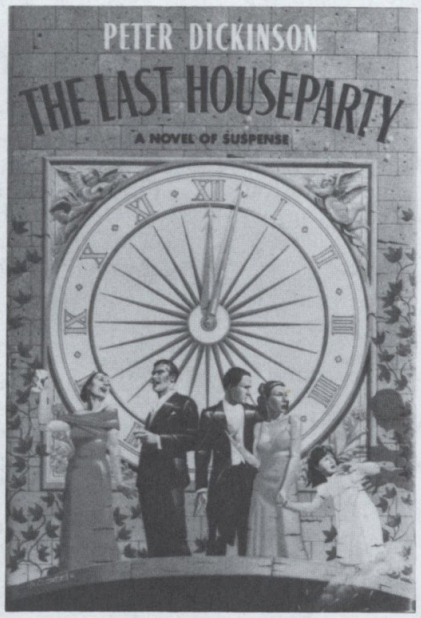
Photo: Robert Smull

Short notes...

Another of Ted Allbeury's classy, near-to-the-bone intrigue novels is ***Shadow of Shadows*** (Scribners, $12.95). A prime Russian defector to England suddenly dries up in the process of telling all. James Lawler is assigned to find out why and fix the problem so the flow of secrets can continue. But the Russian is convinced the British will terminate him as soon as his fund of goodies is exhausted. The reason? Ah, that takes delicate probing, as Lawler and the Russian learn how much alike they are.

Anthony Burton's ***Embrace of the Butcher*** (Dodd, Mead, $12.95) is an exceptionally vivid picture of the bleakness that is bloody, divided Ireland and the human bleakness of people—Irish, British, even American—who pull the strings and triggers. Peter King betrayed his father, the General, by failing to follow a military career and instead left England to be a journalist in New York. His brother was faithful, however, and while on covert assignment in a small town on the Irish border was rewarded by a shot in the back. King smells a cover-up and determines to find out who and why. The who is a New York policeman and occasional assassin for the Provos, but the why leads into the murky depths of move and countermove. A memorable tale.

Peter Dickinson's ***The Last Houseparty*** (Pantheon, $12.95) is unusual—which is usual for Dickinson—but I think ultimately it's less satisfying than Dickinson's best. Perhaps it's too understated. You should be prepared to enjoy, however, as the author dissects a "do" at Snailwood Castle in 1937, the guests, the politics and intrigues, the character of Zena, Countess of Snailwood, the domination of Snailwood's great animated tower clock, and the tragedy of that last party.

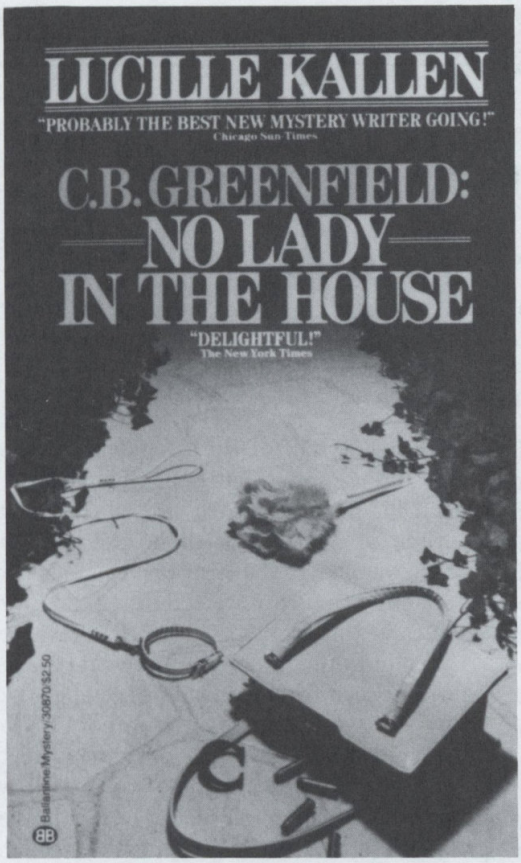


Past and present are well intertwined.

One might suppose that a decently fresh private eye series would be hard to come by, after the legion of P.I.'s over the years had tilled that soil. Fallow it might reasonably be, but spirit and vitality are found in Loren D. Estleman's tales about Amos Walker in the dark streets of Detroit. In the third, ***The Midnight Man*** (Houghton Mifflin, $12.95), a policeman who did Walker a favor is shot, paralyzed. The official investigation seems to be going nowhere, so the policeman's wife hires Amos to find the villain. But justice is not the only thing on her mind.

I suspect that enough fiction has been written about psychopaths loose in New York to constitute a minor subgenre. Suspend enough disbelief and you'll find the latest of these, ***Katie's Terror*** by David E. Fisher (Morrow, $12.50), effectively drawing you into mounting suspense. Katie Townsend forsook a sagging acting career to be a librarian in Manhattan. She has solved one murder case by spare time newspaper backfile research, and now has interest in another. Appearance on a TV show gives her publicity and the attentions of an anonymous phone caller promising death. A psychic she met on the TV show confirms the danger. A policeman hovers, but Katie is suspicious of him. Her lover, a sometime actor who can't understand her defection from that calling, begins to act strangely, jealously. Who will kill Katie?

C. B. Greenfield, the grumpy and very particular newspaper publisher in the Connecticut village of Sloan's Ford, returns for the third time with his long-suffering reporter-narrator Maggie Rome in ***No Lady in the House*** (Wyndham, $13.50). This is a very satisfying and witty tale, most enjoyably built on the idea of that vanishing species, the cleaning lady, and shot through with crisply caught characters. Disaster begins when Greenfield's long-time, expert cleaning lady abruptly retires. Through great effort, Maggie locates another, who is murdered in her first hour on the job. The killer swipes Greenfield's precious stereo system to boot, a despoiling not to be borne. The police are stubborn simpletons, of course, so Greenfield, using Maggie for leg work, begins to poke about, and a second corpse is not long in turning up. Not to be missed.



Richard Harris has nearly a fail-safe plot in ***Honor Bound*** (St. Martin's, $12.95): man against the system. Here the system is the judicial, and the man is lawyer Thomas Hasher, whose mentor and friend was destroyed by cruel and unjust application of the law. So Hasher sets out for revenge and vindication against his friend's implacably evil wife. So far so good, but the author let his passions for wallows in sex far outstrip his literary judgment, and I gave up in disgust at the halfway point.

At least three Americans write mysteries for Hale, the large volume library market publisher in England, without seeing their books published here. One of the three, Philip Lauben, a retired Air Force officer living in Tennessee, breaks the U.S. ice with his fourth thriller, ***A Nice Sound Alibi*** (St. Martin's, $9.95), which if typical of the author's work suggests we have been missing little. *Alibi* is set in Kentucky, where Capt. Homer Clay, a policeman from the right side of the tracks, reluctantly mobilizes himself—and his bumpkin sidekick—to investigate a pair of murders. I read the book under admittedly adverse conditions—in snatches over a week or more—but I don't think the closest attention would have rewarded me with much more understanding or enjoyment. Pass this one.

Never has Ngaio Marsh's love for the theatre come through more strongly than in her final novel, ***Light Thickens*** (Little, Brown, $13.95). Indeed, it's really more a tale of *Macbeth* and its staging in London than a novel of crime—although a murder is committed in the presence of a theatre full of people, including Insp. Alleyn, who fails to make a crucial observation. Since the richness of this story is of theatre and directing and acting, as a mystery it may not please as much as others about Alleyn. But taken for what it is, *Light Thickens* is most fitting for us to remember Ngaio Marsh by.

The pseudonymous John Penn debuts with ***An Ad for Murder*** (Scribner, $11.95). It offers some good ideas, but the telling lacks the polish that more experience should provide. Major Tom Cheryl retired to an English village to manage his money, his wife, his mistress, and his leisure. All should be well, except ads begin to appear in the village newspaper—ads seeming to announce a forthcoming book and/or the major's death. He suffers a few near misses; then a bomb is delivered. The author maintains uncertainty well enough, but the resolution has the appearance of a rabbit hastily pulled from a hat.

The Baltic Emerald by Edmund Ward (St. Martin's, $10.95) may be a bit confusing at times, and a bit hard to swallow at others, but in the end proves to be quite an entertaining thriller. A jewel courier dies in Sweden under conditions highly suspicious to a colleague if not to the local police. He leaves something to the colleague, Morgan: an enormous emerald. Various ungodly (some wearing official uniforms but seemingly no more godly for it) will spare no blood to have the emerald, for where there is one, there might be two, or three...

I can't say I greatly cared who murdered Victoria Buckley in Sara Woods's 32nd Antony Maitland novel, ***Dearest Enemy*** (St. Martin's, $9.95). Or that, having learned whodunit, I felt detectably more content. That perfect couple of the stage, Leonard and Victoria, married 43 years, in reality rather cordially hate each other. He thinks she's poisoning him, but she's the one to die, on the darkened stage of the hit mystery play in which they're starring. The police seize Leonard, and Antony, already involved and in the audience at the fatal moment, is asked to defend. Tepid; not one real emotion can be found in this tale. I wonder if Woods, with her flood of work for the now defunct Raven House, has written herself into the doldrums?

—AJH

A Talent to Disturb

By Robert Barnard

The two foremost practitioners of the traditional detective story today are P. D. James and Ruth Rendell, and it is natural that, when the mantle started slipping from the Christie generation of crime writers and wrapped itself around these two, critics should attempt to define their place in the crime tradition by reference to their predecessors.

P. D. James seemed easy: most critics agreed in labeling her the successor to Sayers. She has, it is true, little of the galumphing high spirits of the early Sayers, but she has a lot of the conscientious craftsmanship, the meticulous delineation of background, the rather puddingy prose style. Is Ruth Rendell, then, the natural heir of Agatha Christie? Certainly her novels are meticulously plotted—carefully-worked-out successions of developments that leave nothing to chance. She has, too, a fine eye for the deceptive potential of everyday things, and an instinctive understanding of the reader's inbred assumptions that lead him to jump to predictable conclusions. But Ruth Rendell would not, I think, like the comparison: she has commented on Christie's cardboard characters and the remoteness of her novels from any recognizable social reality. A Ruth Rendell novel is firmly rooted in contemporary life, instinctively reflects current modes of thinking and behavior.

Margery Allingham, then? Rendell certainly admires Allingham, and there are many points of likeness—notably the contemporaneity, the use of characters that can verge on the grotesque, the fascination with evil or perversity. Allingham's gaiety and high spirits, however, are foreign to Rendell, whose sense of humor is blacker, and mostly finds expression in odd conjunctures of personality, or bleak ironies of circumstance. Perhaps, in the long run, we will find these backward comparisons more misleading than helpful, for most of the older generation created an artificial world whose relation to the real one was at best tangential, whereas both Rendell and James bring to popular crime fiction minds that are nourished and nurtured by the social realities of Britain today.

Roughly half of Ruth Rendell's novels are written around the series figures of Chief Inspector Wexford and his deputy Burden; the others center around a crime or a criminal (these are what an American reviewer has called her "chiller-killer" books, which certainly sums up perfectly three or four of her best titles in this mode). The English reviewers, at least, are almost unanimous in preferring the latter, and (as will be seen from the list at the end of the this article) by and large I agree. It is important to emphasize, though, that Ruth Rendell has, more than anyone else writing in the field today, the storyteller's gift, without which one is lost in a popular genre. All the Wexford stories are compulsively readable, they are well plotted, ingenious, and fast. Many readers wedded to the traditional type of English mystery will prefer these, and—as a bonus—they will get a sharp and convincing picture of life in the English provinces today.

Undeniably, though, they are less original than the others. The writers of the Golden Age left a highly problematic legacy to their successors. Wexford and Burden are obviously figures in the tradition of the series detective: Wexford is elderly, cranky, a devoted family man, whose tolerance of other people's habits and vagaries (particularly their sexual habits and vagaries) is contrasted with the buttoned-up puritanism of his younger assistant. These are constant features, at least in the later novels (in the earliest ones the pattern is not yet firmly established). If the scene is a pop festival, or if the subject of feminism comes up, or sexual deviance, we know that Wexford will take a tolerant, understanding attitude, and Burden a disapproving or positively prehistoric one.

The trouble is that, with Rendell's more realistic style of novel, this becomes just a little dull. The Golden Age detectives—Wimsey, Poirot, Campion—have a certain wild panache about them that makes one overlook the thinness of the characterisation and the predictability of their reactions. They are not characters but collections of habits, attitudes, and identifying marks. This is not a criticism of them:

they fit perfectly into the world, so stylized and remote from reality, that the Golden Age writers create. But puppets fit less easily into Ruth Rendell's world. She puts into the whodunit convention about as much reality as it will take—the realities of class, the realities of sex, in Britain today—and the element

of the automaton in Wexford and Burden consorts uneasily with this. How much contemporaneity the whodunit can stand is an interesting question. It is significant that when, in *A Sleeping Life,* a current social preoccupation comes up—the question of feminism, which Wexford encounters in his family life, and which is relevant to the solution of the mystery—the level of comment is quite superficial, embarrassingly so. One is left with the impression that either Rendell felt, for some reason, that she had to take in this issue of current concern but that she in fact felt no urgent interest in it, or else that it is almost impossible to deal with important issues in what is, even in Rendell's hands, a highly artificial form.

There is one other drawback to the Wexford novels, and that is the dreaded quotation habit. At times, as in *Murder Being Once Done,* they go at it like two tennis pros: *Slam!* goes the quote from Bunyan from the Chief Inspector, *Wham!* comes back the slice of Sir Thomas More from his nephew Howard of the CID. Rendell is less prone to this than P. D. James, much less prone than Amanda Cross, who has such a hideous facility in this black art as to render her books virtually unreadable. Still, the habit is irritating, and it invades her titles, which are all too often unmemorable quotes with little or no relevance to the books: does anyone, for example, remember why *The Lake of Darkness* is so called? Or *The Face of Trespass?* I wish some Ph.D. student would write a thesis investigating why this horrible habit has such a fatal appeal for writers of the conventional whodunit.

There is at least one exception to the relative inferiority (*only* relative, I hasten to emphasize) of the Wexford novels, and it illuminates what leaves one dissatisfied in the other novels. In *No More Dying Then,* the story centers around the kidnapping of a little boy. Wexford figures comparatively little, and the action is mainly taken up with the distraught mother—a tender, tolerant, slapdash ex-actress—and the affair she has with Inspector Burden, who has recently lost his wife. Burden is revealed as a man of overwhelming, and now repressed, sexuality, and the conflict between his puritan principles and the needs he eventually comes to satisfy with the boy's mother is impressively done. Burden comes over as tormented, passionate, not particularly likeable, but intensely real. But though there are clear enough points of contact between this Burden and the Burden of the other novels, here he is done with a depth and intensity that take him into quite another area of artistic creation. It is significant that we have never, in the earlier novels, suspected that he is a man of such strong sensuality; and though, in the later novels, occasional bows are made to his new tolerance, in essence he reverts to type and becomes the predictable figure he has always been. Under cover of being a Wexford novel, *No More Dying Then* is really one much closer to her others, to the books which penetrate to an altogether deeper level of psychological insight.

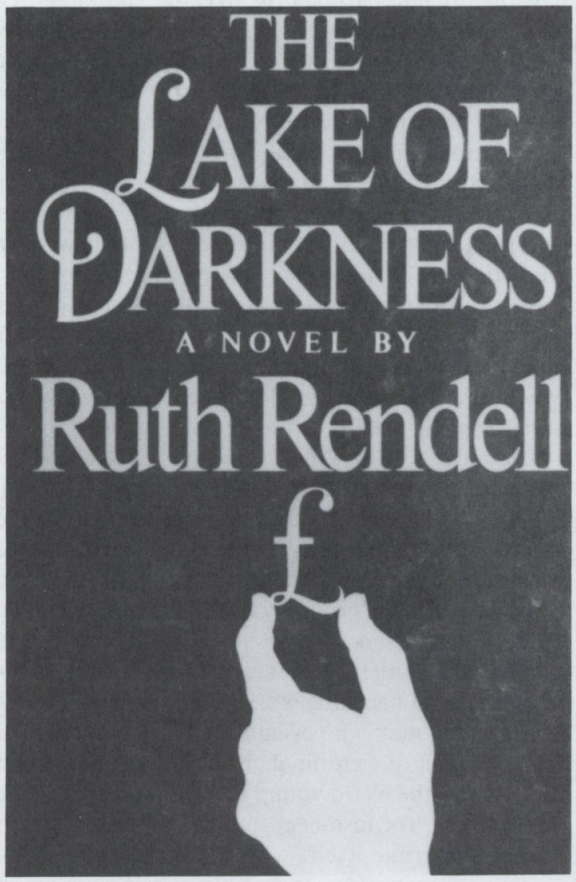
The label "chiller-killer" which has been attached to Rendell's non-Wexford novels is really apt for only four of them, though most of these are among her very best: *A Demon in My View,* for example, concerns a repressed bachelor who satisfies his sexual urges with a tailor's dummy, until it is removed from the basement where he keeps it and he finds other and more deadly outlets. The recent *Master of the Moor,* a brilliant and haunting work, also concerns a lonely and inverted man who eventually becomes a woman-killer. Studies of a criminal or misfit occur in many of the others—the weird young man, Finn, in *The Lake of Darkness,* for instance—but the central interest is usually the crime itself, with the meticulous chron-

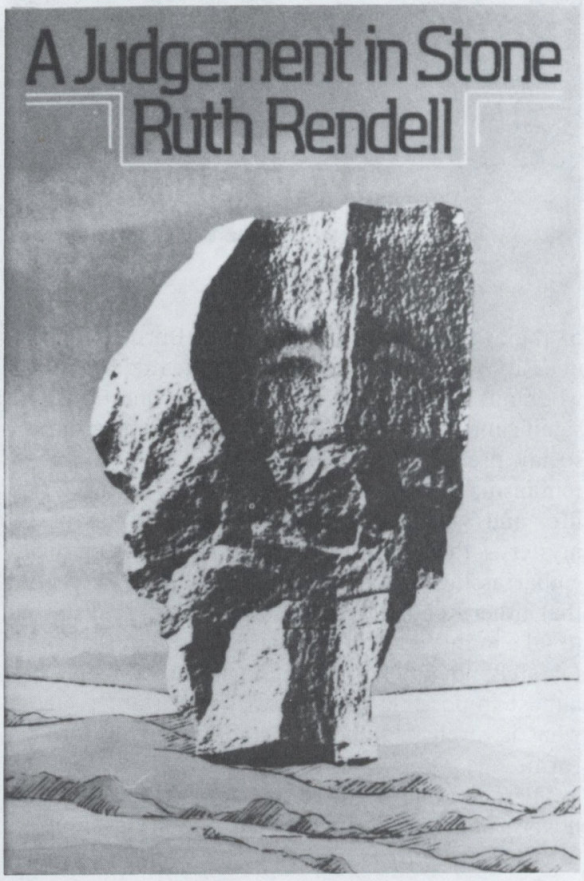
icling of how a certain series of events and conjunctures of personalities lead to a certain conclusion (usually, of course, disaster). *Make Death Love Me,* one of the best of these, follows alternately the fate of a kidnapped bank clerk and the manager of her tiny branch, who has absconded with money while the front office was being held up. While he enjoys a suddenly liberated existence—the new life his romantic imagination has always conjured up for himself—his assistant is imprisoned with the dangerous but pathetic young thugs who have reluctantly taken her hostage. The story is managed so as to bring these two strands together in a sad, satisfying conclusion.

That book displays with particular brilliance Rendell's gift for social observation, and her rendering of the contemporary scene has an almost Dickensian relish for the grotesque. The staleness of the bank manager's home life, the vacuity of existence in his lower-middle class circle, is lovingly caught, as is the only thing that relieves it—the manic right-wing fervor of the hero's father-in-law, vociferating all the basest fantasies of the popular press:

"What we want is the army to take over this country. See a bit of discipline then, we would. The army to take over, under the Queen, of course, under Her Majesty, and some general at the head of it. Some big pot who means business. The Forces, that's the thing. We knew what discipline was when I was in the Forces. . . Flog 'em is what I say. Give 'em something to remember across their backsides." He paused and swigged tea. "What's wrong with the cat?" he said, so that anyone coming in at that moment. . . would have supposed him to be enquiring after the health of the family pet.

The Face of Trespass is a particularly fine example of this kind of plot, because while the isolated young man, living a bare, hermit-like existence, is being set up as a fall guy by his ex-girlfriend, we are in ignorance of this until the end: each event, insignificant in itself, has to be endowed with interest, even though the reader only later realizes the spider's-web effect each of them has had. It is a stunning example of Rendell's plotting ability. If the novels ever falter, it is because one piece in the structure fails to convince: I can never accept, in *The Lake of Darkness,* that the young man who wins a small fortune on the football pools would fail to inform the friend who has filled in the form for him—and if the reader is not convinced of that, the structure built on it seems perpetually out of true. Christie, dealing with lightly sketched characters, can make them do what the plot demands.





With Rendell's more subtly sketched people, character and plot have to mesh totally.

Though these are far from being whodunits, surprise of one sort or another has a part to play in most of them. But in the book which (with *Master of the Moor,* which is too recent to have been absorbed) has claims to be her masterpiece, surprise has no place at all. On the very first page of *A Judgment in Stone,* we are told what is to happen: "Eunice Parchmain killed the Coverdale family because she could not read or write." And in case "the Coverdale family" is not specific enough, in case during the course of the book, when the mass slaughter is coming closer, we might hug to ourselves the hope that "perhaps Melinda escapes," Ruth Rendell carefully destroys all such comforting props by spelling it out still more explicitly:

> Four members of this family—George, Jacqueline, and Melinda Coverdale and Giles Mont—died in the space of fifteen minutes on February 14, St Valentine's Day. Eunice Parchmain and the prosaically named Joan Smith shot them down on a Sunday evening while they were watching opera on television. Two weeks later Eunice was arrested for the crime—because she could not read.

The appeal of this book, then, is far removed from that of a whodunit. Nor has it much in common with the howdunit—of which Sayers, for instance, was such a mistress. The howdunit relies for its interest on knowing the murderer but trying to guess by what ingenious means he accomplished his crime (as well as what ingenious means the detective will use to expose him). It depends, in fact, on premeditation, and on an ingenious murderer, and one thing the murder of the Coverdales is not is premeditated, nor does their mowing down involve any special skill. Perhaps the best characterisation we can give of this book is that it is a whydunit—a "how-did-it-come-about" story. But is is time to say something of the story, and the actors in it.

Eunice Parchmain is a middle-aged woman, a spinster, from an unattractive working-class London suburb. She has spent her life nursing her invalid (or deliberately idle) parents, and, due to having shifted schools during the war, and because of her own secretive nature which has prevented her doing anything about it, she has grown up unable to read or write. She lives cut off, in a passive, self-satisfied darkness, gaining obscure pleasure from attempts at amateur blackmail. After the death of her father, whom she has killed, quite casually, it seems, she takes a job with the Coverdales. The Coverdales are four. George and Jacqueline, the parents, have both been married before, and are still very much in love. George owns a factory, but he enjoys playing Lord of the Manor from his substantial and beautiful house. Jacqueline is good-looking, chic, and hardworking, very conscious of her elegance. George's daughter Melinda is at University, going through a phase of mild revolution. Jacqueline's son is still at school, an inveterate reader, spotty, dreaming, romantic, almost entirely cut off from the family, to whom he occasionally grunts.

Class, in Ruth Rendell generally, is not as it was in the earlier generation of crime writers. They were snobs to a woman, and their every book is instinct with assumptions of class superiority. In Rendell, differences of class correspond more accurately with the reality of class in Britain today: they are noted, but not over-emphasized, and as often as not they are a matter for amusement or ridicule. If class assumes greater importance in this book, it is because we are so close to the Coverdales, and because the gulf between them and Eunice is so large. At the beginning, Jacqueline is childishly pleased because Eunice calls her "Madam," which none of the local chars or terrible *au pairs* that she has previously relied on have ever done. Eventually, as resentment and alienation build up in Eunice, she drops it:

> "Have you noticed that she never calls us by our names? And she's dropped that 'sir' and 'madam.' Not that I care

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Catalog 1 Queen's Quorum, Detective Short Story, Haycraft-Queen, Allery Queen Firsts. Available January 1983.

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about that, I'm not a snob," said George, who did and was....

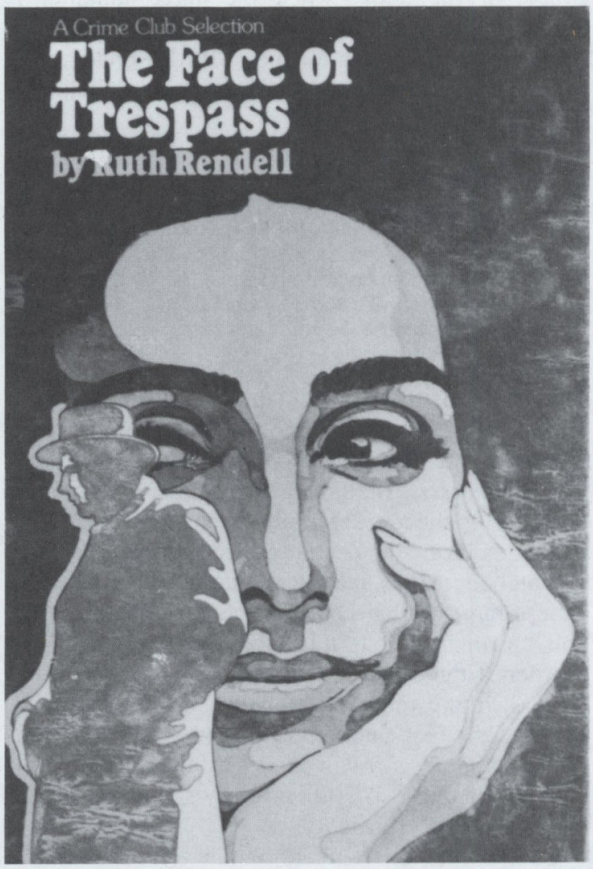
The elder Coverdales are, in fact, play-acting social roles which are things of the past but which give them subtle, guilty pleasure. All this is to the locals not much more than a joke, for class is to them largely a thing of the past: George gives himself great airs, they say, for the owner of a tin-box factory, and Jacqueline is found to be uppitty and mutton dressed as lamb to boot. But nothing of these judgments gets through to them. In a fine touch, when they go to an opera, it is to Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito,* his last opera, commissioned for an Emperor's coronation—a cool, remote, slightly inhuman tribute to an aristocratic regime that was collapsing.

All this, and much more, offers us in the course of reading an easy escape route: we can take refuge in instant social criticism, we can adopt an attitude something akin to: "Eunice Parchmain killed the Coverdale family because they were snobs and she was a lonely, deprived, snubbed working-class woman." But as soon as we consider such a position objectively, it immediately is shown to be impossible as an explanation. Not only do we have Ruth Rendell's explicit statements at the beginning, but we also know that, apparently on a random impulse, Eunice has smothered her father. That, for sure, cannot be seen as an engagement in the class war.

For the thing about the Coverdales that brings about their end is not their arrogance (their modern version of old class arrogance), nor their off-hand treatment of Eunice, their ignoring of her as a personality unless something about her absolutely shrieks for their attention. Eunice would have been only too happy to have been ignored for all eternity, safe in front of her television set, watching her American police series. What dooms the Coverdales is that they are a very literate family. Books and writing are in their life blood. They are, practically, young Giles's life: "Some say life is the thing, but I prefer reading" is one of the mottos of the month he puts up over his bed. Jacqueline and George read long Victorian novels—the same one at the same time, so that they can discuss them together. Notes, letters, the whole paraphernalia of the printed word are built into their lifestyle. It would not have occurred to them for a moment that their servant could not read, and feared to have it known.

Eunice's illiteracy cuts her off in a dumb, heavy, solitary state of darkness. Or is that the wrong way around? We are at least at liberty to believe that Eunice does not *fail* to learn to read as a girl: that subconsciously she *refuses* to, because to read is to become part of the community of men and women of which most people wish to become a part. And Eunice does not want to become part of that community. Her doings with other men and women almost invariably involve an attempt to get some sort of dominance over them. The small-scale black-mailing business she has run in her grimy London suburb seems to involve the only sort of relationship she can understand: mastery allied with contempt. But, mostly, all she asks is to be left in her own dark, dank cocoon.

In this respect, it is the democratic instincts of Melinda, the daughter, which are more deadly than



any of the snobberies of George or Jacqueline. True, Melinda's democratic instincts do not go deep: like many middle-class democrats, her idea of fraternity between the classes is to go into the kitchen and add "You *are* sweet" to a request to iron her skirt. But just now and then she does make the effort to get through to Eunice. And, in spite of the superficiality of her ideas, Melinda does have a brightness, a generosity, an honesty, which shine bright—and threaten to light up the darkness in which Eunice comfortably lives. It is the cut-offness of Eunice that gives her her coolness, her chill, her forbiddingness. None of them really notices it at first. George even likes her dreary clothes, "which, to a more detached

observer, would have looked like standard issue to a prison wardress"—he finds them, no doubt, appropriate to her position. But it is George, who is the most sensitive, who feels the chill first. And gradually, a sense of what they have invited into their house spreads to all the family.

I said this is a chiller-killer plot, none more chilling. But the book centers around not one murderess but two. Without Joan Smith, Eunice would probably have come and eventually gone without blood on her hands. Joan Smith, after a conventional childhood in which she even showed considerable talent, has had years as a low-class prostitute in Shepherd's Bush, and eventually acquired her meek, helpless husband Norman. She has given up her trade when she acquires an even better stimulus: way-out religion. Now Joan and Norman run, with hopeless inefficiency, the village shop and post office. Joan is bird-like, maniacal, loud in the proclamation of her own sinfulness (with details). Her speech is done with that glorying in the grotesque which is so like Allingham: "'You've led a pure life, Eun, so you can't know what mine has been, delivering my body, the temple of the Lord, to the riffraff of Shepherd's Bush.'" At its best her speech mingles the brashly religious with the humdrum and commonplace, with grimly comic effect:

> A kind of holy ecstasy radiated Joan's raddled face. She banged her flat bosom with her fist. "Oh, I was a sinner!" she declaimed. "I was scarlet with sin and steeped in the foulest mire. I went about the city as an harlot, but God called me and, lo, I heard Him! I shall never forget the day I confessed my sins before the multitude of the brethren and opened my heart to my husband. With true humility, dear, I have laid bare my soul to all who would hear, so that the people may know even the blackest shall be saved. Have another cup, do."

It is when her husband, driven from his meekness by her supremely aggravating taunts, gives her a mild blow that Joan is driven over the edge into madness.

As the climax approaches, we never get, nor are meant to get, a feeling of inevitability. What we feel

A NOTE TO OUR READERS

The Armchair Detective has expanded! We have added sixteen pages to our magazine beginning with Vol. 16, No. 1.

Unfortunately, we must raise the cover price of TAD not only to pay for these extra pages but also to keep up with inflation.

Beginning July 1, 1983, the cost of TAD will increase by $1.00 per issue. Any new or renewal subscription received after July 1 will be billed at the higher price.

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The cost of all *back issues* of TAD purchased after July 1 will also increase by *one dollar;* all issues will cost $5.00. The Index will remain $7.50.

If you wish to subscribe, renew your subscription, or purchase back issues *before* July 1, you will be billed at the current and lower rates.

is a tension between knowledge and hopeless hope. Even as the Coverdales sit watching the televised *Don Giovanni* in the living room and Eunice and the quite demented Joan Smith pick up the guns from the gun room, it is still on the cards that they will, as they say, only "frighten them." This St. Valentine's Day massacre seems quite as unpremeditated as Eunice's murder of her father. The horrible thing is that this is *not* predestined: it is random, fortuitous, unpredictable. In some of her books, we do see the catastrophe as inescapable, looming ahead. This also looms ahead, but only because we have been told about it. Throughout the book we are told of the many, many occasions when, if someone had acted differently, it would never have taken place: "Why not phone back, Jacqueline? Dial that number again now," says the author, when to do so would have exposed the whole set-up Eunice has rigged up to give herself a phony reference for the job. The novel is riddled with if's: if they had understood Eunice's problem earlier; if Melinda had not pressed on her her childishly kind attentions; if her television had not broken down and she had not met Joan Smith. At the beginning of the book, the future is a wide-open road, with side roads leading off to all sorts of possibilities and happy endings. The fascination of the book is to see one after another closed off, as quite harmless and understandable decisions are taken, until only one black road is open: the spectacle of the two demented women bursting into the sitting room and spraying the family with shot.

The book, then, is chilling as well as gripping. There is no possibility of that "cosy read" which many readers claim to get from the English style of crime story. Not that the characters are all "mean"—insignificant in their shabbiness, as is the case in *One Across, Two Down.* Even the elders in the family have fine and generous impulses underneath their snobbery, and the younger generation are positively attractive. It is significant that Giles, who is perpetually buried in a book, or dreaming fantasies of a Byronic, incestuous affair with Melinda, or entering a monastery, is as nearly cut off from the human community as Eunice—a fine ironic touch. But in the case of Giles, there is one moment near the end that tells us that this is just a phase of adolescence which will pass, or would have passed: as the family discuss George's terrible job, on Monday, of driving the dismissed Eunice to the station, he appeals to Giles, who will be with him, to give him moral support: Giles, in the only real sentence he has said throughout the book, quotes from literature, but it is an assertion of solidarity, of family communion: "'I will never desert Mr. Micawber.'" Within twenty-four hours, they are all dead.

It is a terrible book, but not a horrible one. In its depth of psychological insight, its range of social observation, it takes the crime novel several steps toward the novel proper. It is the compelling plotting, the irresistible storytelling knack, that ensures that it remains within the genre. Dorothy Sayers's argument that the crime story is closely related to tragedy is relevant here, for at the end we do feel something of that purging through pity and terror which is at the heart of tragedy. As in *Macbeth,* there is at the center of this story a character who has free will, one who is not driven by circumstances to evil, but who chooses it. The particular horror of this book is that the choice, when made, seems such a random one—almost, it might be said, a frivolous one.

Ruth Rendell's, then, are unusual crime books for our time. One hesitates to say that she is a pathfinder, a pioneer of new ways. Most of the permutations of popular literary forms have already been tried, and Ruth Rendell does nothing that Dickens, for example, had not aimed to do in *Edwin Drood.* America's best living crime writer, Margaret Millar, sometimes achieves very similar effects. One will only say that Ruth Rendell has a mind unusually attuned to the odd, the menacing, the abnormal; that she seizes on the contemporary forms these assume, and turns them into something unnerving yet oddly satisfying. Like all good crime writers she keeps you turning the pages in bed at night, but Rendell's books are ones that seldom send you happily off to sleep. She has, more than anyone writing today, a talent to disturb.

CRIME BOOKS BY RUTH RENDELL

****From Doon with Death,** 1964 Wexford
***To Fear a Painted Devil,** 1965
***Vanity Dies Hard,** 1965 (U.S. title: *In Sickness and in Health*)
****A New Lease of Death,** 1967 Wexford (U.S. title: *Sins of the Fathers*)
*****Wolf to the Slaughter,** 1967 Wexford
****The Secret House of Death,** 1968
****The Best Man to Die,** 1969 Wexford
***A Guilty Thing Surprised,** 1970 Wexford
*****No More Dying Then,** 1971 Wexford
****One Across, Two Down,** 1971
****Murder Being Once Done,** 1972 Wexford
****Some Lie and Some Die,** 1973 Wexford
*****The Face of Trespass,** 1974
***Shake Hands for Ever,** 1975 Wexford
*****A Demon in my View,** 1976
******A Judgment in Stone,** 1977
****A Sleeping Life,** 1978 Wexford
*****Make Death Love Me,** 1979
****The Lake of Darkness,** 1980
***Put on by Cunning,** 1981 Wexford (U.S. title: *Dead Letters*)
******Master of the Moor,** 1982
The Speaker of Mandarin (just published)

Short Stories:
*****The Fallen Curtain,** 1976
***Means of Evil,** 1976 Wexford
The Fever Tree, 1982 □

THE UNIQUE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

HUGO GERNSBACK'S SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE MONTHLY PART VI

By Robert A.W. Lowndes

Thursday, May 15, 1930: The newly-titled *Amazing Detective Tales* was there on the rack when I went in to the newsstore, with the simplest and most lurid cover yet. Silhouetted on a white background, we see the head and shoulders of a middle-aged woman with green hair, green eyes, and a green necklace. She wears a darker green dress with a red collar. In her right hand she holds up a tiny phial; a hypodermic needle is dropping from her left hand. The expression on her face and in her glaring eyes is that of horrified dismay.

We see the Gernsback symbol to the right of the new logo, and below it "HUGO GERNSBACK, EDITORIAL CHIEF." "The Gland Murder" by Captain S. P. Meek, U.S.A. is printed in small but quite readable black letters; and below that we see that there are other stories by Ralph Milne Farley, Henry Leverage, and David H. Keller, M.D. At the very bottom of the cover is a dark purple strip which contains the assurance that Arthur B. Reeve is still Editorial Commissioner.

John Ruger's cover does not illustrate "The Gland Murder," as one would expect at first. At the bottom of the contents page, unchanged from the last issue except for the new logo, we read: "Amazing Detective Fans are given an opportunity to enter the literary field by writing a short (500-word) story around our intriguing cover picture, which is painted by the well-known artist, Ruger." The page number for full details of the contest follows, and readers are urged to turn to that page at once.

I can't say that I did. Story-writing contests never appealed to me; what they told me immediately was that I would not get to read, in this issue, any story relating to the cover. The unusual thing here was that the existence of the contest was not indicated on the cover itself; on Gernsback science-fiction magazines, a "contest" cover was always identified as such, usually in a large circle.

But we may as well turn to page 517, because some of the eleven rules are rather interesting. They show that Gernsback did intend to retain the unique features of the magazine.

> (1) A short, SHORT amazing detective story is to be written around the cover picture of this June issue of *Amazing Detective Tales,*
>
> (2) The story *must* be amazing; and should be plausible in the light of our present knowledge of science.
>
> (3) The story must be about 500 words. . . .
>
> (7) Four cash prizes will be awarded: First prize, $25.00; second prize, $15.00; third prize, $10.00; fourth prize, $5.00.
>
> (8) In awarding the prizes, *Amazing Detective Tales* acquires *full rights of all kinds;* such as translation into foreign languages, syndicate rights, motion picture rights, etc. The Board of Editors will be the sole judge.
>
> (9) Stories in addition to the prize-winning ones may be chosen by the editors at their option, for publication at the usual space rates of this magazine.

What was being offered then was five cents a word for the winning story, with a final fourth prize of one cent a word. Rule Nine shows that the usual rate for *Amazing Detective Tales* was less than one cent a word, but there is no clue as to whether the usual payment was ½ cent or ¼ cent. (I suspect a low flat rate that came closer to ¼ cent.)

This issue of ADT is slightly thinner, as it was printed on a thinner paper stock, which is slightly more flexible than that used for earlier issues. My copy of this issue is falling to pieces, but the later ones proved to be a little more durable than those on the heavier stock, which shows somewhat more browning and cracking than the July and following issues.

In the editorial, "Radio and the Criminal," Hugo

Gernsback notes the improvement in police operations that radio has made.

From a vantage point at night, an observer sees a burglar at work. He picks up the telephone receiver, calls headquarters and gives them the location. Within less than two minutes after the citizen calls up headquarters, the burglar is under arrest. How is this done?

And the answer, of course, is short-wave transmission from headquarters to a police car or cars. We learn further that in London various malefactors managed to jam police broadcasts for a while but that a way was found to overcome that. The general tone of optimism that the use of scientific methods by law-enforcement agencies will greatly reduce crime remains. I don't know whether there have been any studies that could show if anything of the sort—even so much as a temporary reduction—ever resulted. It seems never to have occurred to people who wrote in such a vein that the overall effect would be simply to breed more intelligent criminals. The professional burglar regards apprehension and conviction as a vocational hazard. Improvements in police methods tend to weed out the most stupid; the rest become more efficient and manage to avoid apprehension longer. And aside from their occupation, some of them may not behave like criminals at all.

As if to emphasize that there would not be any essential difference between *Scientific Detective Monthly* and *Amazing Detective Tales,* aside from the change in title, the first two stories in the June issue are Craig Kennedy and Luther Trant adventures

At the opening of "The Diamond Maker," the head of a large insurance company calls on Kennedy for aid in a case. A wealthy jeweler has died mysteriously at the same time that his safe was robbed in a baffling manner. He has been insured for a hundred thousand dollars, and his wife is the beneficiary. The company does not seek to evade payment, "but we want to be sure that it is all straight, first." There are some suspicious circumstances.

"Mr. Morowitch, according to the story as it comes to us, returned home late one night last week, apparently from his office, in a very weakened, a semi-conscious condition. His family physician, Doctor Thornton, was summoned, not at once, but shortly. He pronounced Mr. Morowitch to be suffering from a congestion of the lungs that was very like a sudden attack of pneumonia.

"Mr. Morowitch had at once gone to bed, or at least was in bed when the doctor arrived, but his condition grew worse so rapidly that the doctor hastily resorted to oxygen, under which treatment he seemed to revive."

The doctor stepped out to call upon another patient, then received an emergency call to return to Morowitch, who died before Thornton arrived back.

"Now, perhaps there would be nothing surprising about it all, so far at least, were it not for the fact that the following morning, when his partner, Mr. Kahan, opened the place of business..."

It seems that the lock on the safe is intact, but there is a huge hole, "an irregular, round hole, big enough to put your foot through," in the top of the safe. The safe is of chrome steel, and actual tests have shown that it would take eighteen to twenty hours to drill through it. All the diamonds have been taken, and the police are entirely baffled about how the hole in the top of the safe has been made.

Of course, Kennedy isn't baffled at all, and perhaps some knowledgeable readers of ADT weren't, either. But to many of us, it was all new. Kennedy and his narrator-partner examine the safe, then Craig takes out two bottles he has brought with him. From one, he pours a little mound of reddish powder on top of the safe near the hole. Then he takes a little powder of another kind from the other bottle and lights it with a match, warns everyone to stand back close to the wall, and shoves the burning mass onto the red powder.

Almost instantly a dazzling, intense flame broke out and sizzled and cracked. With bated breath we watched. It was almost incredible, but that glowing mass of powder seemed literally to be sinking, sinking right down into the cold steel. On the ceiling we could still see the reflection of the molten mass in the cup which it had burned for itself in the top of the safe. At last it fell through into the safe—fell as the burning roof of a frame building would fall into the building.

The reddish powder, of course, is thermit. Kennedy explains:

"It is a compound of iron oxide, such as comes off a blacksmith's anvil or the rolls of a rolling-mill and powdered metallic aluminum. You could thrust a red-hot bar into it without setting it off, but when you light a little magnesium power and drop it on thermit, a combustion is started that quickly reaches fifty-four hundred degrees Farenheit. It has the peculiar property of concentrating its heat to the immediate spot on which it is placed. It is one of the most powerful oxidising agents known, and it doesn't even melt the rest of the steel surface. You see how it ate its way through the steel. Either black or red thermit will do the trick equally well."

That solves the method of the robbery, but the circumstances of the jeweler's death remain questionable—not to mention who used the thermit on the dead man's safe. Kennedy finds that Morowitch has written "Close deal Poissan" on his appointments calendar; and the only other thing in Morowitch's office that has been touched besides the safe is the letters file; all the correspondence under the letter "P" has been destroyed.

Kennedy finds that there is a "Henri Poissan, electric furnaces," under the chemist's section of the business telephone directory. And a talk with Doctor Thornton reveals that the physician was aware of an odor suggesting either cyanide of potassium or

cyanogen gas around the patient. He explains why that did not bother him until he heard about the robbery. Suicide seems extremely doubtful, but both Morowitch and his wife were photography hobbyists, and, of course, cyanide of potassium would be used in some of the developing processes; nonetheless, pneumoniac congestion remained a feasible explanation, and the doctor had no real evidence for any other.

Kennedy and Walter make arrangements to call upon Poissan, who, it turns out, claims to have found a way to make large artificial diamonds in his electric furnace. Small ones have, indeed, been made by such a process; Kennedy admits it is not impossible that someone may have found out how to make large ones. Andrews and two others are to wait outside, downstairs. Poissan's laboratory is at the top of a loft building, and Kennedy has come prepared to contact them should the need arise.

"Here," said Kennedy, undoing a package he had carried, "is a little electric bell with a couple of fresh dry batteries attached to it, and wires that will reach at least four hundred feet. You and the men wait in the shadow here by this side entrance for five minutes after Jameson and I go up. Then you must engage the night watchman in some way. While he is away you will find two wires dangling down the elevator shaft. Attach them to these wires from the bell and the batteries—these two—you know how to do that. The wires will be hanging in the third shaft—only one elevator is running tonight, the first. The moment you hear the bell begin to ring, jump into the elevator and come up to the twelfth floor—we'll need you."

Kennedy is posing as a professor and Jameson as the son of a banker. He has made the arrangements with the wires, trailing a length of fine wire behind them; once on the top floor, he stops at a window and places the little coil on the ledge, close up against the glass, with the wires running from it down the hall. Inside the loft, after greeting Poissan, Kennedy "carelessly laid his coat and hat on the inside of the ground-glass window, just opposite the spot where he had laid the coil on the other side of the glass."

Kennedy explains to "Spencer" (Walter Jameson) that the electric furnace they see in the loft can reach amazing temperatures. "The most refractory of chemical compounds can be broken up by that heat." As he and his assistant prepare the furnace, Poissan states that he has attained something over three thousand degrees centigrade. When arrangements have been made, Poissan states:

"You see, here is a lump of sugar carbon—pure amorphous carbon. Diamonds, as you know, are composed of pure carbon crystallized under enormous pressure. Now, my theory is that if we combine an enormous pressure and an enormous heat we can make diamonds artificially. The problem of pressure is the thing, for here in the furnace we have the necessary heat. It occurred to me that when molten cast-iron cools it exerts a tremendous pressure. That pressure is what I use."

"You know, Spencer, solid iron floats on molten iron like solid water—ice— floats on liquid water," explained Craig to me.

Poissan nodded. "I take this sugar carbon and place it in this soft iron cup. Then I screw on this cap over the cup, so. Now I place this mass of iron scraps in the crucible of the furnace and start the furnace."

The heating process is swift.

In almost no time the mass of iron scraps became molten. Suddenly Poissan plunged the cast-iron cup into that seething mass. The cup floated and quickly began to melt. As it did so he waited attentively until the proper moment. Then with a deft motion he seized the whole thing with a long pair of tongs and plunged it into a vat of running water. A huge cloud of steam filled the room.

I felt a drowsy sensation stealing over me as the sickish sweet smell from the furnace increased.

When the molten mass solidifies, Poissan takes it out of the water and lays it on an anvil. His assistant starts to hammer it, chipping off the outside. Poissan explains that they have to get to the core of carbon gently. "First rather brittle cast iron, then hard iron, then iron and carbon, then some black diamonds, and in the very center the diamonds." A small diamond is soon revealed.

Announcing

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By Betty Rosenberg

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Kennedy suggests that Poissan let his assistant break them out, "while I stand over him." Poissan replies that his visitor would not know them when he saw them. "They are just rough stones. . . . Unless I attend to it the diamonds might be ruined."

There was something peculiar about his insistence, but after he picked out the next diamond I was hardly prepared for Kennedy's next remark.

"Let me see the palms of your hands."

Poissan shot an angry glance at Kennedy, but he did not open his hands.

"I merely wish to convince you, Mr. Spencer," said Kennedy to me, "that it is no sleight-of-hand trick and that the professor has not several uncut stones palmed in his hand like a prestidigitator."

That tears it. Poissan is furious. "No man ever insults the honor of Poissan. François, water on the electrodes!"

A few drops of water and the sickish odor in the room increases tremendously.

"Stop!" Craig thundered. "There's enough cyanogen in this room already. I know your game—the water forms acetylene with the carbon, and that with the nitrogen of the air under the terrific heat of the electric arc forms hydrocyanic acid."

Thus we see the solution of the mysterious death of the jeweler. Kennedy's arrangements function as planned, and when he draws his gun it is to shoot out the lock on the door so that the others waiting outside, warned by the ringing of the bell, can enter.

Poissan is, of course, a fraud. He *has* palmed some of the diamonds stolen from the safe in order to defraud another supposed jeweler into investing in his process.

When I first read "A Matter of Mind Reading" by Edwin Balmer and William D. MacHarg, the "Luther Trant" story in this issue of ADT, my feeling was that it wasn't really satisfactory. Rereading confirmed that original impression. Trant *does* reveal what might be called a form of psychological mind reading (and the story contains still another instance of guilt uncovered by mechanical devices which measure subtle differences arising from sweaty palms, etc.), but it's all too individual a thing.

The problem is: How does a spy in the firm (an industrial, not national, spy) know the final figures of bids on contracts so that he can transmit them to his real employers, who then can submit a slightly lower bid? It has been happening for some time, and precautions have been taken which would seemingly make it impossible. Only one person knows the final figure; each one of the subsidiary figures has been worked out separately, by different individuals, none of whom can communicate with each other during the process. And the one man who does know the final figure writes it down only on the bid form, which is then sealed immediately. No one else has a chance to see it until the envelope is opened at the proper place and time. There is no tampering with the sealed envelope, no way of scanning it through the paper of the envelope. Either the one man who knows has told someone else or someone else is reading his mind.

We find that one suspect is able to look into that man's office and watch what he is doing but cannot possibly see what figures he writes down, nor is there any sort of photography involved. But what happens is this: as each figure comes into his mind, the man writing the bid unconsciously looks in a certain direction: that direction tells the spy whether the figure is low or high, and he has observed so closely that he can be reasonably sure just what the number is, as there are distinct variations in the direction of the victim's glance. (Only twice during the last six months or so has the spy made a mistake.)

Trant has the official responsible go through his usual process of working out and then writing down a final bid figure and astounds everyone by duplicating the "mind-reading" process. After that, the mechanical test shows which of the others has a guilty conscience. Interesting indeed, but I'm not convinced yet that it's very probable.

Ralph Milne Farley (State Senator Roger Sherman Hoar) became well known during the '20s as the author of the "Radio Man" series of novels in *Argosy*. He also did an occasional short science-fiction tale now and then. "The Flashlight Brigade" is a rather mild science-fiction mystery wherein the solution lies in the transmission of information amongst a criminal gang by means of a "radio flashlight." A murder is also involved, and solved, but the story remains slight and entirely forgettable.

Dr. Bird and Inspector Carnes are with us again in a somewhat more substantial scientific mystery, "The Gland Murders" by Captain S.P. Meek, U.S.A. There has been a series of inexplicable stranglings in high society. In each instance, the culprit was a non-criminous sort of person who suddenly became a homicidal maniac and was apparently unaware of what he or she was doing. All the killings were unmotivated.

The one common element is that each of the culprits received some whiskey from a particular bootlegger—who turns out to be entirely innocent of any offense more serious than violation of the prohibition laws.

Dr. Bird interviews one culprit in prison, and the man's story goes like this:

"Well, the Scotch was first rate. It was as good liquor as I have had for some time, cut very little, if at all. Bob and I got outside of a good deal of it. After we had killed one

bottle, someone suggested that we have a fancy dress ball. We were just full enough to make the idea sound funny and we went into the bedrooms and dug out all the crazy stuff we could find and put it on. Among other things, I put on Bob's dressing gown."

Only the speaker and "Bob" had been drinking Scotch; they had each had about a pint.

"I am normally a peaceable chap and am not given to violence, even when I am pretty drunk, but that evening, the more I drank, the more I felt like having a fight. It seemed to affect Bob the same way and several times Clara tried to get me to go home, but I wouldn't listen to her. Presently I caught myself looking at Bob's neck and imagining how funny it would be to tie the cord of his dressing gown around it and then put a stick in the cord and twist. The thought of his face turning purple and his eyes popping out seemed to be irresistibly funny to me and I couldn't keep from laughing. I laughed so hard that I felt weak and I excused myself and went into Bob's bedroom and lay down on his bed for a minute.

"While I was lying there, he came in. No one has believed me so far when I have told this, Dr. Bird, but I will give you my word that it is true. His face as he entered the door was transformed. It was twisted up in an expression of malevolence and he stole on me with outstretched hands and with murder in his heart, or his face lied. A surge of combativeness came over me and I tried to get up to meet him, but the liquor made me slow and before I could move off the bed, he was on me. He seemed to have just one idea in his mind and that was to get hold of the cord of his dressing gown which I was wearing. From my own feelings, I knew what he wanted it for and I hung on to it, but he was stronger than I am and he tore the cord from my grasp and threw it around my neck and tried to draw it tight."

A struggle ensues, and the speaker finally gets control of the cord and strangles the other man with it.

Dr. Bird calls in a Dr. Fleshner to help him analyze the liquor. Fleshner drinks some in the course of the experiment and tries to strangle Bird. In the morgue is the body of an earlier victim, who committed suicide after being jailed for an apparently unmotivated murder. The body is discovered to have been tampered with. Dr. Bird says that he expected it. He has been consulting with another expert, who has avoided imbibing any of the liquor in question.

After a moment of study, he [Bird] lifted the body and turned it over. As he did so Professor Hooker cried out and pointed to the base of the skull. The spot toward which he pointed was marked as though it had been cut and when he touched it, he took away the skin and a portion of the bone, revealing a cavity at the base of the brain.

"What belongs there?" asked Dr. Bird.

"The pineal gland," replied Hooker. "It has been removed and by quite a skilled operator."

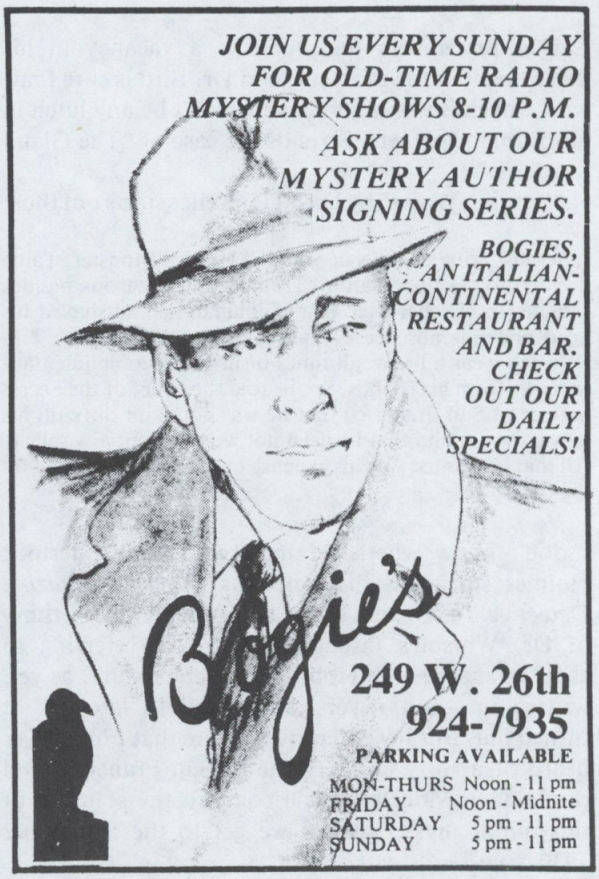
The bootlegger, Angelo, upon being assured that he will be protected against any charges of violating the Prohibition laws, agrees to assist. After all, he only wants to sell good liquor, not to poison his customers. He reveals that he obtained some excellent Scotch and brandy from a man who "said that he was a Russian nobleman and that the stuff he had was a part of his cellar. He sold it dirt cheap and he promised me two thousand cases of the same on the next trip."

With Angelo's assistance, the shipment and the Russian are captured, and when the latter refuses to speak he is spreadeagled on a bed and a half tumbler of his own scotch is poured down his throat with a funnel. The rest of the liquor is thrown overboard. Shortly thereafter, the prisoner shows distinct signs of homicidal mania and has to be put into a straitjacket.

Dr. Bird explains later:

"All life and all the concomitant phenomena of life are the result of certain definite chemical reactions, most of which are known and can be studied. Some years ago, it occurred to certain surgeons...that the feelings and emotions were also the result of definite chemical changes which could be isolated and studied and they started research along these lines. . . . It early occurred to these investigators that certain chemical changes might conceivably be going on in these glands which produced what are known as emotions."

Dr. Bird had been following that work, and when the series of stranglings broke out, the absolute identity



of the crimes suggested identical stimulation "and, of course, the possibility of artificial stimulation."

He and Fleshner "isolated a hitherto unknown substance from the whiskey. In order to test its effect, Fleshner swallowed a small portion of it and an hour later he attacked me and tried to strangle me with the cord of his bathrobe. The effect was purely transitory, but we found on experimentation that a small dose of alcohol would revive it."

What was behind the plot? "It was a plot on the part of the emissaries of revolutionary Russia to cripple the United States. . . . There is only one substance which is almost universally used by the educated and richer classes of the United States today [1930] and yet which seldom gets into the hands of the working classes and that is good imported liquor."

Thus the epidemic of murder in the upper circle of society; and with each murder two members of that society were eliminated: the victim and the murderer.

The whole experience makes a new man of the bootlegger:

"I'm cured, Doctor," said Angelo. "This affair has taught me a lesson and I'm getting out of the bootleg business. I have never had more fun since I was in France (with the AEF) than I had in helping you fellows run down this case. Do you suppose that you could get me in the Secret Service and let me have some more of it?"

Carnes remembers that there is a vacancy in his department at the moment, and Dr. Bird is sure that, with Angelo's war record, there won't be any hitch in his changing careers. So ends the case of "The Gland Murders."

"Burning Water" by David H. Keller starts out thus:

After his trying experience with the Hidden Monster, Taine decided to take a vacation. He had other reasons besides fatigue. In his character as a Chinaman he had shaved his head and this absence of hair made it necessary for him either to wear a hat at all times or invite uncomplimentary remarks from his friends. So, he told the Chief of the Secret Service of San Francisco that he was going off duty till his hair grew out and that he need not worry about any salary. All that he wanted was his expense money while working on the opium case.

I don't know whether I had read many Sherlock Holmes stories at the time this issue of *Amazing Detective Tales* came out, so I probably didn't think of Dr. Watson's fascinating habit of referring to cases he shared with Holmes which he hadn't, as yet, written up—and never got around to later, as it turned out. But I was certainly aware that I had never heard of a story about Taine of San Francisco and the Hidden Monster. We'll come to the solution of this minor mystery when we get to the September 1930 issue.

Dr. Keller was noted for his whimsical humor, and this sequence of "Taine" stories (which deal with Taine's earlier cases) are all touched with it. The present story seems to be science fiction—yet...

Taine now has $25,000 on his hands and decides to consult an old college friend, Harvey Myers, who has become a success in the financial world and is now president of the World Combustion Machine Manufacturing Company. Myers remembers Taine with affection as "the man who had joined the fraternity without being initiated, the star member of the dramatic club, the man who had dressed as a woman and made the college rock with laughter by calling on an unpopular professor at midnight." He recommends that Taine buy stock in his company, which Taine does. But almost immediately afterward, the Company's stock starts to slide.

Myers is both anxious and humiliated and determined not to let Taine lose his money. When the stock has reached a new low, and Taine cannot even borrow on it from a bank, Myers sends for him and tells him an inside secret.

"Now, if you remember the lecture I gave you about three weeks ago, you will recall that I told you that C.M.C. had complete control of the production of horsepower in the western hemisphere? I told you that we had no competition. At that time my statement was true. I also said that if a new and better method of making horsepower were invented, the C.M.C. would buy that invention. That was also true, but I should have said that we would *try* to buy it."

It seems that a man named Paupenau, originally from Poland, claims that he has invented a new power. He won't reveal any details, but "he gave a demonstration to some power users in New England, and that made a great impression on them. He was able, as far as they could determine, to manufacture 137 horsepower of energy with the expenditure of only little more than half a horsepower. Do you realize what that means if it is true?"

Even if the blurb for the story didn't give a positive hint, science-fictionists reading that issue of *Amazing Detective Tales* would immediately have thought of some sort of atomic power. Just *how* the power in the atom was unlocked was the subject of innumerable stories in those days, while others took place in a future in which atomic power had been achieved and there could never be anything like an energy crisis. After all, the energy in a handful of sand or a cup of water would deliver enough power to run every machine on earth for at least a year—or so went the stories.

It seems that Paupenau is not willing to sell. He's turned down an offer of ten million and stated that he wouldn't take a hundred million if it were offered; when he is ready, he plans to give the secret away.

Right now, the rumors that a new source of power exists have thrown C.M.C. into its decline, but Myers seems to be more upset about his old friend Taine's losing his $25,000 than anything else. Myers, learning that Taine has gone into detective work, asks him to take on the case: Get the secret before Paupenau makes it public property—otherwise, we're all broke, not to mention the social upheavals that will ensue.

It turns out that Paupenau is a fanatically patriotic son of Poland.

He had carefully studied the history of his beloved land. Again and again he had wept as he read of the insults heaped upon her by other countries, arrogant in their pride, remorseless in their strength. He made a list of these countries and swore that some day Poland would have her revenge and he, Omar Paupenau, would be the man who would make that revenge possible.

Taine goes to work. He gets a job as a dishwasher in a restaurant that Paupenau frequents and arranges to have himself thrown out for utter incompetence one evening while his quarry is dining. Paupenau looks up from his meal to see the dishwasher

kicking and doing his best to win out in the unequal struggle, but the odds were heavily against him. The humiliation must have been worse than the physical injuries that he had received, for, as he saw Paupenau, he cried, in Polish, "How terrible thus to treat a son of Poland!"

Paupenau explains patiently, as it seems that "Lorenzo," although clever in the use of words, is "stupidity personified" when it comes to understand-

stranger room, board, and a job. Taine has a carefully-prepared cover story which appears to go down satisfactorily with his new employer. He will take notes on Paupenau's scientific studies and write them up in good English.

Paupenau explains patiently, as it seems that 'Lorenzo," although clever in the use of words, is "stupidity personified" when it comes to understanding machinery and electricity. The inventor takes him many times into the laboratory to explain some technical point so that he can describe it more clearly, and it seems at these visits almost impossible to get Lorenzo to understand the simplest facts. At the same time, he is so pleased and so interested and so eager to learn that Paupenau never loses patience with him. One night, the Pole is more talkative than usual.

"Now let me try once more," he said kindly, "to explain the whole problem to you in a few words. I start with the phenomenon called electrolysis of water. I take some water and pass an electric current through it and break that water up into hydrogen and oxygen. Instead of water, I now have two gases in a glass retort. Now, if I pass a flame through those gases, they unite with the production of great heat, and once again I have water. We will start there, with the oxygen atom and with the hydrogen atom. United, they form water. But in forming this water they also form heat. Suppose I take one pound of hydrogen and burn it with enough pure oxygen to convert it into water? What then? By doing so, I have formed 64,000 British thermal units, or a little more than 25 horsepower hours.

"But I have done better than this. I learned that all elements are simply forms of hydrogen. Sir Oliver Lodge thought so, and Becquerel was able to prove it. . . . From that time on from the time that I first saw the truth of this, I made progress. I built an electrical apparatus for alternating currents, producing what? Why, vibrations. That was the next secret I dragged from the gods. Vibration is the secret of power. Vibration is the keyboard for the composition and decomposition of every element known to mankind. Through its action, all nature continues its work of formation.

"Do you understand me so far? Of course, you do. It is so simple. Up to this time it has been child's play. Now, suppose it takes a certain definite strength of vibration, which is obtained by an electrical current, to break up the atom of hydrogen? That number of vibrations per second is my master key. If I expose any element to it, at once that element breaks up into hydrogen atoms. For example, oxygen. I secure oxygen by passing electricity through water. At once oxygen and hydrogen are formed. Now, I separate the oxygen and subject that to the master keyed vibratory influence. Will you be surprised if I told you that I secure eighteen atoms of hydrogen from the atom of oxygen?

"Thus, I obtain a large amount of hydrogen at a low cost. I allow the hydrogen to combine with the oxygen of the free

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air and, once again, I obtain water, but I also obtain a large amount of heat—and heat is power. By my method of producing hydrogen from cracked oxygen atoms, I obtain from five and a half pounds of water one thousand cubic feet of hydrogen, and the value of this, estimating 178 cubic feet of hydrogen to the pound, is about 137 horsepower."

It isn't perpetual motion, he goes on, but it is the next thing to it. He then takes Taine to the laboratory and shows him the master board and which buttons he presses (and in which order) to work his process. One button is dangerous—at least at the present time. Pressing it would result in a tremendous explosion; but the implication is that, when the process has been worked through more thoroughly, it will be safe and will be the final step in obtaining even more power at even lower cost.

Back in the study, Taine sees a packed bag by his chair. Paupenau smiles at him and tells him he is traveling. "To use an Americanism, you are on your way. You have learned all that I want to tell you and a lot more than you can use or assimilate in that peasant mind of yours, Mr. Taine." It seems that the inventor has his own "secret service" and has been on to Taine from the start. "I wanted a clear, concise description of my invention and I found out that you could write beautiful English. So you have been useful to me." He adds that when Taine makes his report to C.M.C., the information will be utterly useless to them. And furthermore, he, Paupenau, is working in earnest on a war machine.

"All I told you is common stuff to fifty scientists. My secret is the production of a high vibration rate and at a low cost. No one knows how to do that except myself. . . . [W]hen I finish, the first country that we are going to try it out on will be yours, and, because you brag of being Taine of San Francisco, I am going to do you the compliment to make your city the first one destroyed. . . . You were asinine enough to think that a few years in college give you the intelligence necessary to make a fine detective. As a man, you are a weakling; as a detective, you are a joke. You are not even worth killing. Now your few personal belongings are in that suit case. Here is fifty-five dollars, all that is due you for your work as a secretary."

So, Taine is dismissed, and it looks as if he has utterly failed. All that he has learned is worthless to him—and it does look as if Paupenau is serious about destroying San Francisco.

Three weeks later, an itinerant organ grinder with a monkey appears at the curbstone near Paupenau's laboratory. He plays for about five minutes, then walks away from the organ, and the red-capped monkey, wearing an ornamented jacket, starts to collect money from passersby. Then it starts to climb the building.

Some technicians opened a window and called to him. The monkey went, jumped in a window and disappeared. In that same moment the Italian walked around the corner and then started to run as though his life were depending on it.

Inside the building, they try to catch the monkey, who seems to be looking for something.

At last he found what he was searching for, something that seemed to attract him. It was a mahogany board with six pushbuttons at one end and a seventh one at the other. He made a dash for this and pushed the six buttons in regular order. Paupenau made a dash for him, but before he could reach him he had pressed the seventh button and held out a little black paw in an appealing manner to the scientist. In a few seconds the earth trembled, the building rocked and then seemed to leap into the air.

Taine makes his report to Myers and very uncharacteristically asks for a drink. His nerves are shaken; he considers himself a murderer. After the fiasco as "Lorenzo," Taine became an Italian organ grinder with a monkey. He remembered every detail of the board Paupenau showed him and had a cabinet maker make an exact duplicate of it, so far as appearance goes. He trained the monkey for three weeks to come in through the window, find the board, press the buttons in the correct order, then hold out a paw—into which Taine immediately put a banana. Thus the behavior of the monkey in the late Paupenau's laboratory.

Was Paupenau a charlatan? We don't know, because Dr. Keller has given us an alternate explanation. It seems that the Secret Service has arrested two Russians who have confessed to having planted a bomb under Paupenau's laboratory, timed to go off at a certain hour. The Russians knew about his project and were alarmed. Myers continues:

"But there is one interesting fact. They timed this bomb to go off at a certain hour and minute. By a coincidence, that moment coincided exactly with the time the monkey went into the room. We do not know whether the monkey ever pressed the seventh button. And even if he did press it, how can we say that the hydrogen caused the explosion? The simplest and most logical explanation is that the bomb caused all the trouble. Does all this make you feel better?"

It does. Now Taine, who believes in predestination, can decide that he was working as a divinely chosen instrument and is not guilty of murder. The threat of ultracheap power has ended, and C.M.C. stock has gone up again; Taine's investment is safe. He decides to return to his hotel and go to bed.

"How about your fee and the bonus?"

"Oh, send me a check for it. Anything you want to give me. To tell the truth, I am not so very well pleased with my part in this affair."

"I think that you did fine. Had the Pole not been so interested in you, he might have been able to guard himself against the Russians."

"That may be. Anyway, it was all predestined, but I think

that it will take me some time to forget about—that poor little monkey."

And I think that Dr. Keller was having his own little joke when he made sheer coincidence play such a vital part in this, and in at least one other, "Taine" story.[1]

"The Double Lightning" by A. C. Webb, M.D., need not detain us long. There is some interesting material on the strange tricks that lightning can play. And for a while it does look as if two people have been killed in the same house, during the same storm, by lightning. There is one peculiar circumstance which leads to further investigation, however; and we learn that it was artificial lightning, delivered to the chandelier in the death room from a dynamo in an adjacent building on the property.

I'm not sure that I would go quite so far in denigrating R. Austin Freeman's style as Julian Symons does,[2] but I agree that the Dr. Thorndyke stories are not vivid reading.

In "The Blue Spangle," Thorndyke is called into a case which appears to be one of brutal murder, the

> "cause of death being a penetrating wound on the head, inflicted with some pointed implement, which must have been used with terrible violence, since it has perforated the skull and entered the brain. That robbery was not the motive of the crime is made clear by the fact that an expensively fitted dressing bag was found on the rack, and that the dead woman's jewelry, including several valuable diamond rings, was untouched."

Unfortunately, there is a young man involved. He has a motive; he and the victim were overheard quarreling rather bitterly in the first-class compartment on the train where the body was discovered after the suspect had disembarked, and Harold "was then carrying his full sketching kit, including a large holland umbrella, the lower joint of which is an ash staff fitted with a powerful steel spike for driving into the ground."

Dr. Thorndyke ascertains the exact position of the wound—"a little above and behind the left ear—a horrible round hole, with a ragged cut or tear running from it to the side of the forehead." The body was lying right along the floor, with the feet close to the off-side door, and there is a further wound, "a long cut or bruise on the right cheek—a contused wound."

The "blue spangle" refers to sequins on the dead woman's hat, and it is Thorndyke's discovery of a sequin where no one would think of looking for it (after some good detective work on the route of the train and what it encountered along the way) that clears Harold.[3]

The final piece of fiction in this issue is "The Sealed Room" by Henry Leverage, which is not a reader-cheater on the order of his earlier appearance but need not hold us any longer than the more dramatic double-lightning gimmick. In this one, the murder weapon is concealed not in a dictograph, as the sleuth first suspected, but in an electric heater, thus permitting murder in a room to which no one had entrance.

In the department "Scientific Actuality," Hector Grey dramatizes a case in France in which the culprit was apprehended on shipboard because the police telegraphed fingerprints and immigration officers were taking all passengers' prints before they went ashore. This is followed by a discussion of the International Fingerprint Bureau.

In "The Reader's Verdict," a Methodist minister objects to what he declares to be the "offensive profanity" in Ralph M. Wilkins's "The Campus Murder Mystery" in the January 1930 issue. The editor replies: "In writing stories of detectives, it is essential to include characterizations of criminals. . . . Now criminals, unfortunately, are addicted to certain habits, amongst which is the use of phrases and expressions which would not pass muster in polite society. . . . It is true that we do not allow obscene expressions to be printed on our pages; in fact, we cannot find the particular passages to which our correspondent refers." Neither could I.

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detective stories, adding that, "The detective part does not have to be the main thing in a story; it may serve as an excellent background to portray other scientific developments." The editor asks for comments from other readers on the proposition.

Debate on the merits and demerits of *The Bishop Murder Case* continues. No one who wrote in seems to have been left indifferent by the story; reactions were strong both ways. A reader questions some of the questions relating to a recent "How Good a Detective Are You?" and the editor's reply shows that some of the questions *do* call for deduction as well as a good memory for what one has seen in the picture, after all. Another pair of letters show that the Taine stories also brought forth extreme reactions. One reader declares them "putrid" and avers that Dr. Keller must be writing them from the sanctuary of a looney bin, while the next reader expresses keen enjoyment.[4]

Under "Science-Crime Notes," the question arises as to whether crime is pathological, and includes a quotation from the *Mental Hygiene Bulletin:*

> It is estimated that about two percent of the general population are mentally defective; that is, about one-fiftieth are more or less lacking in brains. But this one-fiftieth produces one-fourth or one-third of the prison population; so that, as a matter of fact, there are many more criminals drawn from the mentally defective classes in proportion to their percentage of the general population than from the rest, even though they actually represent only a fraction of the prison group.

The editor comments: "Thus we see, that little by little, both scientific and popular opinions are veering around to the undoubted truth that crime is, essentially, ABNORMAL, and requires appropriate treatment."

The other item asks, "Is Scientific Detection of Crime Expensive?" and, after giving a rundown on crime statistics, remarks on

> the huge figure of two billion seven hundred and seventy-five million dollars handed over annually to criminals by the American people. Large as this loss is to the public, however, it does not mean that crime is a paying business to the criminal. If two percent of the total population is a correct estimate of the criminal element, then the average individual income derived from crime is only $1,156.25. The average income per person gainfully employed in the United States is $1,805.37.
>
> Another seven hundred and thirty-five million dollars is spent annually for the administration of justice. . . . In comparison with these figures, the cost of scientific detection is negligible.

So it went in 1930.

Two books are reviewed: *The Three Brass Elephants* by Herman Landon, published by Horace Liverwright at $2.00, and the nonfiction *Criminology* by Horace Wyndham, published by Jonathon Cape and Harrison Smith, both New York publishers, which sold for $1.50.

The first issue of the magazine under the new title did indeed bear out Gernsback's pledge in the May issue that the contents of the magazine would be unchanged. The concentration on science *versus* crime remained, and three of the eight stories can be considered science fiction. The two reprints might have passed as semi-science fiction at the time of their initial publication, and one has to remember that many young readers of the '30s had never seen those stories before.

As to the more routine tales—they aren't really bad. I suspect that they were accepted on the grounds that nothing better had come in. That is the kind of decision innumerable popular magazine fiction editors had to make.[5]

Notes

1. During the '60s, Dr. Keller's widow sent me three "Taine" stories that had not been published in newsstand magazines before. One, "Wolf Hollow Bubbles," had been printed as a booklet by some science fiction fans some time in the '30s or perhaps early '40s; I ran it in the eleventh issue of *Startling Mystery Stories*. A second, "The Temple of Death," had previously appeared in a West Coast fan magazine; I put that into the sixteenth SMS.

   But the third I returned to Mrs. Keller. "The Microcephelans" had an interesting idea (as Keller's tales usually did), but the wicked surgeon just happens to have a heart attack when he is about to operate upon Taine. And for our grand finale, we have Taine and another sitting at the dining table; the other man is eating bananas and tossing the skins onto the floor. Naturally, when the wicked female goes to knife Taine, she slips on a banana peel, and *of course* she stabs herself fatally in the process. It seemed to be absolutely obligatory in cheap mystery thrillers that villains with knives had never heard of holding a knife underhand, for an upward thrust. No—one and all they raised their weapons on high for a downward thrust, and the intended victims were saved by their managing to fall on their daggers, stilettos, or whatever kind of knives they were carrying.

   Obviously, Dr. Keller was having fun, but that was a very long novelette, and I still think I did right in declining it.
2. "With Freeman we confront for the first time the crime writer who produced work of no other kind, and whose talents as a writer were negligible. Reading a Freeman story is very much like chewing dry straw." *Mortal Consequences,* p. 84.
3. I forbear to reveal the solution because a collection of Thorndyke short stories, including "The Blue Spangle," may be available. Rereading it for this study shows that it has retained such virtues as it had in the first place, and I think it is just to call Freeman's material "interesting."
4. Keller's science fiction often brought forth the same intense feelings, as can be seen in the letters columns of *Science Wonder Stories* (1929, 1930) and *Wonder Stories* (1930ff). Those who disliked them were sure that they must have been written under the influence of dope.
5. I had to myself when I was a science-fiction and general pulp editor between 1941 and 1960, and also had to bear with readers who wrote the same kind of how-*could*-you? letters to me that I'd written to editors when I was a fan.

INDEX BY AUTHOR: SCIENTIFIC DETECTIVE MONTHLY/AMAZING DETECTIVE TALES

(all year dates are 1930)

□

PAPER CRIMES

By Raymond Obstfeld

We were both naked and exhausted, curled up together on that motel bed like a couple of sweaty crabs burrowing for safety from beach joggers. She kicked off the sheet, stretched her arms and legs, cracked her toes, and rooted through her purse for a cigarette. After it was lit, she took a long drag, puffed the smoke at the blank TV screen, and looked at me. "Wanna try something. . . different?"

I swallowed. "Different? You mean, kinky?"

She smiled, wiggled an eyebrow, leaned over, and grabbed her briefcase. "You'll see."

I should have known better. I was, after all, a tenured college professor with my own parking slot. She was a novice college textbook salesperson. Already there'd been rumors about her around the department.

She pried open the briefcase like a gynecologist giving a tricky exam. Finally, she pulled out a handful of mystery novels and tossed them onto the bed. "Read any of these?"

"Sure. All of them."

"I figured," she smiled again. Saliva glistened on her white teeth. "We're gonna play a little game. Book Reviewer and First-Time Author. You're the Reviewer."

"I don't understand."

Her lip curled into an expression no one would mistake for a smile. "Don't be such a prude. This is a real turn-on. You see, I hate reviewers. They're so smug. So self-righteous. Like evangelists preaching their opinions as if they were carved in stone or something. I'll tell you right now, when my novel gets published I won't even let the reviewers *look* at it. They'll have to buy it like everyone else."

"Well, I—"

"That's right. And it's a hell of a book, too. Everyone says so. A mystery, but of course that's only its outer skin, a concession to commercialism." She made a sour face, smacking her lips at that bitter word. "But there's much more going on in it than a simple *mystery*. Much more. The themes, my God, of life and death, good and evil. You know?"

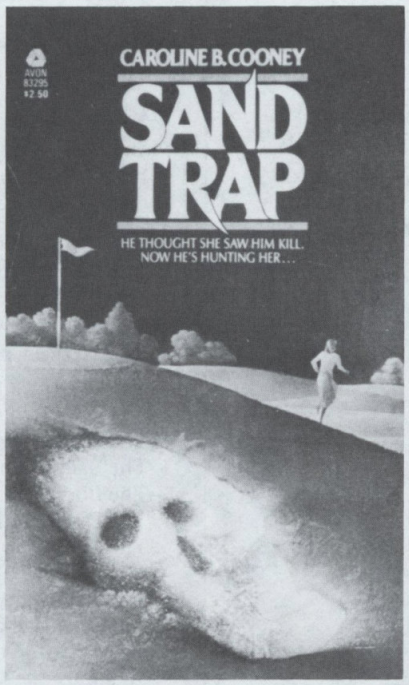
"Sure, I—"

"Okay, then. Tell me what you think of these books. Then I'll know if you're the right guy for me, the kind I'd want to run naked through my manuscript." She thrust the first book at me. "Do it, baby."

I shrugged, took the book. **The Sand Trap** (Avon) by Carolyn B. Cooney. About a lonely woman who's been deserted by her husband, left to care for her war-injured, paraplegic stepson; she's chased by a killer who thinks she's witnessed a murder he's just committed.

"Well?" she asked impatiently.

"I had some trouble with this one," I admitted. "The plot is fairly well trod, so for



the reader to enjoy the book, the writing style or the protagonist would have to be exceptional. Neither is. The hapless victim, Jamey Fraser, is so shrill in tone that I didn't care about her or her fate. The style is smooth, but lacks any energy. There's too much descriptive prose; it seems intrusive and slows the pace down quite a bit."

She arched an eyebrow. "How would you grade it?"

"C minus."

"Next." She pushed a book toward me with her toes. **Angel of the Night** (Fawcett) by B. W. Battin.

"This has some similarities to *Sand Trap,* but it's a little better. First, the plot: Detective Janice Anderson, who cares for her paraplegic father, must track down a crazed killer who has kidnapped her family. There's strong suspense here as she struggles to save her family, but it's not as overwhelming as *The Red Dragon.* The style and tone are easy-going, if not exactly compelling. Janice is a likeable character, though a bit of a complainer. She spends a lot of time worrying about the inequities of how she's treated by the men in the department. Even though her complaints are justified, they're delivered in a clichéd manner without any fresh insight. As in *Sand Trap,* the prose here is occasionally wordy, padded with clumps of descriptive passages that read a little like a romantic novel."

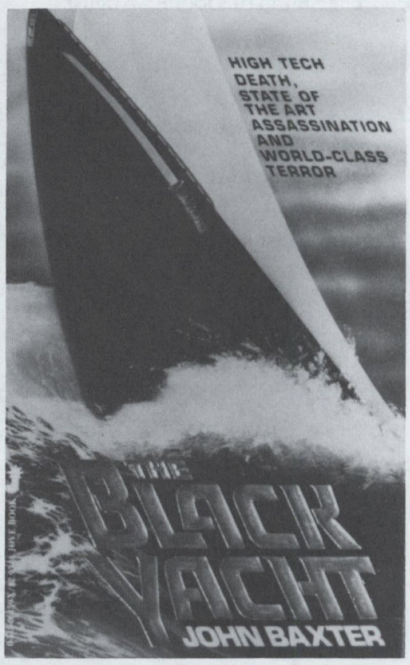
"Grade?"

"B minus or C plus."

"Next." Her hand trembled as she nudged the book toward me. **The Black Yacht** (Jove) by John Baxter.

"This is a thicker, more ambitious book than the others. But it would have been better off trimming its sails by fifty pages or so. It throws a lot of characters together—international assassin, gubernatorial candidate, industrialist, world-class sailor—and though it generates some authentic thrills, it is still a bit clumsy and amateurish at times. For example, the female assassin is introduced to the reader by killing a would-be mugger, a scene that has no logical reason to exist. The reader winces from the heavy-handed artificiality. Further, it is packed with pages of yachting lore. Too packed. B minus."

"Another," she panted. "Faster."



I picked up the skinniest of the books. **Able Team: The Hostaged Island** (Gold Eagle) by Don Pendleton and Dick Stivers. A spin-off from the "Executioner" series. Three gung-ho veterans out to save the world from terrorists. "I remember this well," I said. "The plot was exotic, yet simple: Seventy-two members of a vicious motorcycle gang take Catalina Island hostage, terrorizing the residents with various brutal activities. Able Team sneaks in to save

the people before the gang kills them all. Actually, I'm torn by this book. True, much of it is just plain silly, but some of the writing is pretty good. And, of course, that's also part of the problem. The writing sometimes overpowers the material. For example, several minor characters are developed so crisply that I cared much more about them then about the Able Team. Actually, I had trouble telling the three members of Able Team apart. I'm not sure I ever did. One other problem—the violence. Now, I like violence—"

"Oh?" she perked.

"—in books, but there was something about the excess in this book that actually made me feel a bit drained. All of the cyclists get killed in explicit detail, several by burning. That doesn't bother me. But the sheer endless parade of body after body numbed me. I felt like a voyeur afterwards, a little dirty for having read the book. I think author Stivers is a good storyteller and would probably do well outside the narrow confines of this action genre."

"Grade?"

I shrugged. "Pass."

"One more," she begged, licking her lips. "Please."

"Okay. I saved the best of the lot for last," I said, flipping through the paperback. **The Kill Factor** (Fawcett) by Richard Harper. "This is a modest book about illegal aliens, murder, and a couple of cops out to find justice. Simple, yet effective. I enjoyed this one because it had no pretensions. It told the story with likeable and believable characters. One problem many mysteries have is an inability to juggle the suspense elements of the plot while still making the private lives of the characters seem real. Usually this aspect comes off as window dressing, grudgingly included but shallow. Not so here. The prose style is tight and compelling; no wasted words. Recommended."

"Yes, yes, yes," she gasped, shuddered, then relaxed. "God, that was good. A little rough, maybe, but satisfying." She lit a cigarette, winked. "I think you're just the one to read my manuscript. She reached into her briefcase and hefted a huge pile of paper. "Only 580 pages. But it moves very quickly. Go ahead, read it. We have the room until noon tomorrow."

I felt hurt, used. I wanted to strike back. "By the way," I said casually, a huge smile spreading across my face. "Did I mention this little rash I've been having lately..."

* * * * *

THE SERIES SERIES. I read my first Lew Archer novel when I was in college. Immediately afterwards, I walked to a used book store on Polk Street in San Francisco and bought every Ross Macdonald book they had. I returned every other day until I had the whole series. I read one every night. But before I'd gnawed through the pile on my bedside table, I quit reading them. Sure, the style was dynamic and the hero was witty, intelligent, morose—just what I liked. Yet I started to have trouble telling the books apart. And they became so predictable; the same plot and theme book after book after book. Greek tragedy in mystery form: the sins of the father visited upon the heads of the children. I realized later that the fault wasn't with Ross Macdonald but with me. Like an over-eager child gorging himself on his favorite ice cream, I read myself sick until I lost my taste for the books. Better to have read one every couple of months.

Lew Archer

Unfortunately, with the Spenser books by Robert B. Parker I have no such excuse. I read one or two a year and find myself reacting as I had with the Lew Archer series. The first couple impressed me. *The Godwulf Manuscript* and *God Save the Child* had a lot of life to them. Spenser seemed witty without being cute, and he revealed his philosophies without pontificating. But not for long.

The more recent books, *Looking for Rachel Wallace* and *Early Autumn,* reveal a dull, ponderous character more given to barbs than wit, lectures than insight. His weightlifting and cooking, which should have developed as charming traits, have stagnated, becoming annoyingly repetitious. Spenser's characterization is oddly similar to the hero of Parker's non-Spenser novel, *Wilderness,* a well-written book but with an unsatisfying plot. As with Spenser, attempts to make the protagonist vulnerable result in his appearing merely weak. The difference is critical.

There's no doubt about it, Parker can write strong, admirable prose. But that doesn't overcome the lethargy of the series. Berkley is currently reissuing the whole series, so judge for yourself. But don't read them all at once.

* * * * *

RECONSIDERED. Reviewers are the worst offenders. They're guilty and ought to be punished. Pick up any private detective novel and you'll see a quote from some reviewer claiming that this author is "a worthy successor to Chandler and Hammett." The detective is "cast from the same mold as Marlowe and Spade."

Well, the muck stops here.

Marlowe and Spade are not from the same mold. In fact, they are opposites. Yeah, that's right. So let's go back to the source and see what I mean.

The Maltese Falcon is famous, sure, but more as a movie than as a novel. By that I mean that even many mystery fans haven't yet gotten around to actually reading the book. (Check it out with your friends. Give them a pop quiz.) Still, if you haven't read the book, or haven't read it in a long time, go back to it and find out why that book is so damn good.

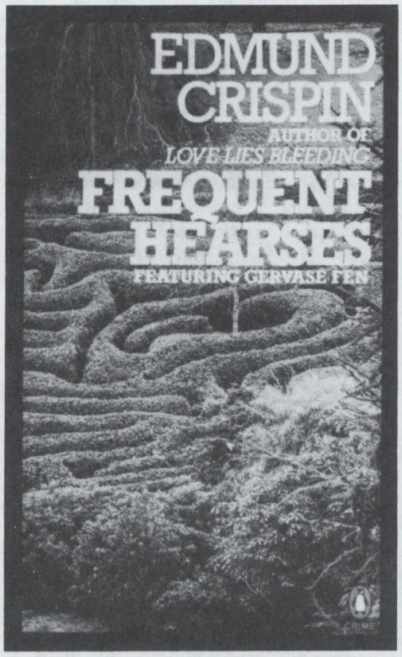
Forget the style, imitated by many but perfected by few. The terse prose, the pounding rhythm of the dialogue. Great stuff. But it's the character of Sam Spade that is so fascinating.

Raymond Chandler discussed Marlowe in his famous essay "The Simple Art of Murder." He described the detective hero as "a man of honor—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world." And there lies the difference. For although Philip Marlowe fits that description, Sam Spade does not. While Marlowe is highly moral, Spade is totally amoral.

The key, as always, is in motive. Why does Spade hunt down the killer? He tells us (and Brigid O'Shaughnessy): "[I]t's bad business to let the killer get away with it." And that's the reason he does everything, for the sake of business. That doesn't mean he's immoral—just amoral. Without moral convictions, he relies on business sense as his basis for operation. A subtle, but important, difference. Remember too his behavior during the book: he sleeps with his client (often thought to be bad behavior in p.i. novels), as well as with his partner's wife. By the end of the novel, even his secretary Effie is rattled by Spade's behavior. When he touches her, she pulls free and says, "Don't touch me. . . . I know—I know you're right. You're right. But don't touch me now—not now."

So. This isn't the place for a scene-by-scene breakdown, but you get the idea. Read the book again and you too will wince every time a thoughtless reviewer lumps Marlowe and Spade together as soulmates. □

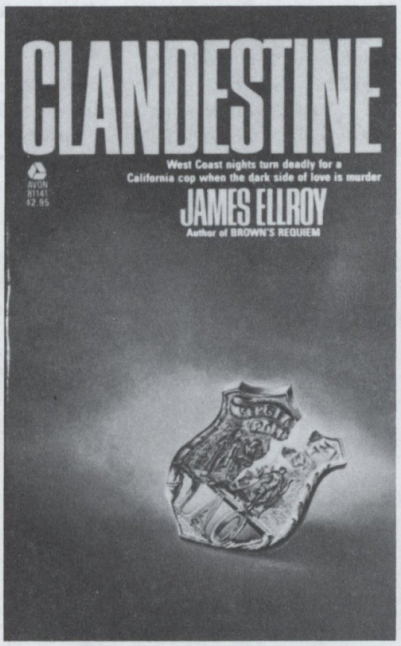
THE PAPERBACK REVOLUTION



By Charles Shibuk

EDMUND CRISPIN

Gervase Fen's assignment in the preparation of a film about British poet Alexander Pope leads to a suicide and three murders in the aptly titled **Frequent Hearses** (1950) (Penguin). This novel, with its well-realized film background, presents Fen at the top of his form, and stands very high among its author's work. (Note: This novel was originally published in America as *Sudden Vengeance.*)



JAMES ELLROY

The author of the promising debut *Brown's Requiem* attempts to beat the sophomore jinx with **Clandestine** (Avon, 1982) and does so with a considerable degree of success. This novel is a long and complexly-plotted character study of an ambitious policeman attempting to solve a brutal murder. Narrated by its protagonist and set in the '50s, it's harsh, realistic, intensely readable, and has many affinities with the hard-boiled private eye tale.

JOHN GRIFFITHS

The KGB and CIA urgently seek **The Memory Man** (1981) (Playboy), who has applied his special talent to plans for a top secret weapon given him by an idealistic Soviet scientist for transmittal to the other side. There are a few surprises as our hero(?) demands $500,000—for that which he has forgotten—and the ending is completely unexpected in this fast-moving and always coherent spy thriller.

WILLIAM OSCAR JOHNSON

The Los Angeles Olympic Games of 1984 forms the exciting background for an intricate Soviet maneuver that will result in an Eastern bloc victory in **Hammered Gold** (Pocket Books, 1982). Johnson's approach to his narrative is unusual and compelling, but his hidden villain and conclusion are fairly obvious, and the ultimate motivation for many lethal acts is really absurd.

IRA LEVIN

Each Broadway season is usually enlivened by at least one—if not more—major mystery production, but relatively few are published in mass-market paperback form. Penguin's edition of the celebrated and long-running 1978 play **Deathtrap** tends to alleviate this unfortunate situation. *Deathtrap* is cleverly constructed, moves forward rapidly, and has more twists and turns than a corkscrew.

JULIAN SYMONS

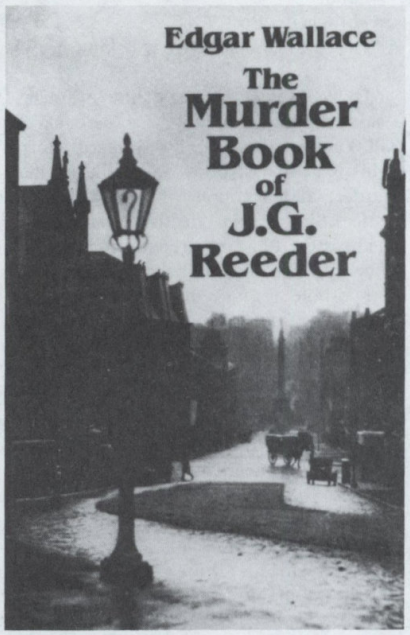
The Plot Against Roger Rider (1973) (Penguin) is a complexly-plotted tale that delves into the psychology of its various characters and their tangled relationships. Unexpectedly (given this author's well-known penchant for the modern crime novel), this work turns into another example of the classic detective story, and boasts a very neatly concealed least-likely criminal.

JONATHAN VALIN

Cincinnati private eye Harry Stoner's current client is the daughter of his former employer, who has just been arrested for her father's murder. There are a few other problems including a highly classified document and a psychopath determined to kill Stoner. **Dead Letter** (1981) (Avon) is a relatively standard medium-boiled tale, but it is well written, organized in a straightforward manner, and it does move along briskly.

EDGAR WALLACE

Dover Publications provided this columnist with an excellent Christmas present by reprinting **The Murder Book of J. G. Reeder** (1925). Many critics hold Wallace in low esteem—while his novels continue to sell in England—but this collection of eight short stories is almost unquestionably his best effort in the genre and well deserving of its *Queen's Quorum* status. The stories are very well written and clever, and capable of providing much pleasure today.



CORNELL WOOLRICH

Ballantine continues to reprint this author's better and most suspenseful work. **Black Alibi** (1942) was filmed as *The Leopard Man* and concerns a series of terrifying murders apparently committed by a jaguar in a South American city. **The Black Angel** (1943) is narrated by its female protagonist, who seeks to prove her husband innocent of the murder of his mistress—before it's too late!

Phantom Lady (1942) was originally published under the "William Irish" pseudonym and can be found listed in James Sandoe's "Readers' Guide to Crime." This breathless tale of a desperate hunt to find a supposedly nonexistent witness, who can provide an alibi for a convicted wife-killer before he faces execution, is one of Woolrich's best works. (Note: Excellent and informative introductions have been provided by Mike Nevins.) □

Interview with Mark Smith

By John C. Carr

This interview with Mark Smith appears in a book published in June, THE CRAFT OF CRIME: CONVERSATIONS WITH CRIME WRITERS *by John C. Carr (Houghton Mifflin Company, $15.95 cloth, $8.95 paper). The other writers interviewed in the book are: Ed McBain, James McClure, June Thompson, Jane Langton, Gregory Mcdonald, Robert B. Parker, Emma Lathen, Dick Francis, Ruth Rendell, Peter Lovesey, and Janvillem van de Wetering. John Carr lives in New Orleans, and his collection of interviews with Southern writers,* KITE-FLYING AND OTHER IRRATIONAL ACTS, *was published in 1972. He himself, incidentally, is at work on a mystery novel.*

From the book *The Craft of Crime: Conversations with Crime Writers* by John C. Carr, to be published in June by Houghton Mifflin Company, Two Park Street, Boston, MA 02108. Copyright © 1983 by John C. Carr. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

Mark Smith, who was nominated for the National Book Award in 1973, was the recipient of a Rockefeller Foundation grant, and has written three masterpieces of characterization, all dealing with the psychopathology of both crime and goodness, redemption and damnation. He is one of the best-kept secrets of American letters. The "straight" fiction world took some notice, and deservedly so, of his novel *The Delphinium Girl,* but his three crime novels remain hidden from the average reader.

Toyland is about a college-educated assassin, Pehr, who claims at the beginning of the book that he hasn't forgotten his murders but "refuses to remember." His buddy, Jensen, and he have accepted a contract to kill two little kids, a girl named Iselin and a boy nicknamed Poor because his other nickname was Poor William. Their uncle wants them killed. All of Smith's crime novels are first of all exercises in the ability of the English language to describe, inflame, disorient, create a constant dissociative effect by metaphor and image piled upon metaphor and image, and explore all the dimensions of thought. Second of all, these three novels are built around philosophical and ethical problems that are heightened and given many more layers of subtlety by the rich, luxurious language that is their medium. They are not as accessible as other novels dealing with the themes of murder-for-hire, infanticide, and killing of other people for revenge. Thirdly, the novels are rich in the symbols that have come down to us from the classical, rabbinical, and patristic as well as apostolic writers. "Don't look back," Jensen says to Pehr after the first murder, warning him he'll turn into salt. Like Lot's wife. Smith is one of our most self-conscious, writerly writers, whose rich and varied style, while demanding, offers unusual rewards. Fourthly, the novels, especially *The Death of the Detective* and *Toyland,* owe much to Smith's love of the structure of opera and No plays, respectively.

The young writer has much to learn from *Toyland*: Smith's narrative strategy, his use of the situation for a meditation on guilt and redemption that is never, never boring, and his careful, meticulous characterizations. And if the beginning writer doesn't know now that novel-length exercise in characterization is a confrontation of the most desperate, brutal kind with one's own soul, then a careful reading of *Toyland* should have a wholly salutary effect.

The Middleman is the "first" of the novels (although published in 1967, two years after *Toyland*), because it is here we meet Uncle Walter, who wants the children murdered. Uncle Walter lives in the basement and plays with his electric train set. The kids, being kids, would like to play with it, too. So Uncle Walter decides to bump them off. Now, Uncle Walter has problems, but Smith does not take the easy way out and make him a figure of black humor.

Smith makes him evil, and then deals brilliantly and creatively with the problems of his evil. One of the many remarkable things about *The Middleman,* which is more an exercise in words and word play than is *Toyland,* is the wonderfully rendered scene in which Uncle Walter leaves his body and becomes a citizen of the village, full of small lead figures, of course, through which his toy trains rumble and clack.

The Death of the Detective has been compared to the writings of Dickens. It bears up well under the comparison. The pure, joyous invention of character and incident is marvelous. But it is, more to the point, just as frightening, just as purely a creation of operatic melodrama, and just as much a game of art as is *Creature from the Black Lagoon*: the black lagoon in this case being the murky depths of modern life in Chicago, in which a retired cop, now head of a security agency, must find a crazed murderer. The story is interrupted from time to time by a variety of digressions Smith makes for multiple purposes. Every page seems as desperate a contest between the novelist and his vast sprawl of material as could be imagined; still, Smith does harness this raw power. There is not another American novel like it.

Smith now lives in York Harbor, Maine, in a wonderful old Victorian wooden mansion of the type used in the nineties as a summer home for a twenty-member family. When this interview was conducted, the place was full of kids, Smith's impressive collection of European and American impressionist paintings, and papers from the classes he teaches at the University of New Hampshire, where he heads the creative writing program.

CARR: Let's get your biography straight first. I couldn't find a satisfactory reference work for you. You were born in Michigan, though.

SMITH: Yeah, in 1935 in a town called Charlevoix, which is in Hemingway country. It's right across Lake Charlevoix from where Hemingway spent the summers. It's a resort town, something like a nice Maine resort town, right on the lake, a wealthy resort town. It's a setting of *The Middleman.* I went to six different colleges as an undergraduate. I started out at Western Michigan in Kalamazoo and then moved back to Chicago and took courses at Wright Junior College and the University of Chicago and Northwestern University. In fact, I went to both campuses of the University of Chicago, and both campuses of Northwestern, which totals up to six, and then I graduated from Northwestern in 1960. I was twenty-four or twenty-five years old. I'd been in the merchant marine briefly, on Lake Michigan, and gotten hurt, broken my pelvis in an accident, so I was laid off for a couple of years. That's when I did all my reading.

CARR: Had you always wanted to be a writer?

SMITH: Well, I was interested in being an artist of some kind when I was very young. My first love, I guess, was either music or writing, and then I got sidetracked in later years in grammar school, when it was no longer fashionable to be a good student or interested in art. But I don't regret having gone through that course of my life at all. And then when I got to college I became much more interested in the life of the mind, eventually. But I think I went through what a lot of fellows went through back then. Originally I wanted to be an anthropologist and then in the humanities in some way. And then I wanted to be a professor, a poet-critic, and by the time I was a senior in college I decided this was not for me. I had to get out of there. And if I'd been an honest man, I would have probably quit my senior year and not finished, but I'm very grateful that I did because I never would have gotten a job.

CARR: That little union card never hurts.

SMITH: That's right, and now you need an M.F.A. or even a Ph.D., but back then you at least had to have a B.A. Then I went off to write—to be a poet. And then I attempted short stories. I gave up on the poetry and wrote a number of short stories.

CARR: In the early sixties?

SMITH: Yes. In a very fertile period of my life; for a year or two there I wrote every day. I wrote about thirty novels, novellas, beginnings of novels, and finally came to the conclusion that the novel was a more comfortable form for me. I wrote *Toyland,* which at the time was two novels—the first half was *Toyland* and the other *The Middleman*—and I've been writing novels ever since.

CARR: Are there people who for various reasons are more comfortable in the longer forms than in the short forms and vice versa?

SMITH: I would think so. If you don't know how to end a scene or drop a character. . . I think the more interested you are in character, the more you're driven to the novel. Or if you're more interested in a number of characters or complicated actions and plots, or what you hope is a larger vision of life.

CARR: There's some confusion now, though, isn't there? Because I see short stories that are the equivalent of someone being ordered to do the minuet

when he'd rather be running the 440. I guess young writers, now that the short story outlets are gone, are turning en masse to the form but without the benefit of many actually published examples, which results in the abandonment of the form, although they don't realize it. Isn't it true that if you have a good novel, you'd get it published a lot quicker than you would a story in *Antaeus?*

SMITH: Well, you'd make more money.

CARR: Right. But isn't it probably true that you could probably get a decent novel published at least as quickly as you could a short story?

SMITH: Well, probably sooner than in a commercial magazine where they really pay you some money, that's true. There are any number of small press publications that print short stories. In fact, yes, short stories have suffered the same fate as poetry—publishing a short story in a little magazine is like publishing a poem: there's really no commercial market for them. That may be one of the reasons I didn't go into short story writing. When I first started writing, you sold your first novel and your advance was $1,500, I think, on the average.

CARR: That's in '63, '64?

SMITH: Yeah. And you weren't going to get any more money than that. That was it.

CARR: And at that, they'd probably exceeded themselves.

SMITH: And they'd probably lose money. But there were a number of magazines back then, maybe half a dozen or so, who, if they bought your short story, would pay you $2,000 or $2,500. When I started out, you only needed about $5,000 a year to live on, and you could make that if you'd written a story for the *Post* and a story for *Esquire.* Or *Collier's.* Or the *New Yorker.*

CARR: There was a lot of market.

SMITH: There was a lot of market back then and they paid fairly well, and now those magazines—there are fewer of them—are still paying the same wages they paid twenty years ago.

CARR: Some people have decided, in the years since that scene vanished into the mist, that short stories have gotten better because they're now published in the little mags. Do you think they've gotten better for being less commercially intended? Do you think the quality has improved by their having been virtually driven underground?

SMITH: I don't think the quality of anything has ever been improved by being driven underground. I think probably work is at its best—I mean good work—when it has a fairly large audience. I think the best American short stories I've read are by Faulkner, and Faulkner's not really considered a short story writer. I really like "That Evening Sun."

CARR: Did you later turn to his novels?

SMITH: Well, no, I read the novels first, most of the novels, with a few exceptions. There are a couple of Faulkner novels I've never been able to read. I won't tell you what they are.

CARR: I bet one of them's *Absalom, Absalom!*

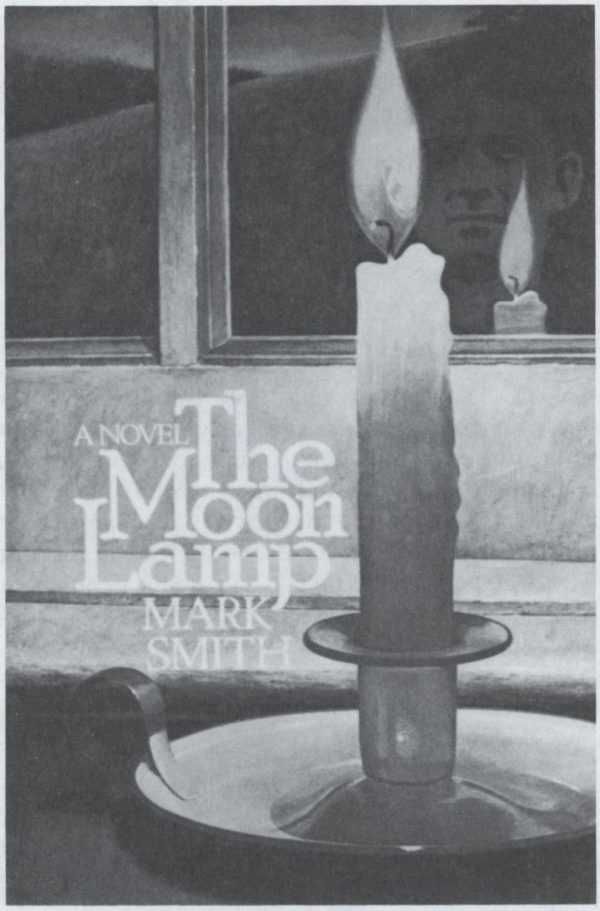
SMITH: You're darn right it is. I don't know how many times I've read the first forty pages. But about short stories: I really don't know about short stories. I teach them. All my students write short stories but they're quite good and they have a very high level of competence. Well, we had three students in this last year who published novels. And we only admit about six students a year to the program. We are very selective, so I see good student-work, but I really don't keep up with the literary journals, where the stories are by people in writing programs and professors. I just don't have the time.

CARR: I often wondered how you get a handle on it. It seems to me you could probably give away half your year's salary subscribing to them and then half your year reading them.

SMITH: Some people do that. I know poets who do that and short story writers who publish pretty much only in the literary magazines, and that is their life, that's where their action is. They know who's publishing what and what magazines are out and they sit in the library and read them if they don't subscribe to them themselves, but I don't.

CARR: Let me ask you about the sequence of your novels.

SMITH: Actually, before I published *Toyland,* I I wrote *The Death of the Detective* as a kind of novella. It was simply the plot of the detective who was called out on the case and found this quiet murder, which led only to...and so on. It was an abstraction, the bare bones of the plot, or at least Magnuson's plot. I wrote that as kind of an existential novella and perhaps something of a satire of detective novels. Especially the plots. Not much, though. I set that aside and decided to make a novel of this idea, of this character, of this plot after I wrote *Toyland.* I began *The Death of the Detective,* maybe fifty or sixty pages of it, and it was just awful. I put it away and decided, I'd go back and write a final draft of *The Middleman.* I figured if I didn't do it now, while I was still a young man, when I was dumb enough to do it, I'd never do it. *The Middleman* is not really a mystery. It's written from the point of view of the



man the murderers get the children from in *Toyland,* which was first. Actually, I wrote them both at the same time and then split them up. I wrote them as one novel, then split them up into two.

CARR: That's a great ending to *Toyland.* The guy was just wandering around, numb, unable to assume any responsibility for the kids, and you say the kids are going to "regelate together"—refreeze together. One of the most macabre, and funny, scenes is the moment when the two murderers have to kill a man and the rifle is flawed. The guy's able to elude their bad marksmanship and then the gunman smashes the rifle against the tree and has to go in and clobber him with his pistol. The only thing I had some misgivings about was the level of diction maintained by the bad guys.

SMITH: Well, I think in those early books I was exaggerating naturalism a little more, especially in *Toyland.* I think the older I get, the more naturalistic I become, the fewer freedoms I take with that kind of exaggeration, with reality. But in *Toyland* I wanted to have intelligent murderers; therefore, I had them speak perhaps more intelligently than they could naturalistically.

CARR: And they know their opera pretty well.

SMITH: Exactly. But I tried to set it up originally, as I recall, from the first page, because it's written from Pehr's point of view: first person, his language, his perceptions. He sees Jensen as making gestures as if they were in Kabuki—stylized. His whole vision is stylized.

CARR: There's this horrible thing: a white marble figure of a man is lying beside him when he wakes up from a dream. He puts his hand out and hits this thing and thinks it's a man, an enemy, but it is a statue and falls through all the floors of this rotten house down to the basement, where it breaks into pieces, and that's a kind of surrealistic stylization of his own body.

SMITH: Certainly an image of himself. It was much more surrealistic than anything I've done since. I think in all my novels I have a tendency to begin them exaggerating naturalism, and I also have a tendency to begin them much more comically than eventually they turn out to be. I've always thought of myself as a comic writer. I think I'm never far from being comic at the moments when I'm most serious, but I don't know whether this comes off or not.

CARR: Oh, it does, yes.

SMITH: But it is hard to pull off. It either happens naturally, I think, or it doesn't make it, but I have started off thinking a novel is going to be a little bit more fantastic and comic than eventually it turns out to be.

CARR: Is it just that a full-fledged novel with a certain density and length defeats the comedy? I'm not saying it defeats it in your work, as *The Death of the Detective* proves, but that novel is not exactly a zany novelette—I love that word "zany"—like the little novel that *M*A*S*H* was based on.

SMITH: No, it wasn't meant to be that at all. I think when you start off with a novel, you're making something out of it; it's fiction and you haven't really established the ground rules yet of how your story is going to work as it relates to naturalism, and I think that if you're making things up, you tend to pump things up. For example, I have noticed that when I begin a novel, I'll use a lot of metaphors. I'll overdescribe scenes. I could spend three pages describing the setting.

CARR: I like that.

SMITH: But eventually I have to go back and cut that down a bit.

CARR: Are you saying that your rhetorical devices—metaphors, images, similes—thin out toward

the end? As they well might, because the action has to take over at that point, I presume.

SMITH: Probably, but take those out of, say, Raymond Chandler, and you've got nothing.

CARR: Yes. When Marlowe says, "I felt like an amputated leg," that's much better than describing it à la Spillane, and there's that wonderful description of Moose Molloy looking as out of place "as a tarantula on a piece of angel food cake."

SMITH: Or the description of that black man's fist as being the size and color of an eggplant. It would have been simpler just to say he raised his fist.

CARR: If you were just interested in all dialogue.

SMITH: I think one of the great pleasures of my life was reading through Raymond Chandler's works.

CARR: When did you discover Chandler?

SMITH: Well, I actually read several of his books when I was younger, I think in my teens, and then it must have been about fifteen years ago that I rediscovered him and then I read right through everything. I wish he'd written more novels. I can't believe he wrote so few. And with somebody like Chandler, the great attraction is this picture of the thirties and of California, those streets and the little bungalows and villas and the gardens that the people have: it creates a whole world. He's showing Americans in California who have been influenced by movies and who are imitating the cinema in the way they talk and the way they act: the tough guy image they try to present. But speaking of images and description, I've always had a strong sense of locality. Like Chandler. But I don't think Chandler is a very successful detective story writer. I wouldn't look at Chandler for that reason. I think Chandler's great strength is his style, which is original, but very American, and is flawed. It isn't terribly good, but it's what is important in reading him. If he wrote flat sentences, you wouldn't read him. And his style is part of his vision. He's completely tied up with his vision of California and life at that time in America and Hollywood. But as for the mystery, that's always at war with his mystery plot. It's incidental, I think, with Chandler. Chandler is one of those writers who were caught with the formula and I think he did quite well with it, but could he have done otherwise? I doubt it.

But back to this sense of place. You have to make this come alive for yourself, whether it's Chicago or the Michigan woods, in order for your story to exist, for your people to breathe. I couldn't set it in such a rarefied atmosphere that only called for my saying "the street."

CARR: Yes, fiction has resisted the rarefied atmosphere throughout most of its history, hasn't it? Fiction should be set in some kind of world that has angles and edges to it.

SMITH: I believe in a very particular world, even though eventually you make your own world. Dickens's London is not really London, but it's Dickens's London.

CARR: Let's get back to the order of your novels for a second.

SMITH: I wrote *The Middleman* in about six months, which made me think I could turn out a novel at least every year. I was greatly misled by that. *The Death of the Detective* came out seven years after that. Then after *The Middleman* was finished, I began the novel that was to become *The Moon Lamp.*

CARR: Which is something of a ghost novel.

SMITH: It has a supernatural element or pretends to—I'm not certain what. I'm not sure myself about it. I worked on that for a while, almost a year, and it was the only time I really got bogged down in a novel. Really stuck. What I was writing wasn't really good; I was going nowhere. One of the main problems was that what I really have to do when I write is run through a draft and get everything down in black and white, then I can go over it and revise it at my leisure. At least I know it's done. There it is. I've got something to work with. The writing of *The Moon Lamp* stemmed from my beginning to teach for the first time, to actually teach writing, to be conscious of what writing was all about.

CARR: In '68 and '69 at the University of New Hampshire?

SMITH: Yes. So I was revising it as I went along. I was polishing each page. And it didn't work. So I abandoned that novel, set it aside to pick up later, and then went back to *The Death of the Detective* and that became five years' work, writing that novel.

CARR: It looks like fifty years' work. It's incredible.

SMITH: And the vision then became much broader.

CARR: You mentioned in your letter that the Crime Writers' Association asked you to join. Was that after *Toyland?*

SMITH: No, after *The Death of the Detective.*

CARR: I wonder if they knew about *Toyland* and *The Middleman?*

SMITH: Probably not. The books were not very successful and they didn't go into paperback. They only sold a couple of thousand copies each. Of course, they're out in paperback now. Because Avon had been quite successful with the paperback of *The Death of the Detective,* they bought my other two

books, my first two novels, and gave them kind of thriller covers.

CARR: One of the copyrights cited for *The Death of the Detective* is 1973.

SMITH: That was for a section of it that was published in *Audience,* a now defunct hardback magazine that was run by Rust Hills, as a tax write-off for Revlon, I think.

CARR: *The Death of the Detective* is a real Chicago novel, too. The essence of Chicago, as I believe *Absalom, Absalom!* is the essence of the ante-bellum South.

SMITH: I hope it is.

CARR: One of the things that convinces me of your immersion in the place is that you've figured out, recorded, whatever, aspects of that city's social psychology. At one point Magnuson comments on Chicago men. He says they'll get into little groups and ridicule someone.

SMITH: Well, it was true for those characters in the novel. Certainly it was true to my observations and experiences in Chicago. Whether it would correspond with everyone's observation I don't know, but I think in the Midwest, and in the South and Southwest, there's much more macho pressure on a man than I think there is in the East. That's very true in Chicago. If you want to put a man down, you get at his manhood somehow.

CARR: Especially in bars.

SMITH: Especially in bars.

CARR: But *The Death of the Detective* is a detective story, and a good one, and it fulfills those expectations: there's a resolution at the end and there are murders, some of them really gruesome. But there are scenes in there that are absolutely surrealistic; for instance, the scene in which Magnuson goes to the mansion to talk to the old man's nurse, who's so doped up she almost has steam coming out of her ears, and that's just the beginning of one of the most bizarre scenes I've ever read. There are other passages like that. It's almost Gothic in its affect. Was that conscious on your part? Did you determine that this was going to have a mood and a tone radically different from other detective stories?

SMITH: Well, I must have. I don't think I consciously made it Gothic, although I suspect there are several metaphors that even use the word "Gothic."

CARR: We were talking about tone, mood, so on. When you decided to write what almost became the detective novel to end all detective novels, did you think about using somewhat more involved and High Style language than 90 per cent of the detective novels in print, some of which are written to the eighth-grade level, unfortunately?

SMITH: In any of my writing I'm more concerned, I think, with creating mood than tone. Mood...I know it's out there. I can imagine it and I've got to get it. The sentences are put together in such a way, and words are chosen, to create a kind of palpable atmosphere. Tone is the author's attitude toward his material, I would assume, and not a certain quality, as in music or in a tone poem. What I wanted to do in *The Death of the Detective* was to use a great range of moods, styles, techniques, points of view. I knew it was going to be a big novel and I wanted to be able at any time to have certain freedoms to do what I wanted to do. I think this came as a consequence of having written two novels in the first person, which is extremely limiting. And I find it very frustrating, at least after two novels. So I'm back to writing an eight-hundred-page, first-person novel, but, again, I'be chosen a narrator who's intelligent enough and articulate enough so that he can adopt a great many styles. He's not limited to one very confining voice and he can also see himself in the third person and the second person.

CARR: That's great.

SMITH: You get smarter as you go along, but of course you lose the passion. You don't have the old fire. You have better taste and better discretion and, I think, more skills, but I'm not certain you have the passion you once had.

CARR: Let's talk about *The Death of the Detective* again, speaking of passion. Magnuson is a creep character, frightening in many ways.

SMITH: In what way do you mean?

CARR: Well, first of all, he's alienated even from the men you'd think he'd have something in common with, like all those guys you see in the scene that opens up his section of the novel. And while they're in the living room, playing cards, he's stretched out on the bed, thinking woeful thoughts. *The Death of the Detective* is a very naturalistic novel, and what goes with naturalism, whether it's dictated by that vision of the world or not we won't get into, is the attitude of being spoiled, soured, ravaged by the world. Do you agree? Disagree?

SMITH: You force me to think of a great many novels, but I think if we identify naturalism with Zola, or say "Naturalism" in caps, that would be true. It would also be true to a certain extent with Dreiser, who would write "naturalism" in lower case.

CARR: Right, and James Jones, the last American naturalist.

SMITH: James Jones, perhaps, but I think *The*

Death of the Detective is basically naturalistic with its surrealistic or operatic elements.

CARR: Operatic. I'm glad you brought that up.

SMITH: And I hope all those elements blend into one vision so that I can get from one to the other and back again without leaving one sticking out of place.

CARR: It's a really unique vision of the world and its inhabitants because there really isn't any clear-cut, clean ending. They bury him and O'Bannon has to take care of some of the details. He has to hire these poor guys as mourners, really, and pallbearers, which is their function, and these mourner-pallbearers are not too happy about pulling this duty and half of them are boozed up. You make a great scene, incidentally, out of a small action that many another writer would dismiss in a couple of sentences. It is the perfect ending to a life that has been futile in some respects, tragic in others, comic in others, heroic in yet other respects, much like the lives of most of us.

SMITH: I saw him very much as a kind of Chicago character, and, I hoped, as ultimately a very American character, and I simply wanted to catalogue his experiences in this adventure—his awakening, his discoveries, as he went along in life.

CARR: Let's pick up one thing: the operatic quality. It is kind of an operatic novel and apparently you're quite a fan of opera: Jensen in *Toyland* even remarks to the other murderer that you're either a character in this opera or another one; make up your mind. Then in *The Death of the Detective,* Fiorio is the one person you use to articulate this aspect of giving directions to the audience from one of the characters. Did you write it as an opera without a score?

SMITH: No, not deliberately. A friend of mine, after he read it, said it was very operatic and I said, "Well, you're right." I think what he meant by that and what I meant is that opera is life very much exaggerated, stylized, and I think there is that element in *The Death of the Detective.* Maybe it's the dominant element, but, as I say, there's that element, along with the more naturalistic stories; for example, the gangster plots—the gangster subplot is all done pretty naturalistically. Some of the chapters that concern Magnuson, especially when he's investigating the murder, become a little more surrealistic or operatic or exaggerated.

CARR: The slaughter of the sheep is a terrific scene, but it left me almost physically ill. That's a real blood-and-guts novel: first they slaughter the sheep and then they slaughter Fiorio, literally, as if he too were a sheep. To go from pathos to bathos, do you know anything about slaughtering? You must if you're an aficionado of Chicago institutions.

SMITH: Well, actually, what I know about butchering didn't come from Chicago but from living on something of a small farm in New Hampshire. We had our own sheep and pigs that were slaughtered constantly.

CARR: They're butchering Fiorio and someone says to break up the offal. I began to see how you work with metaphors.

SMITH: I like that chapter very much. I haven't read it in years but maybe my two favorite chapters of that book are the killing of Tanker and then the killing of Fiorio. It seemed to me the chapters were very well written.

CARR: I liked that chapter early in the book about the old couple who are advanced alcoholics, who love to drink beer and for a long time have gone to exquisite lengths to hide their beer from each other. The husband's method for discovering hidden caches of suds is to bang away at the sofa and chairs until something dribbles out and looks like beer. You really get into what you're doing!

SMITH: Well, when I first wrote a number of short stories, I thought of myself as a very literary writer. *I* would never publish in anything as distasteful as a commercial magazine. So I sent out a batch of these stories to the little magazines. And of course they abused me, lost my manuscripts, sent me standard rejection slips ten months later, wrote me insulting letters. I remember the only commercial magazine I sent a story to was *Esquire.* I got a letter back in ten days, saying nice things about the story and saying if I could rewrite it, they'd want to see it again. So I did. They still didn't like it, but I remember the fellow in his letter said that the one thing he'd liked about the opening scene was that it was fully realized.

And that somehow clicked in me: this is what you have to do. If you're going to have something in your novel or your story, then it ought to be fully realized; you ought to know what *can* be gotten out of it and *how much* you should get out of it.

CARR: Right. That's what I love about *The Death of the Detective.* Everything, every action, every gesture, every thought, is fully realized. You've gotten every ounce out of the situation.

SMITH: Maybe you're saying I'm not a good editor.

CARR: No, the hell with that. I hate attenuated writing without even description or limited exposition.

SMITH: I think if it's done well—attenuation—I like it very much. It's a quality I don't seem to really possess, but I do admire it. *Child of God* by Cormack McCarthy is a beautifully edited book.

CARR: That's what Hemingway wanted all of us to do, wasn't it? Leave out and leave out and leave out. Unfortunately, some of his latter-day disciples are leaving out everything but dialogue, most of it in simple sentences brightened here and there by a compound sentence. Do you really think that Hemingway's advice is all that perfect now; that the real writer leaves everything out, or at least as much as he can except that one telling detail? Isn't that more for writers of short stories? Maybe even writers of short shorts?

SMITH: It's certainly very true for short story writers. I tend to write even longer novels than the final product.

CARR: Was there a longer version of *The Death of the Detective?*

SMITH: Yes. I think I cut out about two hundred pages. And not two hundred pages in any one section or several sections: just knocking out a paragraph here and there. I think there is a quality of editing to writing. For example, in the novel I'm working on now I notice I have a tendency to write one sentence more than I need to write in a paragraph. Instead of ending it where I should have, I tack on another sentence. I think that the ability to edit is very necessary, but Hemingway's advice wouldn't really be pertinent to any writer. When you write a sentence or a scene, something in you says that's what I want, that's how to do it, that's me. And you simply keep working at it until it is you. I can't write leanly. I started out as a devotee of Hemingway's. In fact, the first story I published was a shameful Hemingway imitation: lean and spare and with a thirty-word vocabulary. But it wasn't me. It took a long time before I realized that what I had to write was something a little richer than that.

CARR: Did your editor try to steer you away from what he or she must have seen as genre writing? Did they say that you were going to have trouble with *The Death of the Detective* because you were falling between two stools?

SMITH: No one has ever mentioned that to me and I've had a number of editors and publishers. I've thought about that myself. When you write something like *The Death of the Detective* or *The Moon Lamp,* which—

CARR: That's sort of genre, too.

SMITH: It's sort of genre, too. Certainly it was promoted as a kind of genre novel. My ghost novel..."Smith does for the ghost novel what he did for the detective novel." I thought that's how they might promote it and I kind of wish they had promoted it that way, but they didn't because the two novels are so different from each other that the publishers were very much afraid people would be disappointed. They wanted *Son of Death of the Detective, Death of the Detective Redux.*

CARR: *Death of the Detective Gets Rich.*

SMITH: That's right. And I was giving them something altogether different. But even so, I had rather hoped that the publishers would rather dishonestly promote it by saying, "What Smith did for the detective novel he now does for the ghost novel." That didn't happen. But I think when you're writing these particular kinds of books, the illusion is that you're going to hit both markets. That's the illusion from the writer's point of view—that the general market's going to like it because it's just generally good fiction.

CARR: And a good book.

SMITH: Good book, right. And the detective story buffs are going to buy it; in the case of *The Moon Lamp,* the ghost story buffs are going to buy it. I think that worked probably for *The Death of the Detective;* it didn't work for *The Moon Lamp.* The danger is that the general reading public is turned off because it's got too much of the genre element in it and the genre enthusiasts are turned off because it isn't *their* kind of genre book. It's got more in it than they want.

CARR: Better writing, too.

SMITH: And it's more interested in character and incident.

CARR: That leads me into something I've asked everybody. Do you think there is a difference between genre writing, especially in our case detective writing, and so-called straight literature?

SMITH: Oh of course. I think good genre does follow the formula and is successful within that formula, not that it has to obey its clichés. It shouldn't follow the clichés. For example, if you're writing a detective novel, you don't necessarily have to have a detective in a trench coat whose sidekick, the police sergeant, is a dummy. Or if you're writing the English detective novel, your detective doesn't necessarily have to be an amateur, an effete aristocrat, like Lord Peter or any of the others. The convention by definition is not naturalistic; it does not reflect life, except in the most incidental way. When you try to go beyond that, when you try to impose real life on this unreal form, it doesn't work. I think in reading a whodunit, you read simply to find out how the plot works out. Who did it? You play that game. And you look for a writer who knows how to play that game well and reasonably originally within the genre. I also happen to like the pictures of Old World villages, the country houses and the gardens that you get in the English novels of the twenties and

thirties, but you don't really read that novel for that reason—to see what it's like to be alive on a farm in Shropshire, to grow up with a mother who's an alcoholic, what it feels like to abort your child and be arrested for the crime. You don't read the novels for those experiences. Now there are attempts on the part of, I think, a lot of American contemporary writers to combine the two. Chandler is a good example of that. Another example among English mystery writers—whom I'm more familiar with—was Dorothy Sayers, especially when in a novel like *Gaudy Night* she attempts to write a serious novel. It doesn't work. I think she was more successful in a novel like *Murder Must Advertise,* where there is the metaphor that selling cigarettes to the public through advertising is like selling dope. But I think Sayers's best novels are those that don't attempt to go beyond the genre except to teach you how to ring bells in England or play cricket. Another English writer who wrote very well was Margery Allingham, and she was always attempting to make her novels carry more weight than they possibly could with her implausible detective and her implausible plots. So I think that's essentially the difference between writing what we call straight fiction and genre fiction. I think genre fiction is by nature unreal and can be very successful.

CARR: But people are turning to it, even writers who wouldn't have had this thought twenty years ago, or before Ross Macdonald appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine in 1970. A lot of people are turning to it and readers are turning to it. What does that say about America, if anything?

SMITH: I think every novel Thomas Berger has written has been a play on some kind of genre, hasn't it? He did a detective novel—

CARR: *Who Killed Teddy Villanova.*

SMITH: Right, and he did a wonderful Western. I don't know whether it's part of the American scene right now to be interested in that sort of thing. There is a tendency on the part of critics and writers to glorify the genre form and to consider it as serious fiction, as was the case with Eudora Welty's admiration for Ross Macdonald, and a lot of people's for Chandler. I don't feel they are writing serious fiction. I think you've got to accept them for the kinds of writers they are within the genre.

CARR: There's another thing I've wondered about. And I'm not sure there's an answer. Why do many writers, even writers who've done something else literary before, turn to detective fiction rather late in life? Relatively late. Say when they're forty. I asked the two women who write as Emma Lathen why that may be so and they said they hadn't really wanted to write about their emotional development and their childhoods or about the towns they came from, and that they began to write when they had a solid grasp of how business works. To cite someone else, Dick Francis, of course, was a jockey. Janwillem van de Wetering was a cop in the Netherlands, and had also been in business. He began writing in his late thirties. And you wrote this novel, which certainly fulfills genre expectations, at about the same age. Why?

SMITH: Well, I think most detective novel writers—and I'm not one of them—have another career. In England usually they're Oxford dons or Dante scholars or poets laureate who turn to mystery writing as a sideline, and to make some money. I don't know why—I've always been interested in detective novels. I read them when I was a kid and I think there's always a mystery and a detective element in any book I've written and probably will write. I can't seem to get away from it. It's like a smoking pistol—what did some critic keep telling Chekhov—get rid of the pistol? And he never could. I can't either. Maybe someday I'll write something where I don't have to have a pistol. It could just be mentioned. (Laughs)

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CARR: Well, even *The Delphinium Girl,* which is a beautiful book, ends in a death, really. And the mystery is an eschatological, or existential, mystery. Why do we have to die? Why do I have to die? Why now? Did you feel that was a major burden of the novel, that kind of theological mystery in a book that was not otherwise heavily plotted?

SMITH: *The Delphinium Girl* was not plotted at all. In fact, there was a deliberate attempt on my part to write a novel that did not have a strong narrative. All my other novels have had strong narratives. Some people have even said that's my greatest strength, or my only strength—pure narrative power. So whether out of stupidity or not, I decided to write a novel that would *not* have so much pure narrative power. I wanted to see if the writing and the reader's interest in the characters themselves could carry the novel. I didn't want to write a heavily plotted novel, and maybe in a way it was a reaction against creating a mystery with a strong plot. Or a mystery plot that has a strong mystery element; mystery is something much more subtle and doesn't really rely upon the incidence of plot. Nothing really happens in *The Delphinium Girl* except that she gets sick. And dies, eventually.

CARR: Perhaps that's action enough. How much action is there in "The Lady with the Dog"? How was Russia, Dr. Chekhov? We're not told and there is no melodrama, no images, really, very little whippy dialogue. But it's masterful in the way *The Delphinium Girl* is.

SMITH: But I hope the reader will become interested in the milieu, in the problems presented in a novel of contemporary life in America, and in the characters and how they're all going to work this out, or respond to her illness, her death. But, anyway, I'm now back to my strong narrative.

CARR: What are you working on now?

SMITH: I'm working on a long novel called *Dr. Blues.* It's a first-person narrative. It does have something of a mystery element in it, or two mystery elements. One has to do with a murder that takes place on Mystery Hill, which is the site of what may be European prehistoric ruins—stone ruins—in New Hampshire. The narrator is an academic, a prehistorian, at the university and he's called into the case to help out the police. This isn't the main part of the novel; it's part of the plot, and eventually he is suspected by the police, too.

CARR: That's a good old turn that honors the conventions.

SMITH: So there is that twist.

CARR: And this is a fairly long novel?

SMITH: Yes, not as long as *The Death of the Detective,* but it'll probably be six hundred pages—about seven hundred typewritten pages.

CARR: What's the main plot?

SMITH: Well, it's so amorphous, it's so sloppy, that it's hard for me to articulate. I suppose though if I could articulate the plot of something as messy and complicated as this, it wouldn't be messy and complicated, and it wouldn't exist either. It's a kind of quest novel. A character finds himself rather isolated late in life and is wondering how his life worked out this way. The opening sentence is "Lately I have had the feeling that I have lived my life the only way I could have lived it while managing at the same time to live my life all wrong." The whole novel is predicated on that sentence, so we have to find out not only what his life has been and what it's like but what he imagines it should have been.

CARR: That's great. That's a mystery. It's the same mystery we all face.

SMITH: Plus, he's grown up with his mother, who's a lawyer and a great storyteller, who's told him over the years as a kind of joke (you don't know but maybe it is) that he came from the sea, that he was a kind of gift from the sea. It's the story of having been left on the doorstep, which I was told as a child, and it used to terrify me. They used to say "Well, you know, I'm not your mother; you were left on the doorstep."

CARR: That's very interesting. That happens to a character in *The Death of the Detective,* and there's a family betrayal in *Toyland* and *The Middleman.* Is that family thing buried in your own past?

SMITH: It may well be. I suppose this is one of the elements that's fair play for the critics: something that the writer reveals of himself.

CARR: No. I'm saying that when you see a theme developed over and over and over again, you begin to believe it's probably part of the writer's soul.

SMITH: I don't blame you, and it's a bit scary to discover that you are repeating themes. Or now and then you seem to be doing a scene or a character in a way that you've done before. You say, "Why am I doing this again?" But then you don't want to think about those things. A writer, if he's writing honestly, is going to reveal himself, even in genre fiction. And you can't help but do it. I think if you ever stopped and were able to psychoanalyze yourself and articulate your deepest fears and motivations, I don't think that I, anyway, would write anymore. It's something I really don't want to know too much about. I know it's there, but it's not for me to discover or to concern

myself with. I think writing fiction is an unnatural and probably unhealthy exercise. That's why it amazes me that so many people, especially housewives, want to become fiction writers in their spare time.

CARR: Oh yes. In their spare time.

SMITH: If I had my druthers, I think, looking back on what I've done, I would probably prefer to have been a shepherd or a gardener, not to sit down every day and deny the real world, which is what you do. Why am I not out there sailing today? I sit here every day and say, "Gee, I wish I were out there." Why am I making up this story with these make-believe people and this make-believe world that I'm trying to make true, that I'm devoting all my effort to make real?

CARR: Your world doesn't suit you?

SMITH: Must not.

CARR: Or maybe there is no book in your library you enjoy reading better than your own and that's why you write a lot of your own.

SMITH: Well, why should I even be driven to write books? Why shouldn't I go out and garden?

CARR: Or read?

SMITH: But I do think that somewhere along the line something has to be a little wrong with you to devote yourself to spending so much time writing fiction. I don't think it's the way life was meant to be lived.

CARR: Plumbers probably think that too after ten years of crawling around under houses. But I know what you mean: it's like that belief of the German romantics that artists are society's sickness.

SMITH: I'm not familiar with that theory, but I think I could very quickly accept it. And the way we become the spokesmen or voices of society. In *The Delphinium Girl,* the writer, Stargaard, poses this problem again and again. What am I doing sitting down? Of course he's an autobiographical writer and he's writing about his own life, things that have already happened. He's dredging it all up, sitting in his study, regretting he can't be out living his life.

CARR: What about that guy in *The Death of the Detective* who goes to see his mother? This weird old poet resembles Roethke a bit staggering around the insane asylum. He's a writer, or we think he's a writer—a poet. And that figure occurs again and again in your fiction.

SMITH: I think so. Again, that's a theme that keeps cropping up, and when you're unaware it's making a reappearance, you say, "Well, what does this mean?" But you try not to answer the question.

CARR: And obviously you haven't edited it out.

SMITH: Haven't edited it out. I think it belongs there if it fits in somehow. Every time Charlie Simic, a colleague of mine at U.N.H., reads one of my books he says, "You really do a job on poets."

CARR: That's true.

SMITH: Poets always come off very badly. Maybe that goes back to my being a frustrated poet, wanting to be a poet at first and failing at it.

CARR: Faulkner said novelists were ruined poets. That was his case anyhow.

SMITH: Well, that was mine, too. My problem with my poetry was that I couldn't find my own voice. I think the university was in good measure responsible for this, along with T. S. Eliot. My poems tend to be very academic and I always disguise my voice. How can you be a poet if you don't find your own voice and present it? I mean, a poet *is* his voice, and becomes the voice of his race; that's what makes poetry successful, and here I was—am—hiding my voice behind a mask. I read the book *Yeats: The Man Behind the Mask* and I subscribe to the theory that a poem was a kind of mask.

CARR: Have you thought about going back to poetry, now that it's changed?

SMITH: For years I did. For years I had the notion that I'd be like Thomas Hardy: I would write half a dozen novels and make all kinds of money, then I would return to my first love, poetry.

CARR: And look at nice little thrushes.

SMITH: Thrushes in the hedgerow, sorrowful little yew trees. But somewhere along the line, half a dozen or ten years ago, I realized this was not to be the case. I would never write poetry again and should not write poetry again. For better *and* worse, I was going to write fiction. I think the same is true of writing screenplays. When you're a younger writer, you realize that's where the action is. You're not yet committed to teaching in a university for the rest of your life. Maybe you've had a couple of film offers; people are asking whether you want to do a screenplay. And you say, "Well, that's a possibility. I could be a screenwriter *and* a fiction writer." But I've given up on that, too. I'll never write a screenplay. I'll never write poetry.

CARR: What do you tell young writers about writing? Their lives? Girls? Boys?

SMITH: Well, I don't interfere in their personal lives at all or give them any advice. And I just hope they don't ask. My idea in teaching young writers—especially the students in the graduate writing program and the good undergraduate writers—is that

it's my job to find out who *they* are as writers, to let *them* find out who they are as writers, to adapt myself to them and to give them my criticism.

CARR: There's another level after you teach them to write decent, workmanlike English, which I think can be taught just as an artist can teach a tyro perspective and a ballerina can teach a little girl a way to dance on her toes, that gets into helping them tap into the unconscious.

SMITH: Well, that would be off-the-page criticism. I like to confine myself pretty much to the page.

CARR: There are people who teach mental loosening-up exercises. What do you want most in the world right now? What do you hate about your life right now? Mix that up and you've got theme and plot. Imagine yourself in a brownstone in the Village and what animal you like best and remember something you never had as a child. Improvisations, like those in acting classes.

SMITH: Well, I would never do that. To me it would be artificial and an imposition. But I would say that my criticism is not textual. I don't go sentence by sentence with a student. I think that can be beneficial, but you easily become a proofreader and copy editor, and you don't want to do that. That's not my business. I would ask a student, "Would your character really have done that?"

CARR: Logic problems.

SMITH: Yes, and being true to your character. "Would this have really happened at the end? Is this the way to end this story? Do you have to end a story with your character shooting himself? Would he shoot himself?" You say, "Isn't it possible he might think about shooting himself and not do it, and wouldn't that make a more believable story? And more real?" It's more questions like that. Or you ask them whether this somehow really is a story. What *is* the story here?

CARR: Has anyone ever, since they've all probably read your books—

SMITH: You're assuming too much.

CARR: Has anyone ever come to you and said, "Gee, Mr. Smith, help me write a detective novel?"

SMITH: Yes. Someone asked me that the other day. I was coming down the main street of Durham. This happens very rarely, but he said he'd had a dream the night before about a body being discovered somewhere and thought it would be a wonderful detective story. I said, "Why don't you write it up?" He said, "I prefer to tell it to you because you write so well and you should write it for me." But that's the only time I can remember.

CARR: Are your students doing more or less "straight" fiction?

SMITH: Yes. There's not much interest among students in detective story writing. They're interested in science fiction and fantasy and that's what's been in for ten or twelve years. So I usually require my students when they apply to take my course—they have to get my permission, anyway—to tell me if they want to write fantasy or science fiction. Then I say I really can't help them. If they did by chance want to write detective stories, I could help them, and I'd tell them I could, because I'm familiar with the genre.

CARR: Where are the writers coming from?

SMITH: Most writers are going to come out of places like the University of Tennessee or the University of North Dakota, or they'll be dropouts from Ole Miss.

CARR: People used to say, "You're from *Ole Miss?*" and I'd remind them that it took us one year to produce a Nobel Prize winner in literature and it took Harvard four, and then he became British. What do you tell kids about the odds of becoming even moderately successful as a writer and making a modest sort of income from it?

SMITH: I'm very honest. I don't encourage anybody to go into writing, largely because, as I said earlier, I think it's not really a healthy enterprise. I've just seen so much failure in writing: people who wanted to write, and have written books for years and never gotten them published, stick with it to no avail, and they were reasonably talented people, too.

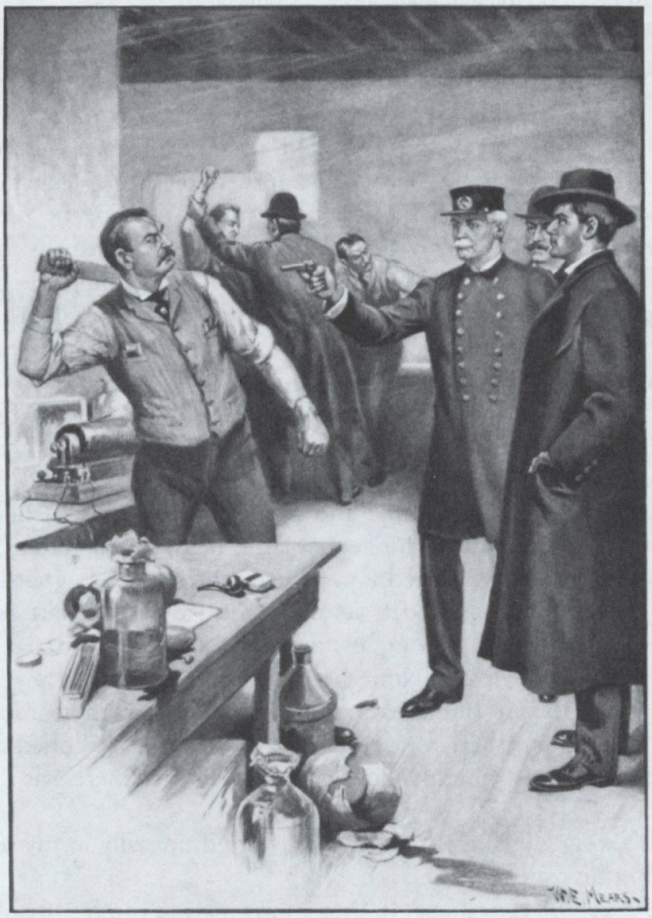
CARR: Yes, I know some.

SMITH: I certainly have read a number of books that could have been published and were better than 95 percent of the books that are published. And there's no money to be made from writing, unless... How many John Irvings are there? One in three thousand? I don't know what the odds are, but most of my students are going to end up teaching and they realize they're going to have to teach if they're going to write; there are no illusions.

CARR: They don't aspire to do anything else for a living?

SMITH: Most of them don't. They realize they're going to have to teach writing and therefore part of their battle is to get a job teaching writing, along with being able to write, because the two go hand in hand for them.

It didn't with me. My idea when I set out to write was to get as far away from the university as I could and never see the place again, but here I am a professor of English, and glad to be one. □



The Adventure of the Counterfeiters

By Samuel M. Gardenhire

LeDroit Conners. Now there is a name to be reckoned with! Conners is the hero of the only two mysteries written by Samuel M(ajor) Gardenhire, *The Silence of Mrs. Harrold* (Harpers, 1905), a novel, and *The Long Arm* (Harpers, 1906), a collection of short stories from which "The Adventure of the Counterfeiters" is taken.

Conners has many of the accoutrements expected of private or amateur detectives of his day, the most notable being his enormous respect and admiration for Edgar Allan Poe and C. Auguste Dupin. In Conners's studio (he is a painter of, needless to say, extraordinary skill) is an interesting little arrangement: a bronze bust of Poe is surrounded by three paintings, all of Dupin, and over the entire grouping hangs a bronze sculpture of a raven in flight.

"His standing with the best people," it is recorded when readers first meet Conners, early in the novel,

"those of solid, substantial class, who approved of him, grew out of his connection with certain banks in the down-town district, at many of which he carried accounts. He was handsome of person and unusually free of purse, the latter attribute being a passport to favor anywhere; but he made acquaintances, not friendships." While of dubious grammar, the paragraph does tell readers a good deal about LeDroit Conners.

—Otto Penzler

"OF WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?" asked LeDroit Conners. He sat before his familiar easel, his brush poised as usual above an unfinished picture. He had painted with more avidity of late, because there had been seemingly nothing beyond the routine of his life to distract his attention. Now, as always, his art busied itself with the face of a woman, like the many that adorned the walls of his studio. The light from the colored window above fell upon his thoughtful face, emphasizing its sadness, and showing, with the long lashes which shaded his eyes, the arch of sable brow. There was nothing effeminate about him, notwithstanding his dilettanteism; he was compact of form and of unquestioned strength.

"Primarily, I was thinking of you," I replied, "and also a story by Poe which I was reading last night. My wife never tires hearing about you, of your studio with its bust of the great poet, the raven stretched above it, and your pictures of the Chevalier Dupin."

"Your wife is very good to speak of me and think of me. Ah! the Chevalier! A great man, sir. You know my views as to crime—the germ of the beast in our blood, which under stress constantly breaks down the barriers called laws, erected by society to guard itself. 'And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose, the baby beats its nurse, and quite athwart goes all decorum,' as Shakespeare has it. What a study! So long as men love women, wealth, and wine, so long will they err to the very shadow of death. None better understood this than the unhappy poet of whom you spoke. He had the gift of divination also. You have often heard me say so."

"You say 'also' with more than your customary frankness," I replied. "The implication is unmistakable; *you* have the gift so marvellously developed that there was a sufficient reason for my thought."

He paused in his work; his brow contracted. I shifted uneasily in my seat in the fear that I had offended him, but his tone reassured me.

"You say a gift developed; perhaps. Rather an instinct, as the faculty of scent to the bloodhound and the acute ear to the hare, an unfailing sight to the hawk and a sense of touch to the serpent. Deductive knowledge depends on reason, but inspiration is an exalted—no, perhaps I should say an acute sense of something else. The beasts, unclothed except by nature and unfed except by season and conquest, must make existence out of an absolute impression of certainty that is neither analytical nor deductive. I fear I am in that category, my dear fellow. I know things because I know them—that is, some things."

He laughed at the look I fixed upon him.

"Do you know Edgar Parton?" he asked, as if to change the subject.

"The young man in the bank, down below?"

"Yes."

I knew him slightly: a handsome, well-mannered young paying-teller in the Eagle National Bank, an institution which occupied the great offices on the ground-floor of the structure in which we were housed. I nodded.

"Well, he was a central figure yesterday, with interest attaching to him yet. Perhaps the excitement occurred after you left, since you have not mentioned it. Didn't you see an account of the matter in the papers this morning?"

"I missed it," I replied. "What was it?"

"He was arrested in the bank—had the handcuffs put on him right before his fellow-clerks, and doubtless spent last night in jail."

"What charge?" I asked. "Theft?"

"No," said Conners—"worse. The charge might be theft, for he has robbed the bank pretty

heavily, but the arrest was for counterfeiting. The government officers have been watching him for weeks, and yesterday they caught him. They had evidence to justify his arrest some time ago, but deferred it in the hope of getting his confederates also. They wanted the plates from which he worked, but his methods were so strenuous that they couldn't wait—he wouldn't permit it."

"This is a surprise," I said, in a shocked voice. "He certainly didn't look the part."

"No," said Conners, with an air of meditation; "I was surprised myself. I have nothing more than the facts as stated by the papers, slightly supplemented by a brief word with the cashier this morning. I went in to cash a check, and, of course, the clerks were full of it."

"What did he get?"

"More than the bank cares to tell. The counterfeit bills are of its own issue; that's where his people are mad. They got wind of it yesterday, and reported it to the police by telephone; then they learned that the government already had him under surveillance. His method was ingenious. He brought the spurious bills into the bank, paid them out to unsuspecting customers, and took their face value in good money. His bogus paper thus wandered out into the community to get into hands that could never trace it back to its source."

"Shrewd, indeed, if the counterfeit was a good one," I said. "How was he found out?"

Conners laughed.

"A singular fatality. A customer received a payment and went to the desk to count it. He saw two bills which so excited his interest that he stepped into the president's office to mention the matter. The incident was entirely fortuitous, and the customer suspected nothing but a mistake. The president at once discovered a counterfeit. A 'good one,' do you say? Why, the spurious bills were so excellently done that they could not be distinguished from the genuine. A dangerous bill, that?"

"Surely—if I understood you," I replied.

"There were several of these bills," Conners continued, "of the character of which I spoke. The president knew that some were spurious, but he could not detect which."

"Impossible," I said.

"No," persisted Conners, smiling; "the bills disclosed *a* counterfeit, but not *the* counterfeit."

I shook my head incredulously.

"The truth," he continued. "The only difficulty with the bills was in their numbers—they were duplicated. This was what the customer discovered, and it disclosed either error or fraud. A mistake of that character being impossible, the president was at once alarmed."

"I see," I said.

"The bank detective was immediately summoned, and he stated with some confusion that he was familiar with the matter; that the federal and local authorities had told him several days since to watch Parton closely, but to say nothing to his superiors, a command which he was bound to obey. Parton was instantly called to the president's office and questioned. He was frightened, confused, and finally broke down, but vehemently protested his innocence. The detective then brought to the private office from the teller's desk a package of new bills in the familiar wrapper of the bank. They were carefully inspected, and it was decided that they were undoubtedly spurious. Parton was then arrested. I am sorry for him, for he promised better than that."

"This is interesting," I said, "for the man is interesting. I rather liked him. How about your intuitions now? Have you suspected him for a thief?"

"I thought little about him at first," replied Conners, carelessly, "but, as all such matters appeal to me, I have thought about him since."

"To what effect?" I asked, smiling. "Remember your rule as to making up a conclusion and finding the facts to fit it. Is he guilty or not guilty?"

"You have not quite stated my rule," Conners laughed; "but I have not allowed myself an impression. I am as yet not sufficiently informed to justify it."

There came a faint tap on the door.

"They always knock," he muttered. "Come in!" he cried.

Two women entered. One was tall, and dressed in black. She was elderly, evidently a widow, with an attractive face in spite of its expression of care, and now showing traces of tears. Her companion was scarcely more than a girl. I could see that Conners was startled, as I was, at her singular beauty. She was slight, petite, with golden hair and eyes of deepest blue. She, also, was dressed in black, but the dark clothes only enhanced her loveliness—their effect was not sombre, being lightened at the throat and showing here and there an evidence of color.

The couple regarded us hesitatingly and with some embarrassment as we both arose to greet them. Then the elder woman came forward eagerly.

"Mr. Conners?" she said.

"Yes," responded my companion with a bow, looking at her inquiringly.

"Oh, Mr. Conners!" she exclaimed. "I am Mrs. Parton. My son, Edgar, has been arrested."

She gave way to a flood of tears, her face buried in her handkerchief. Conners instantly pushed a chair before him and assisted her to a seat. He then gave his attention to her companion, who displayed an increased confusion, standing helplessly at the side of the other. She was affected by the grief of the elderly woman, but, in spite of this, her gaze wandered about the room, resting curiously on the ornamented walls, the draperies, and the strange appointments.

I felt that I ought to withdraw and made a motion to do so, but a gesture from Conners halted me. I was glad of an excuse to remain, and therefore seated myself again.

"Mr. Conners," resumed the lady, when she had sufficiently recovered her composure to speak, "I have just seen my son in prison—a dreadful place. He is in deep distress, and begged me to come to you."

"To me?" exclaimed Conners, in surprise. He looked at me with a glance of inquiry, but I shook my head. I divined his thought, but the ladies were strangers to me.

"Edgars is all I have, and we are quite alone," the elder woman said. "We have few friends, and you have spoken kindly to him in the bank. He is suspicious now of such friends as we have, and did not know to whom to turn. He mentioned you, and then begged me to see you."

Conners became thoughtful. He looked upward with the expression so familiar to me.

"Did he mention the fact that I had an account at the bank?" he asked.

"He did," replied the lady. "He said that the account was a large one, and he knew that your resources were large. How he knew this I cannot tell, of course. There is no harm in such knowledge, is there?"

"A bad sign," I thought, as I caught Conners's eye. "This is exactly the aid a shrewd and cunning rascal would seek. He would send his mother and lovely young sister to play upon the sympathies of one who might powerfully influence the bank." I knew that Conners did not lack money, but I had not before suspected that his resources were such as this indicated.

"What aid did he request?" asked my friend at last.

"He did not say," replied the lady. "I fancied, at first, you were a lawyer. We, of course, must arrange in some manner for his defence. He is innocent, Mr. Conners—I pledge you a mother's word that it is true!"

I thought a mother's word exceedingly unreliable in such a case, and pricked up my ears as the young woman now spoke.

"He was attracted by your face, Mr. Conners," she said, "having often seen you in the bank. He has spoken of you to me many times. Once he paid you some money and immediately you returned two bills through the wicket; they were old and false. He was able to trace them and save himself loss, but your quickness so interested him that he never forgot it. 'I am innocent,' he said to me this morning; 'I am innocent, and Mr. Conners can help me.'"

My friend laughed shortly.

"I recall the circumstance," he said; "a year ago, too."

Again he was thoughtful, and then his manner changed. I observed a sharp and awakened interest.

"But there is another reason why we appeal to you, Mr. Conners," said Mrs. Parton. "We have a friend on the police force, a man whom my husband aided years ago. I fancy he could not

openly assist Edgar, considering the evidence, but he mentioned your name to us both. Edgar was quick to understand him."

"Too quick," was my mental comment.

"Ah," observed Conners. "Is your friend an inspector?"

The lady made no reply, and Conners laughed again.

"I will help your son, madam," he said. "I am prepared to aid him by every means in my power."

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Mrs. Parton, again giving way to tears. "Forgive me, sir, but I am greatly relieved. I felt so helpless because there seemed no one to whom I could appeal. I could have died with grief, and yet I could not bear the thought of leaving my boy. There is something in your voice that gives me a strange encouragement."

I felt it also—an indefinable something which told me that her plea had touched Conners deeply, and that it excited all his powers. I waited with renewed attention, conscious now that I was to see another manifestation of the wonderful ability of which I had had ample proof.

"He is a good son," continued Mrs. Parton, with vehement emotion. "He is incapable of any crime. Ever since his father died he has been tender, solicitous, and true. I know the partiality of a mother, and how often we are blinded to faults in those we love; but I cannot be mistaken here. He was ambitious and industrious, and has risen to his position in the Eagle Bank without friends or influence. He began as a minor clerk in another bank, and, by merit alone, won the post of teller in the institution he is said to have betrayed. Why should he throw away his character in the beginning of his career when he had worked so hard to attain it? It was all he had."

I saw Conners's eyes flash; he looked at me with a strange expression, and I knew that his first impression had come. When he spoke I was surprised at the emotion he displayed.

"Having the blessing of such a mother," he said, "I am sure he would yield only to some great temptation."

He looked at the younger woman from the corner of his eye, and continued:

"Tell me of him—speak freely, and tell me all you know of this. Let me know his habits, relations, and hopes. Later I will see him at the prison, but you can tell me of matters of which he may not speak."

"It is so like a horrible dream," said Mrs. Parton. "That my boy should be arrested! He was engaged to be married shortly. Miss Allen—Louise Allen here—is his betrothed. She is an orphan and lives with her brother who has a men's furnishing store up-town. Mr. John Gordan, a fellow-clerk of Edgar's, lives with them, and it was through John that Edgar met Louise. John is heart-broken at Edgar's misfortune, and it is no consolation to him that he succeeds to Edgar's window at the bank. I saw his face at the familiar opening as I stopped in with the hope of speaking to the president, and he was so full of grief that he could not look at me. Louise says he did not sleep at all last night, and came to the breakfast-table this morning looking as though he had lost a dear relative. We have no friend who is a lawyer, and did not wish to employ one, so certain were we that Edgar would not be long suspected. But John said this morning that we must employ counsel, and said that he would advise us to whom we must go. We saw Edgar at the prison, meantime, and he suggested that I come to you. Do you know of some one whom we may trust? It is so dreadful to be poor!"

She struggled bravely with her emotions, and Conners came to her relief.

"Let me have your address, dear madam," he said. "I will see your son and later call on you. At present I doubt if you can help me more. Does Miss Allen live near you?"

"I live in the next block," said the young lady, speaking for herself. "Perhaps I ought to say, Mr. Conners, that John was afraid to interest himself too actively in Edgar's behalf, because he worked with him in the same bank. To do so might hurt him without aiding Edgar; and my brother, on John's account, was sensitive also. They thought I ought to stay away from both the jail and Mrs. Parton's until matters were a little clearer, but I am really glad I came. Mrs. Parton wished me to."

"You were formerly engaged to Mr. Gordan, were you not?" asked Conners. "Oh," he said, lifting his hand as she started and then hung her pretty head, "we often have to ask questions, like a doctor or a lawyer, no matter how unpleasant. You need not answer. I know it as though you had told me, and I could name the time you broke with him. But that is sufficient now."

She did not answer, although the color heightened in her face. Conners did not look at Mrs. Parton, but took the address she gave him and went with them into the hall towards the elevator. I waited his return.

"I have a theory!" I cried, as he re-entered.

"Indeed?" he laughed. "Then you must be a part of the investigating committee and help these ladies out. Will you come with me?"

"Certainly," I answered. "Where?"

"Several places, but first to the bank. They should have additional facts by this time, and we should know them, since we are in for it now in earnest. They will not refuse me, as you can guess, in view of what you have heard of my standing there. We can forgive young Parton his loose tongue, however, if he is guilty of nothing worse."

He made himself ready, meantime, and, going to the elevator, we descended to the first floor and entered the bank. Conners called for the president, and we were ushered into his private office. He was smooth, fat, bald, and florid; he was also benign, regretful, and prejudiced.

"I am glad some one is interested in young Parton's behalf," he said, when Conners had finished a careful statement as to his business. "If you design to procure him counsel, we will be most impartial in the matter, although the crime is something to shudder at. Think of it! Counterfeit money dealt out through the window of a national bank—it is horrible!"

He perspired heavily under the mere influence of the thought.

"There is no doubt of his guilt," he continued, when he could calm himself. "The young man was caught with the goods on him, as Flury says."

"Flury is your detective?" observed Conners.

"Yes, Jerry Flury."

"Your employees are bonded, of course, Mr. Jonas?"

"Yes, sir, and it covers this case," cried the president, with emphasis. "We don't care about the counterfeiting; but it is our loss that interests me. The counterfeiting is a government matter, but his theft is ours. I don't care what the bonding company says."

"Who succeeds Parton, Mr. Jonas? You will pardon us, but we are interested, as I have said."

"Glad to help you," responded the president, heartily, doubtless in recollection of the account to my companion's credit. "John Gordan has his position now—a worthy and reliable young man; a friend of Parton's—but all the clerks were his friends. They will be glad to repudiate him now. Such is the punishment entailed by crime."

"Are there any further facts?" asked Conners.

"Ample to settle all doubt," replied the president. "Parton's rooms have been searched and more counterfeit money found; also a part of a broken plate and certain engraving tools—not the plate with which this work was done, but a part of a poorer attempt. Parton was once a lithographer and an engraver of rare promise. The firm with which he once worked has been found. Such things always crop out in moments of emergency. He was searched at the jail and some important memoranda found on the back of a card in his possession. Flury took a copy."

He handed Conners a paper which bore certain marks, as follows:

"J. Harding.
No. 633,722. Fld. Mch. 18th.
Allowed. At last.
Bdwy Bank $5000. A.
Seamans Svg. $5000 M."

Conners copied the notations in his commonplace book and returned the sheet to Mr. Jonas.

"Counterfeiters usually work in company, and the operation is by means of a gang," he said. "Could Parton have had confederates in the bank?"

"Good Heavens, I hope not!" ejaculated the president, with a start. "And yet, we never doubted *him*."

He touched a button at his desk in nervous haste.

"Tell Flury I want him," he said to a clerk who answered.

In a moment the bank detective made his appearance, a short, thick-set man, with a large mustache and the unmistakable air of the private police. He was dressed in the square-cut coat and striped trousers of his class, his stiff checked shirt and florid tie in keeping with his countenance.

"This is Mr. Conners, Flury," said the president, ignoring me and indicating my friend. "He is a customer of the bank and is interested in the Parton case."

I saw the detective covertly watching us. He knew us both as tenants of the building and doubtless the details of our offices and habits. He demeanor suggested much.

"There won't be no trouble," he laughed. "We nipped this thing early."

"Mr. Conners suggests that counterfeiters invariably have confederates, and we know that they usually work in gangs. That is a matter for the authorities, but I trust that Parton has no confederates in the bank."

"There ain't a man in the bank but what is as level as this floor," said Flury, earnestly, his face flushing a deeper red. "Most all of them is in bed by ten o'clock every night, and them that ain't is simply in nice society, with dances and such. We know them all down to the breakfast-table the next mornin'."

"Who were Parton's associates?" asked Conners.

"Well, Gordan for one, and he throwed him down the minute he sees him dishonest. I gets the tip as to the engraving firm from Gordan. Of course, he's sorry, as we all are, but that don't make no difference. Gordan is broke up over the thing, and, although he gets Parton's window, he's that generous that it don't count. But I suspects," and the detective chuckled, "that he falls heir to the girl also."

"What girl?" asked the president.

"Parton is engaged to marry a young woman up-town that Gordon is sweet on. The fact is, Parton cuts him out, but Gordan is that broad-minded that it's all square with him, and he don't bear malice. It's your Christian kind that makes bank people safe, and Gordan's in that class. He stays honest, gets Parton's job, and wins back the girl. It sure proves the rule that virtue is its own reward."

"You may go, Flury," said the president.

"Wait!" said Conners, sharply. "What were Parton's habits before this trouble?"

"Best in the world, on the face," replied the detective. "No drinkin' and no gamblin' so far as I can find out. But he had some nights that we can't account for, and we learns this mornin' that he runs an account in the name of his sweetheart in another bank, a saver on Broadway."

"Do you suspect confederates?"

"The police and federal secret people do. Of course he knows where the bills are made, and if we hadn't been so sudden we might have found the shop; but that wasn't my fault, and certainly it ain't my business." He shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"Who searched his rooms?" asked Conners.

"The Washington secret-service people."

"Were you there?"

"Yes."

"What was found?"

"Enough to fix him. Some tools in his bureau-drawer and some bills. There were moulds in his trunk and several bottles of acid for etching. There was an old plate and a bundle of good paper."

"It looks bad," observed Conners, gloomily.

"Yes—or good!" laughed the detective.

Conners nodded his head, and, at a sign from the president, Flury withdrew.

"May I talk with Gordan?" asked Conners.

"Certainly," said the president. "I presume Parton's lawyer will see him in due time, but anything you may learn now will go to help the case in the end."

To my surprise, he seemed in no manner annoyed at this apparently gratuitous investigation, and my respect for my companion was necessarily increased. Evidently his account was large, since it procured for him such consideration. The president called his clerk, and gave instructions that some one relieve Gordan at his window, and in a few minutes the young man stood before us. He was a frank and good-looking fellow, but his demeanor was subdued and his countenance grave. He evidently suspected that we were officers or lawyers. Conners made no explanations, but questioned him at once.

"How long have you known Parton?" he asked.

"We have been friends from boyhood," replied the young man.

"Intimate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you like him?"

"I loved him as a brother, sir."

"What prompted you to reveal to the officers the fact that he had been an engraver?"

Gordan flushed, looking steadily at the carpet.

"It was a circumstance with which I was familiar, and I thought it should be known. I knew that he wanted to keep the fact a secret, and I felt that he was doing himself an injustice. It was sure to come out, and the sooner the better for him. Candor was all that could save him now."

"And you wished him saved?"

"Yes, sir."

"Notwithstanding the fact that he had interrupted your relations with Miss Allen?"

"That is an old matter," replied the young man, with a look of surprise. "Did he speak of it?"

"No," said Conners.

"Then I shall not."

I saw a peculiar expression come into Conners's face. He half smiled, but said nothing.

"I would think Parton innocent, if I dared," continued Gordan, with a furtive glance at the president.

"The observation does you credit," said Mr. Jonas.

"Thank you, sir," said Gordan.

"That is all," said Conners.

The young man withdrew, but I caught a parting glance at my friend which I conceived to be one of dark malignity. Conners rose, and I did likewise.

"I am grateful to you, Mr. Jonas," he said.

"Not at all," replied the president, as he bowed us out.

"We will go to the jail," said Conners, as we paused in the hall. "When we have seen Parton I can report progress."

"I hope so," I laughed. "Thus far you have learned nothing with which to comfort him."

He looked at me with his enigmatical smile; his face had the expression that it had worn in the eventful moments of my previous experiences with him, and I grew thoughtful. But I could think of no reason for any confidence on his part, unless he was satisfied as to Parton's guilt. My own theory had gone.

Upon our arrival at the prison we found that Parton had been taken into a waiting-room next to the office, where he was in company with his mother and Miss Allen; they had come to see him, and had been allowed an interview alone. But as we were ushered in, at his request, I noted some drawn curtains at a high window and felt sure that he was under surveillance. In a case of such importance no opportunity would be spared to secure evidence, and, doubtless, from behind the draperies a witness was listening to, and recording, any statement he might

make which would be deemed important to the government. If Conners noted it, his countenance gave no sign.

"Ah, thank you, Mr. Conners!" cried Parton, coming forward, while the two women rose from their seats. "My mother has told me how kindly you received her."

Conners shook hands with him. We seated ourselves and I had time particularly to observe him. His face showed the effect of his trouble and a night in custody, but he did not look a criminal. There was a certain refinement in his features, and a look about his eyes suggesting a resemblance to his mother. I felt an instant of pity for him, although certain of his guilt.

"How long have you known that you were watched?" asked Conners.

"Known it!" exclaimed the young man, in surprise. "Why, my arrest came like a thunderbolt! I had not the faintest idea of any trouble until I was summoned to the president's office. I don't know now that I have been watched."

It was a careful answer, but his manner was disturbed and uneasy.

"You passed counterfeit bills through your window, and others were found among the moneys you had in charge; further bills, with unlawful instruments, were found in your rooms; you are an expert engraver, which fact you seem to have been reluctant to reveal, and you have large deposits in two savings-banks, one on Broadway."

I looked at him in surprise; Flury had mentioned only one. His mother looked surprised also.

"How did you know of this?" asked Parton.

"One account is to the credit of Miss Allen; the other to your mother."

"I do not understand," said Parton, wearily.

"Flury mentioned the fact of one; I surmised the other. You may remember that I bowed to you twice in the past year as you came from two different institutions. Upon each occasion you carried a bank-book."

Parton said nothing.

"Your friend thought proper to mention your skill as an engraver. You should have anticipated him."

"My friend?"

"Gordan."

"Damn him!" exclaimed the young man, fiercely, with a glance at the girl, who shrank away. "He has my place. Flury said that, too."

"Let us not be too hard on Mr. Gordan as yet," observed Conners. "I have certain curious memoranda here, with which you are familiar. Do you care to explain them?"

Conners drew forth his book and exhibited the copy he had made from the sheet in the president's office.

"I do not care to explain now," replied Parton, firmly. "I am pledged to silence. I do not deny the fact of the money."

"You cannot deny it," returned Conners, coolly.

"Oh, Edgar!" exclaimed Mrs. Parton. "What can this mean? We have been poor, and you never mentioned having any money to me."

"It was a surprise—I could not, mother," replied the young man.

"Let the explanation wait, madam," said Conners. "A pledge should be kept, and I do not think the worse of your son for his statement. We will speak of the counterfeit bills."

"I know nothing of them," cried Parton, passionately.

"These bills have been passed by you for weeks."

"They have not!" he cried.

"There is no doubt of it," replied Conners. "Perhaps you did not know it."

The young man made a gesture of despair.

"The bills were remarkable in character," continued Conners, "and you might well be pardoned for not knowing it, if you are guiltless."

The young man made another gesture, looking towards the girl.

"You have no business here, Louise," he said. "This is my mother's place, perhaps, but you

did not know you were engaged to marry a felon. The quicker you desert me the better. I deserve it."

The girl went white about the lips. She looked piteously at Parton, and then at us. Her suffering and embarrassment were so apparent that I turned away.

"I do not know what this means—your having money," said Mrs. Parton, "but you can explain it, I know. Louise is a true girl. She does not believe you guilty. Do you?" And she appealed to the girl.

Miss Allen said nothing, and I could see that she was on the verge of collapse.

"I think," said Conners, "that Miss Allen would prefer to speak with Mr. Parton alone. I have nothing further to learn here, madam. I think, myself, that the deposits can be explained, and Miss Allen owes no sort of statement to any one while we are present."

The girl looked at him with a gratitude so intense that he gave her a smile of encouragement.

"Come," he said to me. "We must hunt for evidence outside, and to-morrow I shall hope to have something to say to the authorities."

Parton did not rally under this statement, and bade us good-day with a demeanor that was almost sullen. Both women were weeping on his shoulder as we left the room.

"Well?" I said, when we were in the corridor.

"Well?" he replied, imitating my speech good-naturedly.

"How about your intuitions? You know about it now?"

"Certainly," he responded. "I know the guilty person, and we have seen and talked with him. But I am slightly puzzled over the question of proof."

"I feel sorry for the girl—yes, and the mother, too."

"Both are entitled to some sympathy," Conners observed, dryly.

"You might induce him to confess," I said. "It may lighten his sentence, providing, of course, he informs on his confederates. Otherwise I do not believe in a compromise with criminals."

"Nor I," he said, "and there will be none in this case."

"Where do we go now?"

"Back to my rooms to wait until nightfall, and then I could take you on a trip that promises some excitement. But you are a man of responsibilities, and I should dislike to lead you into danger. Counterfeiters are dangerous people and object to being interfered with."

"Don't let that deter you," I said, eagerly. "I can take care of myself."

He laughed, but said nothing, and we were shortly back in his familiar quarters.

He lighted a cigarette and stretched himself at ease on a couch, his hands clasped behind his head.

"Let us suppose Parton isn't guilty," he said. "It is a supposition a professional officer would never indulge in from the admitted facts. But I know that he is *not* guilty, and hence my task is an easy one. It is because I know that he is not guilty that the task of finding the offender is easy, too. With a vision obscured by error or prejudice, one's perspective is limited; mine is not. If Parton is innocent, some one immediately connected with him is guilty; this must be so. The whole story is told by the fact that incriminating articles were found in his room. Grant that he is innocent, and what does that suggest? The fact of the bills being passed by him is not of itself significant. In the haste of paying them out he might well fail to note their character. I say in the haste, for, being an engraver and an expert teller, he would have detected them in time, anyway. Consequently, they were supplied to him daily and surreptitiously. Grant him innocent, and what does that suggest? It follows, also, that some one secreted the tools and bills in his apartment. I did not need to question his mother or Miss Allen to learn that. The latter would not know, and the former could only suspect. That I might do myself. But, since I have already determined who the criminal is, we can easily settle so trifling a matter as that."

My theory returned.

"Gordan!" I exclaimed.

"My friend," he said, looking at me solemnly. "I tremble for you. Your sagacity will fly to

your head some day and the consequences may be fatal. Nay," he continued, as he saw that I was hurt, "a good man does not have to be a good detective, and a happy man has no need to occupy his mind with problems such as this. I was jesting, and if you will forgive me I will stretch my caution a point and take you with me to-night, being myself responsible to your little household for your safety."

"Good!" I exclaimed. "Where do we go?"

"I will let you know in due time, when I am quite certain myself," he replied. "Meanwhile, get word to your wife that you will be absent, and I will see a certain Mr. J. Harding, whom everybody seems to have overlooked."

I went out to send a wire to Jennie and finish some matters in the office. The day had passed, and I had eaten a late and lonely supper at a café near by before I saw Conners again. He entered my office hurriedly.

"Come," he said. "I have been delayed. Get your overcoat, for we may be long, and the air on the water is chilly. You may take this, also," he continued, handing me a revolver. "I trust you will not need it, but precaution bars accident."

I suppressed as much as possible the excitement which bubbled through me, taking the weapon and dropping it in the side-pocket of my coat.

"A peculiar and deceitful voice; a false countenance with a pair of suspicious eyes; two calloused hands without excuse; a stain of ink on a vest and a trace of oil on a pair of trousers; large diamonds on a small salary, and the whole about a person who stands close to a good chance to be the real criminal in this case, have given me a clew which I have followed up this afternoon," said Conners, "and which we shall further follow to-night. A bare inkling of the truth is often sufficient, as I think you will find out."

I followed him from the building, and on the sidewalk we were joined by four men. Conners had evidently told them of my coming, for they observed me without comment. Answering his gesture, they proceeded down the street, boarding a passing car on Twenty-third Street and alighting near the ferry on the East River. It was already dark, and we threaded our way through the later crowds pressing homeward to Brooklyn, turning south to a wharf where a steam-cutter was moored. From its neat trim, and the eagle above the pilot, I recognized a revenue-boat from Governor's Island. It was evidently awaiting us, and, immediately upon our embarking, the moorings were cast loose; the boat backed into the river, pointing its prow to the north. Every moment of the time I was keenly elated, but I troubled no one with questions. What I could see was sufficient to thrill me with expectancy, while the sharp night air set my blood tingling through my veins. My tongue was silent, but a thousand speculations flashed through my mind.

Conners had left me to shift for myself, and I questioned none of his companions, whom I suspected to be secret-service officers. Neither did I molest him. He devoted himself to the man who directed the movements of the party, and they talked together in low tones. The boat pushed its way through the narrow passage between the shore and the island, and, emerging from the channel, turned its prow towards the Sound. The throb of the engines kept time to the beating of my heart. No precaution was taken with the lights, as other boats passed to and fro, and the men sat in couples with lighted cigars, conversing pleasantly together. I had a place near the rail at the stern, and presently Conners joined me.

"What in this wide world ever prompted you to a trip like this?" I asked, in my bewilderment. "I take no exception to anything for a purpose, but what possible information could you have gained to induce it?"

"Easily answered," he laughed. "When you suspect a man, it is a simple matter to follow him. The man I suspected sent a telegram to Glenco Bay this afternoon. It was addressed to a person named Coulter, and read: 'I will be on board at ten-thirty.' An officer went to Glenco and found that Coulter has had a house-boat moored off the shore for the past three months. He learned so many other things that we are going up to take a look. Waiting for his return caused some of the delay of which I complained to you. Do you understand?"

"I think so," I replied.

"It would not do to be there before ten-thirty," he continued. "We want our friend on the scene first."

"Who is it?" I asked, impatiently. "Gordan?"

Conners smiled.

"You overlooked the president of the bank," he said.

"What?" I exclaimed in amazement. "You are surely cra—"

Conners laughed again.

"I understand you," I said, slightly nettled. "It is Gordan, of course. In the light of what I have heard, it is plain enough. You have observed young Parton at the bank, and, having a good memory, recall the fact of twice seeing him coming out of saving institutions with a bank-book. The statement of the detective, Flury, and the two notations on the card found on Parton, indicate the size of the deposits he carries, suspiciously large in his case. I do not know how you discovered that Gordan had once been the lover of Miss Allen; perhaps it was a mere guess, from certain evidences which a less astute person would be slow to observe; but at all events it proved to be correct. This leads to a conclusion that is inevitable. Parton is an engraver and one of the counterfeiters; Gordan is a confederate. Gordan was taken in because he surrendered his girl without much protest, and was found to be a man easily influenced; his assumed loyalty to Parton is a part of the plot. The rascals retain a position of advantage at the bank, and are thus enabled the better to watch the authorities and aid Parton. The larger figures on the card indicate the amount of counterfeit money already issued. You suspected Gordan from the first and, having followed him, now find out his secret. Perhaps the girl and the mother are both in the gang. Counterfeiters, as you say, always work in bands, and the daily papers tell us how often women are associated with them. You see," I continued, smiling triumphantly, "being in a detective atmosphere, my faculties have become acute."

"And the night air has freshened your imagination," laughed Conners.

We were interrupted by a call from forward, and, bidding me follow him, Conners answered it. We entered the little cabin at the bow, and under the light I recognized his companion and Inspector Paul.

"Hello!" I exclaimed, as I took his extended hand.

"I was aboard when you came," he said. "Like you, I am an invited guest."

Conners then introduced me to secret-service officer Howard.

"We are nearly there," said the detective, pointing through the door to a dark outline ahead. "When we swing about the point yonder, we are in the bay. The boat lies near there, just within the shelter of the bluff."

"What time is it?"

"Ten-forty."

"If they are prompt they should be aboard by now," said Conners.

"Shall we darken up and try to drop alongside, or launch a boat and creep up?"

"Never the last!" said Conners. "They are on the lookout for that. All they have feared, and listened for, during the time they have been here is the sound of oars grating in the locks. Large boats are common enough in this vicinity. Put the lights out and give her headway. Speed is what we want."

We were bending eagerly over the rail as the boat rounded the point in question, with the doors closed and all lights extinguished. Ahead we saw the outlines of a long, flat-roofed craft, sitting low in the water. The windows showed red squares of light, although they were closely curtained.

We were nearing the motionless craft rapidly, and the engines stopped. Our headway brought us alongside, and the wheel came round with a quick turn as our prow swung off.

"No words or explanations," was the sharp but whispered admonition of Howard. "Move quickly, and all together. Now!"

The cutter bumped abruptly against the side of the unsuspecting stranger. There was a

startled movement inside, and every officer leaped over the rail. In an instant the door flew in with a crash, and as they pressed through I followed, to look upon a scene as dramatic as though set upon a stage.

The main cabin of the house-boat was a long, low room, built above the flat deck, brilliantly lighted by shaded lamps. At one end was a stone table, near which was a bench of tools and a steel structure like a printing-press. Jugs, bottles, and all the paraphernalia of counterfeiting were scattered about. Grouped together, with faces that expressed rage and anger no less than surprise, were five men in their shirt-sleeves, three of them in aprons. The tools with which they had been working were yet in their hands, so little time had they to discard them for the ready weapons which lay upon the benches immediately before them. The officers were ranged in a semicircle before me with levelled pistols on the wondering criminals, while Conners stood to the front, his hands in his over-coat pockets, regarding a stocky individual who fingered nervously an iron bar. His disposition halted between a desire to use it at all hazards, as expressed by his convulsed face, and a respect for the threatening weapon which Inspector Paul held in the line of his eye.

"Good-evening, Mr. Flury," said Conners. "I am sorry to meet you again under such unfortunate circumstances."

The scene was ended quickly, and the men were handcuffed. It was a wonderful boat, and its fittings filled the officers with admiration. An electric plant run by an engine, with sufficient power also to propel the craft, operated the tools and press. In the centre of the deck was a trap, above a well which passed entirely through the hull. An enormous box, zinc-lined and water-tight, passed up and down this well by a bolt and chain, and the criminal apparatus could be concealed therein and lowered to the bottom of the bay. Here the box rested while the great craft could drift away with no sign of its secret or any evidence of the guilty work which its owners carried on. At night it was moored above the selected spot, the implements pulled up, and the business resumed.

We had the plate and its makers as well, with as dangerous a lot of bills as ever went out to disturb a tranquil business community. It was a great haul.

It was nearly morning when, tired and exultant, Conners and I reached his studio. Even then we did not go immediately to rest. I had had little time to question him.

"Parton will keep his place, if he wishes, and marry his girl," said Conners. "It will bring joy to the heart of his poor mother. It also acquits Gordan of complicity, and shows him to be a true friend. There was no malice in the memory that Miss Allen was once his sweetheart—he was really attached to Parton. Doubtless he had another sweetheart somewhere; the town is big. I saw Mr. J. Harding this afternoon and learned enough to explain the whole mystery of the savings-bank deposits. Harding is a patent lawyer. Parton was once an engraver and invented a method for making a half-tone plate for illustrations. He made application for a patent through Harding, and sold it to his clients for ten thousand dollars down, with a further payment to be made on the granting of the patent. Meantime he was pledged to secrecy. Men are always cautious about such matters, and inventors abnormally sensitive. The card with its notations told me the whole story. The large number, 633,722, suggested a patent-office entry, and the date of filing proved it.

"Once on the scent the rest was easy. Parton, when a youth, first worked in a lithographer's establishment and became an expert, but he was ambitious and wanted to be a broker. Hence, when he had saved a little money he secured a position in a bank. But he worked on his invention, perfected it, and made his application for a patent. It has taken a long time because an interference was declared, and the delay frightened his purchasers and made him apprehensive. Flury was the agent of the counterfeiters, and every morning was able to make an exchange of the bills among the moneys in Parton's box. It required but small cunning. We will get the whole matter straightened out to-morrow and you will have another interesting story to tell your family." □

REX STOUT Newsletter

By John McAleer

When Georges Simenon (who, incidentally, will be eighty this year) put me in touch with Professor Lew Kowarski, I rushed to my *Who's Who in Science in Europe* to find out just who Professor Kowarski was. I came away impressed. He is the chief nuclear physicist at CERN, the European Nuclear Energy Agency, which has its headquarters in Geneva. Kowarski is also the man who set up France's nuclear program and built Canada's first nuclear reactor. What intrigued me most, however, was that he weighs 225 pounds and likes to be called Nero Wolfe by his friends. I found Professor Kowarski more than willing to discuss his acquaintance with Nero Wolfe. He wrote me:

"Apart from a rather juvenile interest in S. S. Van Dine, my tastes in detective fiction used to be British- rather than American-oriented. I came across my first Nero Wolfe only after the War; I think it was *The Silent Speaker*. After that it was *Black Orchids,* and then I found myself hooked, and the Wolfe-Goodwin world (including such remote corners as Lily Rowan's penthouse and Marko Vukcic's restaurant) became increasingly familiar.

"It was one of my CERN colleagues (Dr. Mervyn Hine) who drew my attention to some resemblances between Nero Wolfe and myself. Of course I am not *really* fat: 50 pounds less than Wolfe, and definitely taller (Wolfe, to my knowledge, has never been described as a tall man). [Archie says he's six feet tall.] Then there is the combination of a Slav origin with reverence toward the niceties of the English language. Finally, we both tend to take a firmly ojective view of our own mental gifts. All in all, I had to admit that the point was well taken.

"Although my views on automobiles are fairly similar to those of Wolfe's, I forced myself to use these conveyances (as also others, such as Boeings) fairly widely. Of course I do not drive; my wife is my chauffeur, but to this Archie function she prefers her highly proficient imitation of Fritz Brenner. She keeps quite a few plants in our apartment, so there is a touch of Theodore Horstmann, too.

"To Rex Stout's readers, all inhabitants of the 35th Street brownstone (except perhaps the somewhat shadowy Theodore) are real and alive, and this also includes the permanently connected visitors, from Saul Panzer to Purley Stebbins. Other characters are no less vivid, but perhaps less real—all these headstrong ladies, lustful bankers, and eccentric intellectuals are cartoon sketches rather than lifelike paintings. Mystery plots are pretexts rather than the main preoccupation, and attempts to create a Criminal Mastermind were definitely unconvincing: it's just as well that Arnold Zeck was disposed of as early as 1950.

"On the whole, it's Rex Stout's attitude to language which interests me most—whether it shows in writing a whole (early) novel in which the hero is referred to as 'you,' instead of the customary he or I; or in Wolfe tearing up a dictionary because it recommends the verb 'to contact.' Or single sentences like 'Gold is a metal, Madam' (was it in *Might As Well Be Dead*?) or 'Obviously there was something in her that stopped him from thinking' (in one of the shorter stories?). I tried to check on all these quotations, but I could not find any of them in the twenty-seven Nero Wolfe books which are within my immediate reach."

As someone who thought of nuclear physicists as people who sat around brooding about new weapons to blow up the world with, I found Professor Kowarski's letter wonderfully reassuring. Somehow I feel that if Lew and Mervyn are regular guys who enjoy curling up with a Nero Wolfe novel, then the annihilation of the planet is not imminent.

Take a look at George N. Dove's *The Police Procedural* (Bowling Green, 1982) for some enlightened commentary (pp. 31–33) on Inspector Cramer. Dr. Dove is retired Dean of Arts and Sciences, East Tennessee State University, a post he held for 23 years. He is solidly in Rex Stout's corner. We hope we're going to hear more from him.

* * * * *

The annual Black Orchid Dinner of the Wolfe Pack was held at the New York Sheraton on the evening of 4 December 1982. About 125 Pack members were on hand. Principal speaker of the evening was Robin Winks, author of *Modus Operandi,* and Master of Berkeley College at Yale. As vice-president of the New England Chapter of the MWA, I invited Robin to address our monthly dinner meeting, at the Harvard Club, in 1981. It was a highlight of our year. I didn't think he would be able to top that performance, but I was wrong. His talk was splendid. But you'll be able to see that for yourself since it will reprinted in the next Wolfe Pack *Gazette*. Incidentally, the *Gazette* is now rolling from the press after a period of gestation that would awe an elephant. A litter of them (well, three to be exact) was distributed to the guests at the Black Orchid Dinner. How Larry Brooks ever learned to master a word processor in two weeks' time, I can't begin to imagine. I guess he's been surrounded by Wolfe books for so long (Larry's collection of Stout materials runs into thousands of volumes) that Wolfe's genius is beginning to rub off on him.

* * * * *

I have before me the bound galleys of Ken Darby's *The Brownstone House of Nero Wolfe,* so now I accept as certain Little, Brown's assurances that it will be released in March. Ken has created a loving tribute. Ken was musical director of *The Wizard of Oz*. With this book he will transport all Stout fans over the rainbow.

This year's winner of the Wolfe Pack's Nero Wolfe Award for that novel which best upholds the standards which Rex Stout brought to detective fiction was Hugh Pentecost for his *Past, Present & Murder,* a Julian Quist novel (Dodd, Mead, 1982). Hugh (who is actually Judson Philips) is a Grand Master of Mystery and still in top form at eighty. He joins an illustrious company of former Nero winners—Larry Block (1979), Helen McCloy (1980), Amanda Cross (1981). There's a chance that next year's Nero may not be a plaque but a Nero statuette, with Wolfe standing, perhaps, on a boulder, even as he does in the opening scene in *Some Buried Caesar.* If that happens, I'm going to resign as chairman of the Award committee and enter the competition myself. What an adornment for my bookshelves that would be!

* * * * *

Roy Hoopes, in his definitive biography of James M. Cain (*Cain,* Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1982), confirms that Cain was a staunch admirer of Wolfe and Archie. Rex was a Cain rooter, so that's as it should be.

* * * * *

"The success of American writers from S. S. Van Dine to Ellery Queen to Rex Stout proves that there is no congenital limit preventing an American from writing detective stories in a recognizably British mode." So says Dennis Porter (pp. 127–28) in his admirable *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (Yale University Press, 1982).

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From my Mailbag:

From Erik Routley, author of the classic study *The Puritan Pleasures of the Detective Story* (Gollancz, 1971), with whom it is a pleasure to correspond:

"I can certainly say that I have myself enjoyed Rex Stout's work very much. I have not read him as extensively as I have read some (seventy books, like Agatha Christie's trunk-full, is a daunting assignment): but I have always appreciated the virility and soundness of his technique and the saltiness of his characters. He certainly exemplifies the 'romantic' technique as defined by C. S. Lewis and accepted in the course of my book—Nero Wolfe is a massive eccentric of a typically dominating kind in the romantic style: yet he is always subject to reason—and that, I think, is what gives detective fiction its special attraction; power—represented in the omnicompetent detective—is admirable only when it is made to serve justice; if one believes in abstract justice, one sees a sort of hypostasis of justice in reason: and then an incarnation of reason in some admirable figure who is flesh and blood and better than we are but entirely obedient to justice and reason; I suppose that this is what makes us enjoy detective fiction—it would at least be pleasant if it *were* like that in real life, and it's not entirely foolish to believe that it *could* be."

I found myself thinking, after I saw Dustin Hoffman's *Tootsie,* that it's probably the most successful comedy since Clifton Webb's *Sitting Pretty,* and for the same reason—the protagonist is a wonderfully self-assured person who, by his very competence, teaches others to have faith in themselves. Doesn't Wolfe's omnicompetence affect us in the same positive way?

* * * * *

Judson C. Sapp has graciously shared with me his correspondence with Anthony F. Smith of Houston, Texas, in which Smith discloses that in the late 1930s and early '40s the Philadelphia *Inquirer* did abridged tabloid-sized novels for its Sunday supplement under the rubric "A Gold Seal Novel." These were done of cheap pulp paper and crudely illustrated by a staff artist. Among the novels given this treatment were *Fer-de-Lance* and *Black Orchids.* Does anyone have any more information on this venture? *Black Orchids* got special treatment, by the way. It was on slick stock, and the cover was a fine, full-page illustration of Nero.

* * * * *

In the preface to *Data Structures* by Edward M. Reingold and Wilfred J. Hansen, one of the books in Little, Brown's Computer Systems Series, Nero Wolfe is quoted on p. ix: "Nothing corrupts a man as deeply as writing a book, the myriad of temptations is overpowering." My thanks to Peter Kugel, computer scientist extraordinary, for bringing this to my notice.

* * * * *

In his column in the Houston *Post,* 23 October 1982, Lynn Ashby led off an appeal to voters to get out and vote with a long quotation from *A Family Affair* in which Archie Goodwin speaks of the sense of well-being he gets when he meets his responsibilities by casting his ballot in a democratic society. My thanks for this item to Peter Blau, editor of the *Baker Street Journal,* who not only is a ranking Holmesian but has as well a companionable fondness for Nero Wolfe.

* * * * *

Here's an item from Jeff Hatfield, manager of Uncle Edgar's Mystery Bookstore in Minneapolis, that may amuse you as much as it did me:

"While watching the NBC sitcom *Taxi* I was startled awake to the point of falling out of my chair. The story involved compulsive gambler, Alex, fighting the urge by leaving an Atlantic City crap table while on a winning streak. When he returns to his New York taxi garage, boss Louie is aghast and goads him into going to a crap game taking place in a restaurant "not five minutes from here." Scene change to the restaurant back room where the high-buck game is under way. . . . Commercial. . . . And when they return the setting is established with façade shot of the restaurant with its high canopy over the door identifying RUSTERMAN'S."

Obviously, NBC has not yet dismantled the whole of its Nero Wolfe set. Does that mean the series may make a comeback, with, one hopes, a change of Nero?

Most readers must have noticed that NBC's Archie, Lee Horsley, is now starring in a new series as *Matt Houston.* He's acquired an alleged Western twang to go with it, however, and it's so bad you wonder if you're listening to dubbed dialogue.

* * * * *

I'm grieved to report that one of my staunchest supporters while I was writing Rex's biography, Esther Starbuck of Wilmington, Ohio, died on 26 October, five days before her ninetieth birthday. She missed Rex's seventh death anniversary by just one day. Esther got me much of the wonderful information I had on Rex's grandmother, whom she knew when she was a girl herself. She also supplied the photo of Hackberry Hall, actual newspaper clippers of family obituaries, tragedies, etc. It was from Esther that I first became aware of the strong parallels between Emily Todhunter and Nero Wolfe. Her daughter tells me that working with me on the book gave her mother a new lease on life as she was passing into her eighties. It gave me a new lease on life knowing her. Sometimes we enjoyed talking on the phone and enjoyed laughing at one another's accents—Boston vs. Ohio. But, alas, we never met. But hold the thought for her, we are all in her debt.

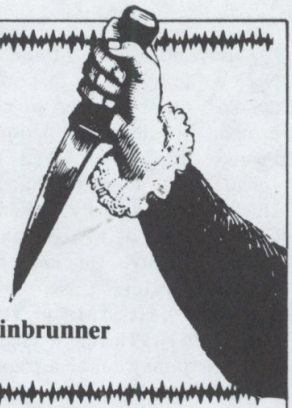
* * * * *

The Thorndyke File now is in its eighth year. $5.00 will buy you a year's subscription (two issues) and membership, with membership card, in the R. Austin Freeman Society. Those overseas, make that $6.50.

Royal Decree: Conversations with Rex Stout is finally out, after many delays, but worth the wait. The cover, done by a *Punch* artist, another of Rex Stout's British fans, is a nice surprise.

Keep the copy coming to me, as well as subscriptions to *The Thorndyke File* and orders for *Royal Decree* ($6.50 for a numbered, inscribed copy), to Mount Independence, 121 Follen Road, Lexington, Mass. 02173. And, again, thanks one and all for your strong support. □

The Radio Murder Hour



By Chris Steinbrunner

No other detective in the annals of literature is so immediately perceivable by voice alone as is Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes—a style, a diction, a turn of phrase, a commanding inflection that is instantly recognizable. Recently, The Maltese Falcon Society, New York chapter, met at Bogie's Restaurant—with black falcon statuary cocking ears in attendance—to listen to a tape collage cleverly put together by radio historian William Nadel of Sherlockian voices. The game was once again afoot—this time with sound effects!

Some of the audio tracks were actually from Holmesian movies. Once more, an amused Robert Stephens in Billy Wilder's underrated *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* berates Watson for chronicling him as a violin virtuoso while "I could barely hold my own in the pit orchestra of a second-rate music hall." We could study other cinematic Holmeses from the vantage of their voices alone. Stewart Granger seems a better Sherlock, as he pursues a television Hound, for the listening than for the viewing. Roger Moore sounds surprisingly apt, as he brought to the role his absolute best (he loved the part, for it gave him "more dialogue than I ever had in 120 *Saint* episodes and two Bond films"). Peter Cushing's tones are not always sturdy, and James Mason's Watson is at times almost too eloquent, good though he is. And it was a delight to hear Conan Doyle speak in an early newsreel of how "I thought I would try my hand at writing a detective story where science would take the place of chance..."

But these tracks are only a prelude to an assembly of excerpts from rare radio shows. Rare, indeed, for we first hear William Gillette on a 1930 NBC series—a wonderfully lively, confident detective deducing from a missing waistcoat button that Watson's wife is away: "Elementary, my dear fellow, elementary!" A cheery, energetic voice—radio's earliest Holmes was among the medium's best. The same scene is repeated almost a decade later, when Orson Welles starred in an adaptation of Gillette's stage play for *The Mercury Theater,* and a bewildered Watson gasps: "Holmes, if you had lived a few centuries ago, they would have burned you alive!" Retorts Welles as a breathless, hurried, and flute-voiced Sherlock, "A child's play of deduction." Nearly twenty years later—and far more sinisterly—Welles would portray on a BBC radio series the evil Professor Moriarty.

In the 'forties, Basil Rathbone demonstrated that it was not his Sidney Paget looks alone which made him the perfect Sherlock Holmes. For seven years, he brought the great range of his talent to a weekly radio series for which Anthony Boucher wrote many of the scripts. "The Adventure of the Accidental Murderess" is a typical play: Holmes and Watson are on a rustic holiday when a shot rings out during a forest stroll. "Holmes, Holmes, are you hurt?" blurts Watson (the endearing Nigel Bruce), and the detective murmurs, "I...I think I am..." His wound does not prevent him from immediately making sage deductions drawn from the bullet's echoing sound.

William Gillette

When, in 1946, Rathbone stunned his public by deliberately withdrawing from the confines of the role, Tom Conway was cast as Sherlock for some 39 weeks. He made a quite adequate detective, although Rathbone had left him a difficult act to follow (fortunately, Nigel Bruce remained behind to give him good, Watsonian support). His voice is self-possessed yet pleasant, especially in an excerpt wherein he hears a client who had previously left a pipe at Baker Street knocking on the door: "Now we will have something more than his pipe to study," said with the proper lilt.

Other voices tumble in parade. Sir John Gielgud is a mellow, warm Holmes opposite Sir Ralph Richardson as Watson. Carleton Hobbs, who starred as Sherlock Holmes for countless years on the BBC in dramatizations of nearly every story, is an older voice, but at times unexpectedly pungent, as when he comments on the possible fate of Lady Frances Carfax: "One of the most vulnerable classes in this world is the drifting and friendless woman; she's a chicken in a world of foxes, Watson." Robert Hardy, who recently portrayed Winston Churchill in television's *The Wilderness Years,* was a robust-sounding Sherlock in the Argo Spoken Word recordings. We hear a brief snatch of Robert Langford, who played the detective in a series on South African radio. The faraway past of radio's golden age—a period of time through which Holmes was hardly ever off the air—once more comes alive.

But it is not *all* long-distant past. In the last few years, Hi Brown's esteemed *Radio Mystery Theater* has presented actor Kevin McCarthy in about a dozen hour-long adaptations of Sherlock Holmes stories. He is an enthusiastic, yet traditional, detective, responding as vigorously as the great players before him to the prospects of a new adventure—as when an anxious client blurts ominously: "The very noblest in the land may suffer unless a way is found out of this frightful affair."

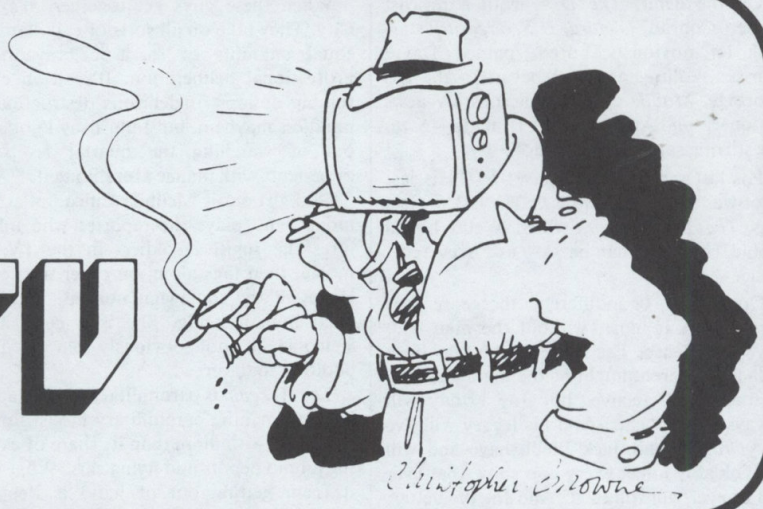
Chronicler Bill Nadel fittingly ended his audio reel with a reprise of Basil Rathbone—surely the best radio Holmes of all, and the one actor to play him in every medium, and always well—reading from the beloved Vincent Starrett poem which closes:

Here though the world explode
These two survive...and it is always 1895.

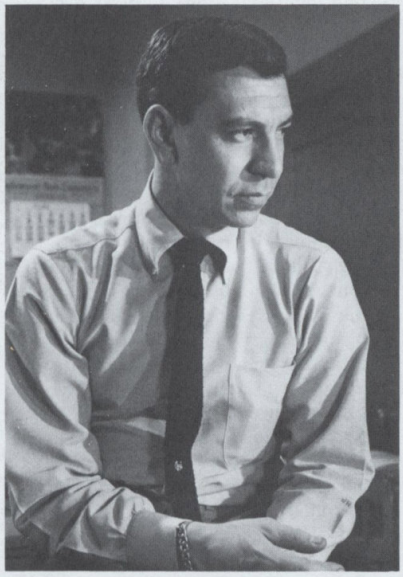
For surely, as Starrett noted in the same poem, "Only those things the heart believes are true." And to which the heart's ear listens.

NOTE: TAD readers interested in contacting *The Maltese Falcon Society* can reach them care of Judy Freeman, 1 Bogardus Place, New York, N.Y. 10040. □

TAD ON TV



By Richard Meyers



The heart of the television detective died December 23, 1982 at the age of sixty-two. Never mind that he married four times. Never mind that the majority of his contributions to the genre were unsuccessful. Never mind that he died of a heart attack at that relatively young age. Those are just the facts, ma'am.

What should be remembered is that Jack Webb was, by and large, the TV Detective personified. He was its strength, its backbone, its conscience, and its morality. Until *Dragnet* appeared on the network, the old genre on the new medium did not have an identity of its own. Although the groundbreaking series had been a radio mainstay since 1949, it took on a unique visual life of its own once it reached the tube.

The story you are about to hear is true. Jack Webb was born April 2, 1920, just missing April Fool's Day. His father had abandoned the family months before, leaving the mother and her mother to raise the boy in poverty in Los Angeles. Webb excelled in school to the point that he was offered an art scholarship which he was forced to reject in order to support his family by working in a clothing store.

World War II came to his rescue. The USO shows were outlets for his burgeoning talents. Once VJ Day came, Webb went to a radio station in San Francisco to read the news and spin jazz platters—his first foray in combining reality and fantasy. The mystery genre soon invaded his career, after he auditioned and secured the lead in *Pat Novak For Hire,* a half-hour private eye radio program.

Hollywood beckoned, so, by late in the decade, Webb was appearing regularly on movie screens. He could be glimpsed in *Sunset Boulevard,* but his clipped yet intense personality was showcased in *The Men* starring Marlon Brando. But it was on the set of the police thriller *He Walks By Night* that Webb met technical advisor Sergeant Marty Wynn, who dreamed of a realistic, fact-based police series. He had come to the right person.

The LAPD gave the persuasive Webb its cooperation, and he repaid their help by making the radio *Dragnet* into the most popular series on the air by 1951. The distinctive theme song, the esoteric police terminology, the low-key passion of a cop doing his job, the love of the law, the triumph of justice, and the stylistic gimmicks all combined to rivet the audience to their seats.

Today, *Dragnet* seems a satire of itself. Sergeant Joe Friday had become the butt of too many jokes—good and bad. What seems most memorable now are the classic satires: Stan Freberg's "St. George and the Dragonet," *Mad* magazine's delirious lampoon, the brilliant battle of alliterations between Webb and Johnny Carson on *The Tonight Show.* But, at the time, *Dragnet* was the most powerful drama TV had to offer—often rivaling the overpraised live theater in the "Golden Age of Television."

This was not poetry, this was not metaphor, this was not illusion. *Dragnet* was real life at its saddest, its ugliest, its most pitiful. But standing above it all—not judging, just doing his job—was Joe Friday. He had only three words of explanation: "I'm a cop."

How soon so many forget. Ironically, Webb himself did not help. His company, Mark VII, seemed to grind out one law show after another, each—whether a ratings win or loss—chipping away at the foundation of *Dragnet's* credibility. On the success side were *Emergency* (1972–77) and *Adam-12* (1968–75), a patrol-car program whose uniformed riders gave new meaning to the word "catatonic."

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On the debit: *The D.A.* with a miscast Robert Conrad, *O'Hara, U.S. Treasury* starring an obviously bored, pained David Janssen, *Chase,* a pitiful paean to the gas shortage, *Mobile One,* a ludicrous TV-news actioner, and—the Mark VII nadir—*Sam,* the stirring saga of a police dog.

His last series was *Project UFO.* His last pilot was *The 25th Man/Ms.* His last project was *The Department,* which Webb hoped would counter what he saw as "irreverent" police shows.

Good, bad, or indifferent, the genre goes forward, as it must, without the man who gave it credence. The shows Webb may have seen as irreverent might be the mind and soul of the TV Detective, but Joe Friday will always be the heart. And his legacy will live on. *Dragnet* and Jack Webb have and will unavoidably affect every cop show that ever did or ever will follow it. And for the better.

The genre must not only recover from the loss of its forefather but from the catastrophic 1982–83 season. *The Devlin Connection, Gavilan,* and *Bring 'Em Back Alive* are already gone. *Tucker's Witch, Matt Houston, Remington Steele, T. J. Hooker,* and *Cagney and Lacey* are holding on by the skin of their knuckles. Only *Hill Street Blues, Magnum P.I.,* and *Simon and Simon* have any ratings security (which is as it should be since all three are solid stuff).

The slight tightening executive producer/creator Phil DeGuere wrought on the latter series served to strengthen the program enormously. The Simon brothers have begun to live, filling out the sometimes less than solid stories. More often, however, the smooth direction, top-notch technical control, and involving plots carry the day, making this whimsical, heartfelt p.i. effort the best thing since Rockford hung up his gumshoes.

In the meantime, *Rockford* co-creator Stephen Cannell has continued his penchant for high-powered fantasy (witness his *The Greatest American Hero*) by co-creating and writing scripts for *The A-Team,* an NBC mid-season replacement. Frank Lupo is the other half of the creative team, serving as producer for the frenetic melodrama which combines *Mission: Impossible* and *The Fugitive.*

George Peppard, veteran of one mystery series (*Banacek*) and one medical show (*Doctors Hospital*) stars as John Hannibal Smith, the leader of a crack (and cracked) mercenary unit who take on relevant small-scale wars while on the run from the American military who want their bones for a Vietnam treachery they did not commit.

Smith's penchant is for big cigars, comfortable shoes, and heavy disguises (harking comparisons to *The Wild Wild West's* Artemus Gordon and the IMF's Rollin Hand). Filling out his team are Dwight Schultz as A-Team's certifiably insane pilot (they had to break him out of an asylum in the initial teleflick), Dirk Benedict as "The Face," their womanizing Romeo and all-around slick front, and Mr. T, the co-star of *Rocky III,* as B. A. Baracus, a mountain of a man whose only flaw is a pathological fear of flying.

When these guys get together, it's Quip City. They take on all sorts of evil plans with equal amounts of sarcastic bravado and professional deliberation. It's all an excuse for big dollops of delirious destruction and mindless mayhem, but I must say I got a kick out of watching the quartet level their opponents with malice aforethought.

Odd girl out is Melinda Culea, an actress/model who plays the reporter who initially hires the fugitive soldiers in the TV pilot movie, then tags along on other missions to represent the somewhat normal, non-homicidal human being. She is a cutie and a welcome, if not obviously out of place, addition to the crew.

The A-Team is paramilitary fascist fantasy, but entertaining paramilitary fascist fantasy, served up with more than its share of exploding ammo depots and flying cars. What keeps it from getting out of hand is Peppard's panache and Cannell's creativity.

The actor is equally at home with potentially embarrassing lines such as "This has nothing to do with religion...this has to do with power. . . . He is a crazy cultist terrorizing kids," as he is when he explains why he is going back to destroy the cult after safely escaping: "He stole my boots. . . . Nobody steals my boots."

The writer is great at having the group make a debilitating array of weapons out of seemingly haphazard pieces of junk. Seeing Mr. T make a flame thrower out of a truck's undercarriage, a broken heater, and a washing machine is really neat. All in all, *The A-Team* is pleasantly nasty schoolboy stuff—more war adventure than detective mystery. But, what the hey. Nothing else is on at the moment, and I can't help but feel the A-Team won't make it to next season. Brainless brutality wears its welcome out quickly, even on me.

Well, since television is in that never-never land between the failure of the September 1982 shows and the introduction of the Winter 1983 replacements, I have time to comment on the outer limits of the genre. Since I managed to talk about *Dallas* after the "Who Shot J.R.?" fiasco, it's only right that I say some words about its main competition, *Dynasty.*

This is nifty "corruption in the halls of power" stuff, written without shame and done to a turn. Besides that, it has two things going for it: attractive women in all age categories and John Forsythe. The acting ranges from cursory to capable across the board all the way up to the *Bachelor Father* veteran. He pulls off one of the best small screen acting jobs I've had the pleasure to admire.

In anyone else's grip, the big-business patriarch would come off as a two-dimensional cliché. Forsythe makes him believable, delivering a close to perfectly controlled portrayal. And believe you me, that isn't easy when the myriad plotlines include poisoning the paint in an enemy's office to slowly drive him bonkers—an audacious technique I haven't seen since the time a killer laced wallpaper with "Paris Green" on *Burke's Law.*

On other fronts, the biggest thing in telelaw today is *The People's Court,* a throwback to the glorious era of the "court" shows such as *Divorce Court, Night Court, Traffic Court,* and even *Juvenile Court.* The new series is closest to *Small Claims Court* in that it tapes a real case with damages claimed up to $1,500.

You see, the producers ask various real-life litigants whether they want to bare their cases for the camera. If they do, they will not only be able to be paid for their appearances but split a pot of $1,500, depending on how much the judge awards to whomever wins. The judge is real, but retired, only he has been empowered by California law to make binding decisions.

This fellow, Judge Wopner, really makes the series work. He is the Marcus Welby of judges, a white-haired, tough-but-tender law-giver who can crack a feeble joke or two but will take no guff from nobody. Of course, the "small potatoes" cases help to make the program interesting, since most viewers can identify with a neighboring dog eating one's prize petunias or a used car blowing up several seconds after purchase.

The People's Court is flourishing in syndication, and little wonder. I'd imagine that at one time or another all of us (especially us) would be interested in going down to the courthouse and sitting through a lawsuit or two. This series brings chambers into our living rooms. It is so entertaining and seemingly simple that it makes me want to go right out and commit a misdemeanor or two.

While I'm harvesting opinions so far afield, I might as well pass judgment on *Whodunnit,* the Broadway murder mystery written by *Sleuth* author Anthony Shaffer. After all, there isn't a review column called "TAD on Stage." Now, don't panic, anyone: I'm not going to give anything away. All I want to do is enhance what enjoyment one might be able to cull from the entertainment.

This is the kind of show that gets better the more I think about it. At the time, it seemed to give new meaning to the word "lightweight." Something to keep firmly in mind is that the play is a slapstick satire of *The Mousetrap* school of murder mysteries. I am certain it will be a huge hit in stock and amateur theatres because part of the gimmick requires bad acting.

The mystery itself is eminently fair, however. The murderer can be guessed as long as one isn't distracted by Shaffer's sleight-of-hand—an original, inventive, and really quite delightful conceit he first uses to pull the rug out from under us and then uses to lower over our eyes.

In summation, *Whodunnit* does a number on its theatrical origins, using mystery preconceptions to continually keep viewers off balance, and then sneaks in a relatively simple solution from under a wide variety of artificial fireworks. To establish the proper tone, keep in mind that this show would be a perfect touring vehicle for *The Carol Burnett Show.* There's a part perfectly suited to each of her cast—not to mention her favorite guest stars. Go see it and see what I mean. □

TAD at the MOVIES

By Thomas Godfrey

THE TREATS OF SAN FRANCISCO

With all due apologies to the fans of this year's honored guest Robert B. Parker, the highlight of the 1982 Bouchercon-by-the-Bay just had to have been the three-day Mystery Movie Marathon put together by host Don Herron with film coordinator Jayson Wechter and Bruce Taylor of the San Francisco Mystery Bookstore. The measure of its success was in the number of local filmgoers who turned up just for the film events, and the sight of staunch bibliophiles like MWA president Ed Hoch and Edgar-winning critic Jon Breen among those taking in the film program.

With the possible exception of New York, San Francisco has probably inspired more celluloid mysteries than any site in America. A look at an incomplete list of mystery films set largely or entirely in Baghdad-by-the-Bay gives some idea why:

After the Thin Man (1936)
D.O.A. (1949)
The Conversation (1974)
The House on Telegraph Hill (1950)
Impact (1949)
Dark Passage (1947)
The Man Who Cheated Himself (1950)
Chan Is Missing (1982)
Scene of the Crime (1949)
Hammett (1982)
The Maltese Falcon (1940)
The House Across the Bay (1940)
Nora Prentiss (1947)
Sudden Fear (1952)
The Line-Up (1955)
Woman on the Run (1950)
Hell on Frisco Bay (1956)
Shakedown (1950)
Red Light (1949)
Bullitt (1968)
Charlie Chan and the Dragon Queen (1980)
Charlie Chan at Treasure Island (1940)
Shadows Over Chinatown (1946)
Race Street (1948)
The Sniper (1952)
Vertigo (1958)

and telling scenes from the area also featured in:

Out of the Past (1947)
Point Blank (1967)
Alcatraz Island (1945)

If memory serves me, there are even some Northern California scenes in *The Killers* (1962). That, in case you have forgotten, is where Ronald Reagan first uttered the immortal words "Shut up!" in public.

What can be drawn from this list of motley and varied San Francisco films? First, the common denominator of style. San Francisco certainly has the kind of style you can splash all over the screen, whether it be in the form of early-Grover Cleveland gingerbread architecture, fancy hushed restaurants, rugged local terrain, cable cars, the opera, Old Money, new money, funny money... It is no wonder screenwriters and filmmakers turn to the Bay Area for settings, as opposed to say Dubuque or Levittown.

And San Francisco does have variety. In one film, you can cram Nob Hill dowagers, Tenderloin down-and-outers, Castro Street gays, Chinatown Orientals, North Beach literati, dockside hoods, tuna fishermen, campus radicals and reactionaries, conventioneering hookers, run-of-the-mill California crazies, and never once leave the city limits. Short of a profile of the current Congress or a biography of Alfred Bloomingdale, where else can a blasé reader find all this in one story?

San Francisco also offers a distinctive historical progression that gives this variety even greater possibilities: the mission period, the Robert Louis Stevenson-Victorian era, the time of the great earthquake, Prohibition and the 'twenties, the Depression-wartime-and-late-'forties era, the Berkeley-based activist years, and the contemporary hodge-podge. This town just reeks of history and color. Just think of the possibilities—

A homosexual Chinese dowager and campus reactionary with underworld connections schemes to take over a tuna fleet bankrolled by North Beach transcendentalists and some reformed winos from the Tenderloin Hotel during the week of the 1906 earthquake. During the story, the reader encounters Dashiell Hammett, Carol Doda, Luciano Pavarotti, and John C. Frémont.

This stuff practically writes itself. Get Lawrence Ferlinghetti to write the dialogue, Frank Zappa to do the music, Bank of America to put up the money... Who needs David Begelman anyway!

But to the point, the flowering of the San Francisco mystery-suspense film, with all its attendant possibilities, came in the *film noir* era after the War. In 1949 alone, there were ten such films in production with a San Francisco setting. Many factors came together at this time. The studios were still making lots of films, more with lower budgets which lent themselves to the mystery-suspense genre. The public taste had turned away from Andy Hardy and Busby Berkeley. The unsentimental, resigned, misogynistic style Dashiell Hammett had used two decades earlier now suited the times quite well. People were tired and disillusioned, anxious and more than a little suspicious, and the moviemakers finally caught on. It was no surprise that the quirky, appealing, yet tough and indifferent city by the Bay seemed often to provide the right setting.

What is the greatest San Francisco mystery-suspense film? *The Maltese Falcon* will get a lion's share of the votes. *Vertigo* makes a strong showing. So does *Bullitt,* which introduced the breakneck car chase to film. *After the Thin Man* deserves consideration. But let me cast a write-in vote for *San Francisco* (1936) with Jeanette MacDonald warbling her way through thousands of earthquake victims who are exsanguinating and having cardiac arrests all around her. A grand show, and a moment of hard-boiled indifference and brutality that leaves anything that Barbara Stanwyck, Marie Windsor, or Audrey Totter did during the *film noir* era look like rank humanitarianism.

A sampling from my notes of the films shown at the marathon:

★★½ **D.O.A.** (1949) Edmond O'Brien, Pamela Britton, Neville Brand (D: Rudolf Maté)

In spite of its reputation, *D.O.A.* has more than its share of disappointments as a mystery-suspense film. The story idea is everything here. Frank Bigelow (O'Brien) is an office worker for a bonding and insurance company who finds he has been poisoned with radium during a weekend excursion to San Francisco. Bigelow finds the answer to who and why just in time to tell all to the police with his dying breath.

The script is burdened down with some unfortunate howlers, the heavy touch of the director, and most of the actors. The net effect is to keep the audience outside the suspense and uninvolved.

Pamela Britton is especially culpable as Bigelow's faithful girlfriend Paula. She's sweet to the point of diabetic coma and just as out of it. Her character became so hopeless that the audience started groaning before she opened her mouth. Clearly the radium would have been better used on her. O'Brien, often a competent and unsentimental actor in support, is off form in the lead part, with a chronically worried expression that is overused throughout. He tends to over-act in several scenes, most disastrously when the doctors give him his fatal diagnosis.

The best performance is Neville Brand's as a thoroughly sadistic, twisted killer. He gets right under your skin and keeps crawling. Director Maté does best with the camera. (He had been a cinematographer.) The shots of San Francisco at night are so good, the audience may look more at the scenery than at the actors. Dimitri Tiomkin's score is very much hit-and-miss, best when imitating Max Steiner's score for *The Big Sleep,* worse when underlining scenes (which are already overwrought) with music that sounds inspired by *The 1812 Overture.*

★★★ **Charlie Chan at Treasure Island** (1940) Sidney Toler, Victor Sen Yung, Cesar Romero (D: Norman Foster)

This was one of Toler's first films as the famous detective, and one of his best. This time Chan has come to Treasure Island in San Francisco Bay for the 1939 World's Fair. A mystery writer friend (Louis Jean Heydt) commits suicide en route to the fair when he receives a threatening radiogram from Dr. Zodiac, a shadowy psychic and blackmailer. Naturally, Chan tracks down the elusive Zodiac with the help of his number two son and magician friend The Great Rhadini (Romero).

It's great fun from start to finish, full of séances, thin-air disappearances, magic stunts, illusions, hidden identities, hypnosis, hidden eyes, and the like. No wonder Monogram Studios went back to this sort of hokum when they bought the series from Twentieth Century-Fox four years later.

Foster, who directed most of the Mr. Moto series, also at Fox, keeps the plot moving. No energy is wasted on character development or peripheral romance. The audience's attention is riveted to the story, where it belongs.

With Douglas Dumbrille, one of the screen's best villains (most memorably jinxing the Marx Brothers in *A Day at the Races* and *The Big Store*), Sally Blane (Loretta Young's sister), Donald McBride minus the slow burns, and June Gale (who later allegedly pushed her husband Oscar Levant down the stairs during one of his fits of hypochondria and cracked a few of his ribs).

★★½ **Miracles For Sale** (1940) Robert Young, Florence Rice, Henry Hull (D: Tod Browning)

A fairly dedicated adaptation of Clayton Rawson's *Death Wears a Top Hat* with the main character's name changed to Mike Morgan (maybe the people at MGM thought the name Merlini sounded too much like Mussolini). Whatever the reason for the change, Young plays him in a rather serious, sober, consciencious fashion, much suited to his later *Father Knows Best.* Morgan runs a magic shop and gets involved with murder among psychics, mediums, escape artists, and the like.

The story is pure contrivance but adequate within its own logic. The dialogue and most of the performances are serviceable but nothing special. The murderer, however, will be spotted much too early, though the plot is extremely convoluted and everyone in the case turns out to be interrelated by the end.

MGM, the Rolls Royce of studios, gave even their B's a certain gloss and glamour, and that helps. So does an interest in magic. Rare and watchable.

★★★★ **Vertigo** (1958) James Stewart, Kim Novak, Barbara Bel Geddes (D: Alfred Hitchcock)

There are many Hitchcock scholars who argue that this is the best of his American films. It's a tough argument to refute. His touch here is smooth and certain, never compromised by the schlock Universal and his TV experience were to foist on later work. The story of a phobic detective who becomes obsessed with the memory of a suicidal woman he was hired to protect benefits greatly from the performances of James Stewart, Kim Novak, and Barbara Bel Geddes. Stewart, so very changed from the gangling youth of *You Can't Take It With You* and *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington,* achieved another acting peak in his middle years in this film and in *Anatomy of a Murder* which followed. The stammering innocence was toned down and made subservient to other character traits of a given part. Here he pushes the detective's craziness right up to the limit, yet never loses audience sympathy.

Kim Novak, whose stardom usually outshone her talent, comes across perfectly as the woman of mystery. Hitchcock knew just what to have her do to be alluring. Nothing. Her lines are minimal and understated. The camera and the settings do most of the acting for her. In a long sequence in which she seduces Stewart at some of San Francisco's most atmospheric settings, the overall effect is hypnotic. Hitchcock allows the audience to see and feel what is going on, rather than having the characters tell about it.

Bel Geddes's part as Stewart's understanding, long-suffering girlfriend is decidedly secondary. She has many of the same physical characteristics as Grace Kelly, Hitchcock's prototypical ice blonde, but Bel Geddes is given only half a role, the proper, "good" girl, with her horn-rimmed glasses and her hair and emotions pushed back. Novak embodies the other half—sensual, dangerous, and ultimately more exciting. Kelly, of course, played in *Rear Window, Dial M for Murder,* and *To Catch a Thief.*

Composer Bernard Herrmann gave the director perhaps the best of a series of fruitful musical collaborations, a score which is at once chilling and sensual, romantic and ominous, just like the film itself.

Surrender to the charms of *Vertigo,* one of the dozen or so masterpieces of the mystery-suspense genre—perfection right down to the core.

CURRENT AND CONTROVERSIAL

★★½ **Still of the Night** (1982) Roy Scheider, Meryl Streep, Jessica Tandy (D: Robert Benton)

Writer-director Robert Benton (*Kramer vs. Kramer, The Late Show*) has obviously done his homework on what goes into a successful mystery-suspense film. But this this does not ensure success. In fact, *Still of the Night* is most fascinating as a study of how an intelligent director can conscientiously go through the right motions and still come a cropper.

The most obvious of its failings is an overall roughness of conception and stylistic lack of assurance. The pacing never seems quite right. Suspenseful sequences inadvertently announce themselves as they appear and lurch into gear with all the smoothness of a Mack truck. Compounding this is an overall lack of imagination and reluctance to take chances. The plot is earthbound and predictable. The suspense never grabs you.

Roy Scheider plays a psychiatrist whose patient, a buyer for a Christie's-type gallery, is mysteriously murdered. The man's mistress (Streep) appears in his office one day to return his lighter. Later, as Scheider looks into the murder, Streep becomes the prime suspect, but by then Scheider is romantically hooked.

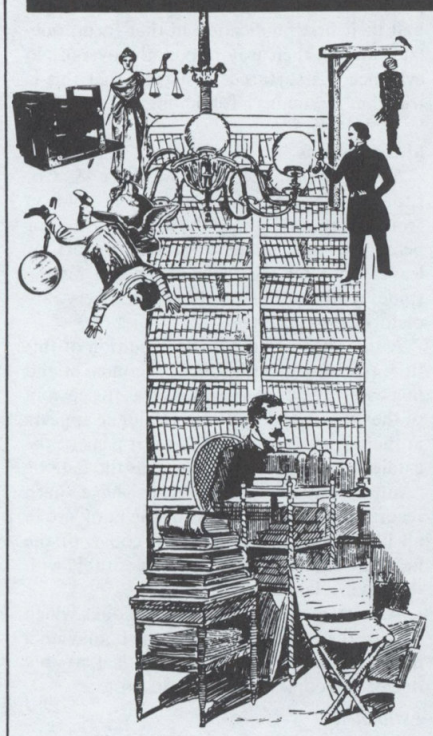
Scheider works better than I would have guessed as the psychiatrist, but he's much too closed-in as an actor to give us much to identify with. We get the lines and a certain air of competent masculinity, but that's it.

Streep, who is so good in *Sophie's Choice,* made the same year, is totally miscast. The part cruelly exposes her performance as an actorish collection of tics and tricks, none of which enables her to convey the requisite sensuality. If Benton had encouraged her to stop acting, she might have come off better.

The best performance comes from Jessica Tandy as Scheider's psychiatrist-mother, but, after two telling sequences, Benton foolishly drops the character.

A dream-like sequence, strongly reminiscent of Hitchcock's *Spellbound,* holds the key to the mystery. The simplistic one-to-one symbolism was passé even in 1945, and Benton does little to disguise it as a dinosaur of a plot device.

In spite of the cult reputation of his earlier *The Late Show,* Benton seems to be more at home dealing with domestic, interpersonal relations. The scenes between Scheider and Tandy have a shine that is nowhere else in the film. It would suggest that the next time Benton should tackle a suspense story like *The Desperate Hours* rather than warming over more Hitchcock. □



COLLECTING Mystery Fiction

By Otto Penzler

MAX CARRADOS

Generally, when a subject has been discussed as a subject for collectors, a pattern has emerged. It is possible to assemble a respectable collection without great difficulty, but one or two books will remain elusive. Putting together a truly first-rate collection is, in every instance covered thus far (Charlie Chan, Clayton Rawson, Philo Vance, and Judge Dee), a truly difficult challenge.

In the case of Max Carrados, the most famous blind detective in literature, there is a difference. Even though the number of volumes is small—five—it is genuinely difficult to assemble even a passable collection and virtually impossible to collect all the books in excellent collector's condition.

Max Carrados comes from that Golden Age of detective short stories when distinguished authors on both sides of the Atlantic attempted to outdo each other in creating eccentric detectives whose exploits were intricately plotted and whose solutions were cleverly, even intelligently, divulged. They were logical and inevitable, and how we miss those stories today; they are simply too demanding for the ordinary writer and too unprofitable for the few outstanding authors of pure detective fiction working today.

Dupin, the first detective in fiction (created to be a detective in a detective story) was eccentric, and so was Sherlock Holmes, the greatest of them all. Looking for new twists, writers tried everything they could to make their creations stand out from the rest: there were priest detectives, children detectives, female detectives (not an eccentricity in the usual sense, but in the context of a time when women were not expected to be off hunting for clues or killers), Oriental detectives, armchair detectives, super-intelligent detectives, aristocratic detectives, backwoods detectives, and blind detectives: in short, every kind of detective that did not ordinarily belong on an official police force.

Many of the books and short stories produced in this Golden Age are garbage in which authors simply attempted to make their detective more eccentric, more out-of-the-ordinary (I am careful not to say extraordinary) than any of their contemporaries, and the solutions to the mysteries in which they become involved are unsatisfactory, incomprehensible, or just plain silly. In spite of all the praise heaped upon them, I suggest that M. P. Shiel's stories about Prince Zaleski, for example, one of the most eccentric of all detectives, are unreadable. As exercises in writing, the long pieces of fiction have some interest for their arabesque excesses; as detective stories, they are pitiful.

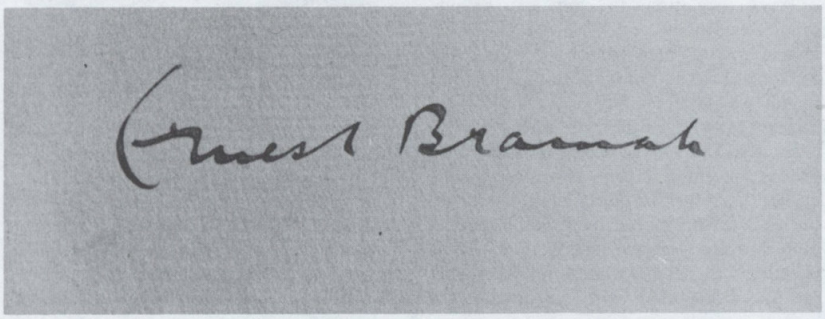
But the best of the Golden Age writers (and I refer to the first Golden Age, in which short stories flourished, not the more familiar Golden Age, between the world wars, when the novel of pure detection reached its zenith) wrote convincingly, even if we remain unconvinced. Readers *knew* that Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, The Thinking Machine, could not have someone explain the rules of chess to him and then defeat the world champion in his first game. And readers *knew* that Max Carrados could not read the headlines of a newspaper by running his hand along the page. But the writing style was there, and we are willing to suspend disbelief long enough to see where we are heading.

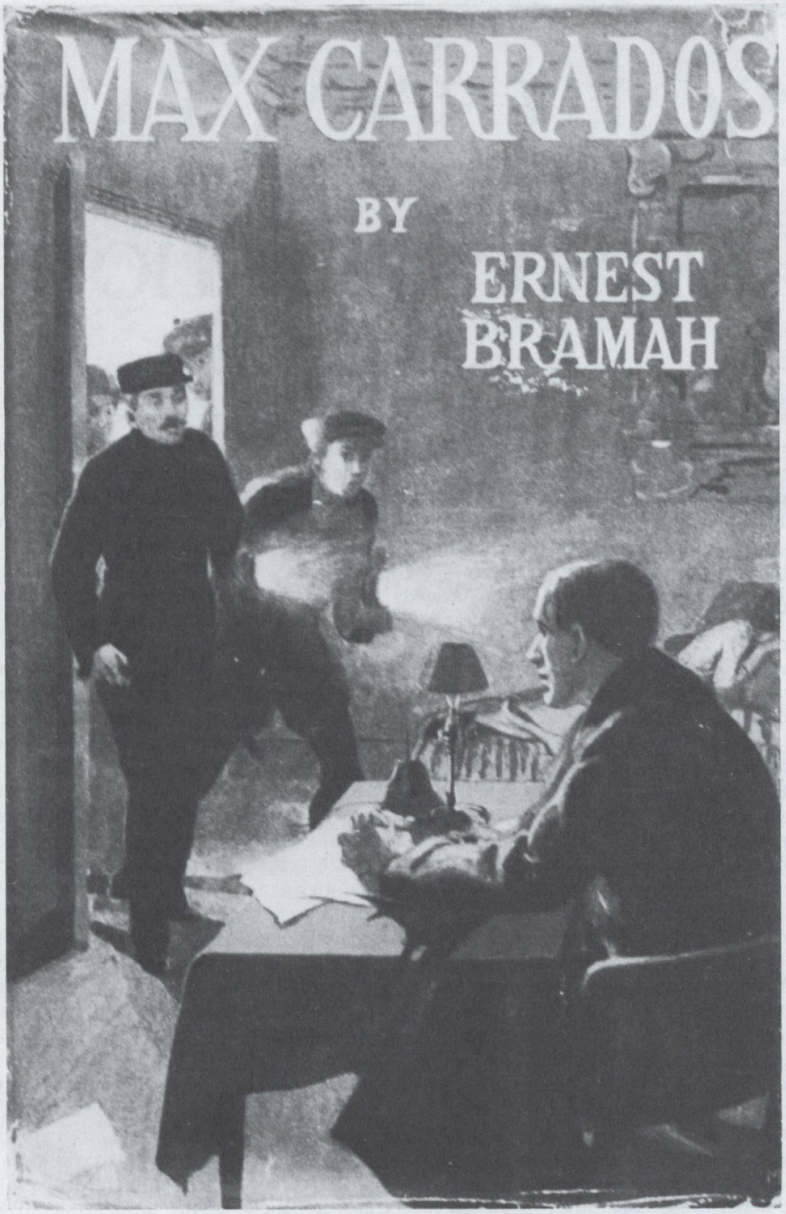
Ernest Bramah (Smith) remains a bit of a literary mystery himself. Remembered today mainly as the creator of Max Carrados and of Kai Lung, an itinerant Chinese storyteller, Smith preferred a reclusive existence and did not offer information about his life to the curious outside world. He succeeded so well that it was a commonly held belief that no such person as Ernest Bramah Smith existed, but that the stories, books, and plays which appeared under his name were either the product of another well-known British author who preferred the cloak of pseudonimity, or that he was a hoax perpetrated by a group of writers. To lay those rumors to rest, Bramah finally permitted a photograph to be taken and responded in the introduction to *The Specimen Case* (1924): "Either I am to have no existence, or I am to have decidedly too much: on the one hand banished into space as a mythical creation; on the other regarded askance as the leader of a double (literary) life."

No matter how little is known of his personal life, it is through his literary creations that Ernest Bramah (1868–1942) will be remembered, and it is Max Carrados that will be remembered best and longest.

There are only three short-story collections devoted to the charming blind man, one novel, and a single short story collected in another volume of Bramah's fiction, but the character has a permanent place in the history of mystery fiction. Ellery Queen, in his often-quoted book, *Queen's Quorum,* describes *Max Carrados* as one of the ten greatest detective story volumes, and few would dispute the claim.

As with many stories that rely on a





contrivance, the literary level is uneven, and the situation with Bramah's Max Carrados stories is extreme. The best dozen or so are at the very highest rank of detective fiction, elbowing for a foothold on the ladder's top rung with the stories featuring Dr. Thorndyke, Father Brown, Uncle Abner, The Old Man in the Corner, and The Thinking Machine (Sherlock Holmes is in a class by himself and jostles with no one).

When the quality falls off, however, it absolutely plummets. Familiar ground is covered in the weak (generally later) stories, and the author even cheats from time to time by bringing in elements of the supernatural. Although much admired by a few critics, the novel, *The Bravo of London,* is undistinguished. Still, the same criticism of unevenness can justly be leveled at all the detectives noted above, and it is unfair to diminish Bramah's achievement by pointing out that not every story attains the same lofty heights as the best of them.

None of the first editions of the Max Carrados books is common, though it is not difficult to find reading copies of some stories. Max Carrados is anthologized frequently, and Dover performs a splendid service by keeping in print (for more than a decade) *Best Max Carrados Detective Stories,* selected and introduced by E. F. Bleiler, a volume of ten stories culled from the three collections. Bleiler speculates that other Max Carrados stories may exist, forgotten in the pages of English magazines (since the stories had their first publication in that form, only later finding their way into cloth covers). No evidence has surfaced to suggest that this is true, but it remains a fond hope.

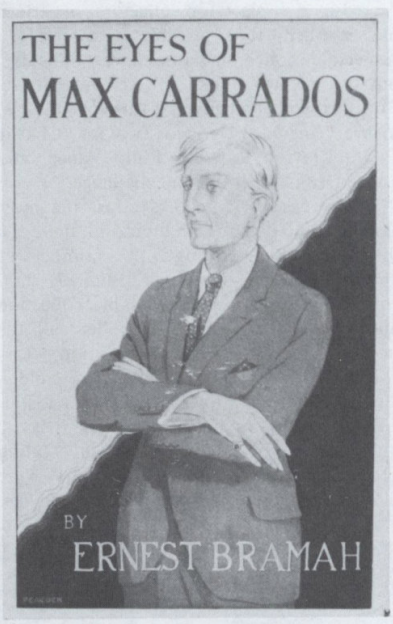
Max Carrados

First Edition: London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., (1914). Red cloth, lettered in gold on front cover and spine, the title and author being contained in an ornate framework of leaves both on the front cover and on the spine; rear cover blank. Issued in a very rare pictorial dust wrapper.

Note: There is no American edition of this title. At the rear of the book, Methuen bound in a catalogue of its books, as was the custom of the time. The date of the catalogue appears at the top right corner of the first page of the catalogue, and it is essential that the date be "Autumn 1913." Later dates have been recorded. While the sheets of the book are in all likelihood the same for all copies of the first edition, the volume is less desirable with the ads in a later state.

As with more than one of the books which follow, the estimated price of the book with a dust wrapper is virtually hypothetical, as only one or two copies are known to exist.

Estimated retail value:	*with d/w*	*without d/w*
Good	$ 750.00	$100.00
Fine	1,500.00	350.00
Very fine	2,000.00	500.00



The Eyes of Max Carrados

First Edition: London, Grant Richards Ltd., 1923. Blue cloth, lettered in dark blue on front cover and spine; rear cover blank. Issued in a pictorial dust wrapper.

First American Edition: New York, George

H. Doran Company, (1924). Yellow-orange cloth, lettered in red on front cover and spine, with two small ornamental devices on front cover (all lettering and devices enclosed in a box) and one small ornamental device on spine; rear cover blank. Issued in a pictorial dust wrapper.

Note: The first American edition was published a full year later than the British edition, and is the only one of Bramah's Max Carrados books to be published in the United States. The first printing of this edition has the Doran monogram on the copyright page; if the monogram is absent, the book is a later printing.

Estimated retail value:	*with d/w*	*without d/w*
First Edition		
Good	$ 200.00	$ 25.00
Fine	650.00	75.00
Very fine	1,000.00	125.00
First American Edition		
Good	$ 50.00	$10.00
Fine	125.00	20.00
Very fine	200.00	25.00

The Specimen Case

First Edition: London, Hodder and Stoughton Limited, (1924). Red cloth, front cover blind stamped with the title and author, all enclosed in several blind stamped boxes; spine printed in black, with a rule between the title and author's name; rear cover blank. Issued in a pictorial dust wrapper.

First American Edition: New York, George H. Doran Company, (1925). Blue cloth, lettered and ornamented on front cover and spine in orange; rear cover blank. Issued in a pictorial dust wrapper (using the same illustration as that of the English edition).

Note: This volume is an attempt at a literary tour-de-force in which the author seeks to provide an example of every type of story that he is able to do. Among the examples is a single Max Carrados short story, "The Bunch of Violets," which makes its first book appearance here. While it would be stretching the point to call *The Specimen Case* a Max Carrados book, it must be included in any collection which attempts completeness. The first printing of the American edition has the Doran monogram on the copyright page; if the monogram is absent, the book is a later printing.

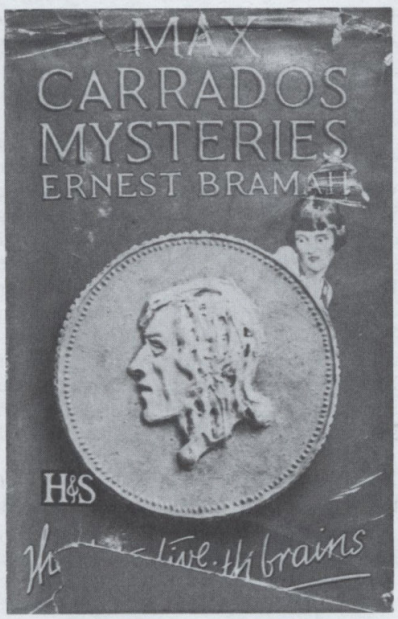
Estimated retail value	*with d/w*	*without d/w*
First Edition		
Good	$ 35.00	$15.00
Fine	125.00	25.00
Very fine	200.00	35.00
First American Edition		
Good	$ 20.00	$ 7.50
Fine	65.00	15.00
Very fine	100.00	20.00

Max Carrados Mysteries

First Edition: London, Hodder and Stoughton Limited, (1927). Blue cloth, black lettering and publisher's logo on front cover, black lettering, ornamentation, rule, and publisher's monogram on spine; rear cover blank. Issued in a very rare pictorial dust wrapper.

Note: There is no American edition of this title. This is the scarcest of the three Max Carrados short story collections, though historically less significant than the first volume, which is a true cornerstone work.

Estimated retail value:	*with d/w*	*without d/w*
Good	$ 500.00	$ 35.00
Fine	850.00	100.00
Very fine	1,250.00	150.00



The Bravo of London

First Edition: London, Cassell & Co., Ltd., (1934). Green cloth, lettered in gold in the spine, with rules at the top and bottom of the spine; front and rear covers blank. Issued in a very rare pictorial dust wrapper.

Note: There is no American edition of this title. It is the last Max Carrados book, and the only novel. Scarce in any edition or condition, it is worth the search as it is an interesting and unusual work, though well below the high standards of the best short stories. The copyright page of the first edition states: "First published, 1934."

Estimated retail value:	*with d/w*	*without d/w*
Good	$ 500.00	$ 75.00
Fine	850.00	150.00
Very fine	1,250.00	225.00

Sincere thanks to Peter L. Stern, by whose courtesy the accompanying illustrations appear. I had seen dust jackets for *The Specimen Case* and *The Eyes of Max Carrados* on several occasions, and on *Max Carrados Mysteries* once, but never on either *Max Carrados* or *The Bravo of London,* so when Peter acquired a collection of all five books in dust jackets, it seemed the appropriate time to request copies of those jackets for use in this column.

Please note that the estimated prices are just that—estimated—and that they are intended as a very rough guide to relative values. They are probably near the center of a wide range of prices that you might expect to pay for books in the condition described in a bookshop or catalogue, presumably being sold by a bookseller who knows what he or she is doing. □

Real Life Cases

CRIME HUNT

By T. M. McDade

THE RICE CASE

On September 23, 1900, a Sunday afternoon in New York, Mrs. Thompson and Mrs. Moody, two elderly ladies, were performing a social courtesy rare today. They were calling on Mr. William M. Rice, an octogenarian who lived at 500 Madison Avenue, and they had brought with them some cakes and wine in a small hamper. Mr. Rice had been ill, but not seriously, and they hoped to cheer him up. Strangely enough, however, there was no answer to the ringing of the apartment bell, and the two gentlewomen departed, disappointed and a trifle puzzled. It was some days before they were to learn that, while they had waited for some response, Mr. Rice was quietly, but oh so quietly, being murdered in his bed.

The Rice case is extraordinary in several respects: a murder victim 84 years of age is itself unusual; more so is the fact that the confessed murderer was released without ever being brought to trial, while the man who was tried for the crime may never even have seen his victim. Moreover, this man who for months planned the killing and the theft of Rice's millions, failed in the first 24 hours after the murder because he was ignorant of the mechanics of cremating a body.

Rice, at 84, possessed all the qualifications for a murder victim as they are often depicted in fiction but rarely occur in real life. He was enormously wealthy for the times, he had made numerous enemies due to his sharp practices, he planned to leave little of his estate to his few relatives, and he lived the life of a recluse tended by a single servant. Making money had been the one passion in Rice's life; he did it well and was thoroughly disliked for it. Born in Massachusetts in 1816, he went to Texas, still a wild frontier, while still in his teens. When only 23, he ran a "groggery" in Houston; upstairs he provided a faro game and roulette wheel. He got enough money out of this venture to set up a "legitimate" business as a pioneer pawnbroker, taking mortgages on cowboys' ponies for cast loans. During the Civil War, he went to Mexico, shipping blockaded cotton to England. When the war ended, he was rich and back in Houston, helping to start the Houston and Texas Central Railroad. Sentiment, he avowed, had no place in business, and he practiced his own preaching. In 1885, he did not hesitate to close down the Houston Savings Bank, which owed him $40,000, though his own brother was the president. A texas newspaper summed up the feelings of his fellow Texans when it wrote on his death: "He is the first Texas millionaire to die absolutely 'unhonored and unsung.' There is none so poor here as to do him reverence."

In the late 1880s, Rice moved to New York, though his principal money interests still lay in Texas: railroads, lumber, hotels, oil and mills. For all his money, he lived frugally, even meanly. In 1899, the apartment at Madison Avenue and 57th Street was scantily furnished and looked more like an office than a home. He cooked his own meals, and, beside a woman who came in for a few hours weekly to clean, his only help was a 27-year-old Texan, Charles F. Jones, who served as secretary and valet. At 84, Rice still carried on his own business, trusted no one, and made all his own decisions. His health generally was good. Though he limped slightly from dropsy, he made frequent trips to his downtown office where he looked the part of the character he was, his white hair close cropped, with a Van Dyke beard, string tie, and Malacca cane. He was twice a widower; his second had died in 1895 after thirty years of married life. Of Mrs. Rice we need only know one fact: by her will she had attempted to dispose of $2,500,000 of her husband's property, an act which lead to his murder.

The basis of Mrs. Rice's action lay in the Texas Community Property Law under which she claimed half of his estate. If Rice were a resident of Texas, then she was entitled to one-half under that law and could will it, as she had, to her sister and some friends. Rice, who had his own plans for disposing of his millions, began a suit in Texas against Holt, the executor of his wife's will, claiming that he, Rice, was a resident of New York and as such was not bound by the law of Texas. To help prove that Rice was still a resident of Texas, Holt had retained Albert T. Patrick, a lawyer in New York. Patrick was himself a Texan, a graduate of the University of Texas, and had formerly practiced law in Houston. He had acquired a reputation for shady legal tactics and as a result had moved to New York.

One evening in November 1899, Patrick called at Rice's apartment. His purpose in this visit was to try to negotiate some kind of settlement of the suit, or, failing that, to obtain evidence against Rice. On this night, the old man had retired and Patrick met Rice's servant Jones. Several things were revealed to the lawyer's sharp eyes. He saw in Jones a farm lad who had been brought to New York by Rice, who found him working in a hotel in Houston. Noting the recluse-like habits of Rice and the friendless life of Jones, he saw this as a value to himself.

On that first visit, when Patrick, a well-dressed, impressive looking man, chatted with Jones, he did no more than lay the groundwork for future visits. He told Jones he was a cotton broker form Texas, and they exchanged news of that state. He left Jones some Texas newspapers and a week later was back. This time he revealed his identity and enlisted Jones's aid in getting evidence to defeat Rice's suit. Patrick promised Jones $250 cash and part of his $10,000 fee if Jones would type out a letter purporting to have been written by Rice to Captain Baker, his Houston attorney, stating he had lost confidence in winning the suit and that he was going to settle the case. Jones had said he could get Rice to sign such a letter without knowing its contents, and Patrick gave Jones a draft of the letter, telling him to type it and keep a copy in Rice's files.

Nothing came of this scheme, but Patrick continued to work on the old man's meanness. He told Jones he was worth more than the $55 a month which Rice paid him and promised that Jones would be "well taken care of." With the growing intimacy between them, Patrick took more and more liberties. On his visits at night, he would rifle through Rice's papers, looking for something to use. Eventually he found something which changed the course of all their lives—it was Rice's will.

Up to this point, there is little doubt that Patrick had but one purpose, namely to get evidence against Rice and win a big fee for himself. Now for the first time a larger prize loomed into view—Rice's estate. In 1891, the old man had founded the William M. Rice Institute in Houston "for the advance of science, art and literature" and had given it more than $1,500,000. Now, in his will, it appeared that, except for leaving his brother a life interest in $80,000, all of his estate, estimated between $5,000,000 and $8,000,000, was to go to Rice Institute. The thought of all that money going to a school was too painful for Patrick, and he had no difficulty in getting

Jones to share his views. As the secretary testified at the trial, "Mr. Patrick thought that was a very unjust will. He said that he did not think it right that Mr. Rice should leave so little of his property to his relatives and give it all to charity; and I said that I though the same thing. I then agreed to go on to assist Mr. Patrick."

The latter proposed making a new will in which friends and relatives of Rice would share half of the estate, the remainder to go to Patrick, who would "take care of Jones." The youth questioned Patrick's taking so large a portion, but Patrick's arguments won out. On one point, however, he did not prevail; Jones refused to be a legatee or witness to the will. Some instinct warned him against either, though the older man had offered to put him in the will for half the estate.

The drafting of the forged will shows Patrick at his scheming best. He decided to give all Rice's relatives substantial legacies, as well as Captain Baker, Rice's attorney, and any persons who might be disposed to testify against him. For instance, three of Rice's Texas agents who could identify his signature got bequests, as did a man who delivered eggs twice a week and the elevator boys who could "identify" Patrick as a visitor to Rice's apartment. His plan was to make it in the interest of everyone to support the will, and, as this would be at the expense of Rice Institute, he carefully included the trustees of that school as personal beneficiaries to cool their ardor for contesting the forged will. Patrick was also anxious that the witnesses to the forged will be the same as appeared in the genuine will. One of these men had been refused a needed loan by Rice, and Jones thought he would be agreeable to helping them. But though the temptation was strong, the man never hesitated. As he told Jones, "I'd like to be the executor of such a large estate, but it would be simply cutting my head off." With this failure, Patrick began to look among his own friends for witnesses. He also had to look ahead to Rice's death to explain how the old man got to know him, and why he would make him his heir. Actually, the two had never met, all of Patrick's meetings with Jones taking place after Rice had gone to bed.

On January 28, 1900, Patrick inserted an ad in the New York *Tribune* seeking heirs and acquaintances of Mrs. Rice. The purpose of this was to try to arrange a formal meeting with Rice, and, even if nothing came of it, Patrick could always claim that he had met Rice through the ad and arranged a settlement of the suit. Rice himself did not see the ad, so Jones called it to his attention, but the old man, wiser than he thought, ignored it, saying that "it was only some lawyers fooling around." Jones, however, typed a letter, presumably from Rice, in answer to the ad and kept a copy in Rice's files.

Patrick foresaw that a legal battle would arise over the estate, and, with that sharp mind of his, he was already manufacturing the evidence he would need. He had one of those egotistical minds which had a reason or argument for everything but could not see the inherent improbability of the whole scheme. To establish that he and Rice had had business relations for months, he had Jones, that docile tool, write some 25 letters addressed to Patrick, all presumably from Rice, expressing the greatest confidence in the lawyer and his ability to settle the Holt action. Deeming it too dangerous to mail these to Patrick lest one go astray, Jones addressed Rice's envelopes to Patrick but inserted ads or handbills and gave the originals to the lawyer. The scheme required that copies of the letters be in Rice's files, but for the time being Patrick kept both copies.

Finally, after months of planning, the lawyer decided to execute the forged will; for witnesses he had procured D. L. Short, a publisher and notary, and Morris Meyers, a lawyer who worked in Patrick's office. With his lawyer's eye for detail, Patrick first got Jones to have both Short and Meyers witness genuine papers for Rice on different occasions. There could be no question then that they had been in the apartment and that Rice's genuine signature appeared on other papers they acknowledged. Also the date used on the forged will, June 30, 1900, was one on which genuine papers had been witnessed by the two men. Jones even had Patrick forge Rice's signature to some checks to pay bills of Rice so that after his death these checks would be found among his papers and could be standards of comparison with the forged signatures. The banks paid the checks without question.

The master stroke in Patrick's mind was in not destroying the old will. As long as this document existed, neither family nor friends could expect to inherit any of the old man's estate. Were he to die without any will, or if the second (false) will were declared invalid, in the absence of the first will, he would die intestate. Thus, while the first will existed, there was a powerful incentive for the family to support the forged will.

While all this scheming was taking place, much of it in his own apartment, the old millionaire went about his business of making more money. It had been suggested to him once that he give Rice Institute the bulk of his estate immediately so that the building of the school could be completed in his lifetime. The argument did not move him. "Anybody can build an institute," he said, "but it wasn't everybody could make money." So he went on making it, while Rice Institute waited and Patrick and Jones plotted to steal it.

One dampening factor was the old Texan's good health. Jones himself was ill, however, and Patrick had the youth use his physician, Dr. Walter Curry, a 67-year-old Confederate surgeon who lived nearby. It was not surprising, then, that when Rice did need a doctor, Curry, who had been there to treat Jones, should be called. It is difficult to say at what precise time the scheme to steal Rice's estate was broadened to include his murder, but it was not later than the cremation letter.

This letter, dated August 3, is addressed to Patrick, beginning "Dear Sir" and closing "Yours truly," rather formal for one's chief legatee. It reads in part:

"Concerning the matter of cremation, I sent down to the United States Crematory office for information and got two circulars which are very interesting. Ever since Col. Ingersol and Col. Waring were cremated, I have thought that I should like to be cremated also. I would much rather have my body burned than eaten by worms or stolen by some medical student and carved to pieces. If I should die I want you to see that I am not embalmed as they fill you with chemicals, but I want you to have my body cremated at once and my ashes put in an urn and interred with my late wife, Elizabeth B. Rice."

At some point in the scheming, Patrick had decided he could not wait for the old man to die naturally. Should the Texas suit against Holt come to trial, all his planning would be wasted. Then another event occurred to force him to move faster. On September 16, Rice received a telegram that a Texas oil plant of which he was the principal stockholder had burned and asked that he advance $25,000 to rebuild it. Rice decided, against Jones's urging, to send the money, thus emptying his New York bank accounts. These were the very funds which Patrick planned to seize on

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Rice's death and which he needed to fight off the other claimants to the estate. Something had to be done rapidly if they were not to lose this chance. When Jones told Patrick of this development, the lawyer told him they would have to get rid of the old man.

For several days, Rice had been ill from eating too many fried bananas. Dr. Curry had been visiting him, more or less regularly, and on Saturday, the 22nd, he found him weak, ill, and a little delerious. That same day, a draft for $50,000 for an advance to rebuild the plant was presented at Rice's apartment, but Jones said that Rice was too ill to sign it. He passed this news to Patrick. On Sunday, Dr. Curry visited Rice again and found him better, and, in response to Jones's inquiry, he said he thought the old man well enough to go to his office that week, perhaps Monday. That opinion insured Rice's death.

Precisely what happened in Rice's apartment that Sunday afternoon was long a matter of conjecture and the subject of much dispute by expert witnesses at Patrick's trial. Late in the day, Jones went out to a restaurant, where he met Patrick, and, after he returned, the two lady callers failed to get admittance, to the puzzlement of the doorman who knew that Rice was in. Shortly thereafter, Jones telephoned to Patrick that the old man was dead, and the lawyer, who had carefully absented himself during this critical period, arrived with Dr. Curry, who was somewhat surprised to discover the patient, whom he had left resting quietly that morning, to be dead. There was nothing in the circumstances, however, to incite his suspicions, and he gave a certificate of death due to "old age and weak heart" with the immediate cause as "collacratal diarrhea with mental worry." The undertaker was summoned, and Patrick gave orders for the immediate cremation of the body. It was then that the first of his elaborate plans fell through. He learned for the first time that it took 24 hours to heat the crematory and that nothing could be done until the next day. At the undertaker's suggestion, Patrick agreed to have the body embalmed, although in the cremation letter Rice had desired cremation to escape that very result. It was planned to have cremation follow as soon as possible. When Patrick left Rice's apartment that night, he carried a suitcase containing securities worth more than $250,000, $450 in cash, and two watches.

On Monday morning, Patrick moved to collect the $250,000 standing in Rice's name in different New York banks. No announement had yet been made of the old man's death. Patrick had Jones prepare four checks in amounts of $25,000 to $135,000, payable to himself and on forms on which he had already forged Rice's signature. One of these, drawn on the Fifth Avenue Trust Company, was taken by a friend, John Potts, and cashed. Short, a witness to the will, took another $25,000 check to Swenson & Sons, bankers, but was less successful. A clerk was suspicious of the signature. Moreover, Jones had misspelled Patrick's first name, writing it "Abert" instead of "Albert." The check was therefore returned, but, when Patrick reindorsed it, the bank called Rice's apartment, insisting on Rice himself confirming the signature. Jones had to admit that Rice died the previous day, so payment was naturally refused. Patrick himself made an attempt to get Rice's securities from his safe deposit box but without success.

That afternoon, Jones sent telegrams to Captain Baker and to Rice's nephew in Houston, who immediately departed for New York. In the meantime, the District Attorney's office had been told by Swenson's of the suspicious attempts to cash the check after Rice's death. That evening, James W. Gerard, attorney for the bank, accompanied by a detective, interviewed Patrick at his home. While admitting the existence of a new will, Patrick named himself only as executor rather than as legatee, knowing the suspicions that would arouse. Returning to Rice's apartment, he found it full of detectives, and from there he went to his own office. His nerves were giving out, and he began destroying all the duplicate copies of the faked correspondence which was supposed to be found in Rice's files. Even this he botched, for he clogged the toilet in which he tried to dispose of them, and the superintendent had to be called to clear it. Finally, he called the undertaker and revoked the cremation order, although this action was superfluous as the police were already guarding the body.

The next day, Patrick was called to police headquarters. After an interview, no attempt was made to detain him, and he returned to Rice's apartment. Though there was still no suggestion of wrongdoing in Rice's death, Patrick told the cleaning woman that she was suspected of poisoning Rice and had better say nothing of his death. He also began seeking supporters for the second will by telling prospective heirs of the amounts left to them. Rice was to have been buried on the 25th, but the police intervened and held the body until the vital organs could be removed for analysis. On the 27th, it was released and cremated at Fresh Pond Cemetary, with only Jones, Dr. Curry, and three detectives attending.

Patrick was now adopting a conciliatory attitude toward the Rice family representative, Captain Baker, who had arrived with young William Rice, the nephew. Despite rumors, the newspapers reported there was "no cloud on the serene face of Mr. Patrick." He would say nothing to the press. "Mr. Rice had a motto," Patrick said. "Never tell anybody your business and then you will know more about your business than anybody else." At a conference on the 27th, held with the family attorneys and the head of Swenson & Sons, Patrick produced the two wills. He also surrendered the securities taken from Rice's apartment and the assignment which purported to transfer to himself the securities held by Swenson's. The only tangible loot he had been able to obtain was the $25,000 for the check cashed through the Fifth Avenue Trust, but even this was eventually released to the estate. He told conflicting stories about his own interest in the transactions and said that Rice had "got stuck on me" and left him all the money which he, Patrick, would devote to philanthropic uses to perpetuate Rice's name. To Baker and Rice, Jr. he dangled the lure of the 5% commission as executors under the forged will. For several days he met and talked with Gerard, Baker, Rice, Jr., and the police. On October 4th, he and Jones were arrested for forgery.

Now the case took a different turn. Faced with the forged cremation letter which Patrick had given—as well as the indecent haste to dispose of the body—the police were quite sure murder had been done. But, search as they might, the analysts could find no poison nor criminal source of death. The lungs had been examined at the time of the autopsy and, nothing but some congestion having been noted, had been cremated with the body. The heart, liver, stomach, and kidneys were all tested, with no result.

Meanwhile, Jones and Patrick were held in jail, where the police concentrated on the younger man. Over the weeks to come, Jones gave them several statements trying to explain Rice's death, but each was broken down under careful study. Finally, in February, he offered one they could accept. According to Jones, Rice unknowingly suggested the manner of his death. One day, the old man was reading a magazine and exclaimed to Jones, "Something should be done to stop dentists from using chloroform." The article was about deaths in the dentist's chair, and Rice added, "The dentist always says it's from a weak heart." When Jones offered the thought that perhaps you could not tell the cause of death, the old Texan suggested that they ask Dr. Curry, which they later did. The doctor agreed that it would be difficult in an autopsy to tell if an overdose of chloroform or a weak heart had been the cause of death. Two weeks later, Jones wrote to his brother in Texas and asked him to send some chloroform.

On the day of Rice's death, Jones had met Patrick on the street and told him that the old man was greatly improved and sleeping well. The lawyer then told him that Rice could not be allowed to live until Monday, as the imminent arrival of Captain Baker would "break up everything." Though the youth protested, he finally agreed to Patrick's bidding, receiving from him the two bottles of chloroform left with the lawyer for safekeeping. When he returned to the apartment, he found Rice as he had left him, lying on his back in bed. Jones saturated a sponge with the contents of the bottle, wrapped it in a cone-shaped towel, and placed it over the face of the sleeping man. He could not bear to stay in the room, but returned in thirty minutes to find the old Texan dead. He removed the towel and sponge, which he burned in the kitchen stove, and aired the room.

On the strength of this admission, Patrick was indicted for murder in the first degree; no

action was taken against Jones, as his testimony was needed to convict the lawyer. Despite this confession, there were still gaps in the State's case. Jones's story, he being an accomplice, would have to be corroborated, and, while there was evidence of a plot to steal Rice's estate, proof of Patrick's participation in the murder was not readily to be found. In fact, the State spent months preparing for the trial, which began on January 22, 1902, sixteen months after Rice's death.

The trial, long and stormy, was held before Recorder John Goff, and the testimony filled three thousand pages. The State had the burden of proving that chloroform was the active cause of death, and, to support Jones's story, experts testified that the congestion in the lungs indicated use of an irritant gas, but most of the testimony was speculative. The trial was a battle of experts. As the conviction of Patrick would naturally settle the question of the forged will, the estate spared no expense in its investigation. A whole squad of handwriting experts testified to the forgeries, on which Patrick had not been very astute. He had used one genuine signature of Rice's to trace most of the forgeries and the signatures were too much alike. Doctors had made dozens of experiments to prove the effect of chloroform on the lungs, and they now testified to the consistency of Jones's story with the known facts.

The defense countered with its experts. On the handwriting, its witnesses were notably weak, but the medical men who questioned the cause of death were experienced and able. The real hole in the defense, however, was the failure of Patrick to take the stand. His counsel did not dare to expose him to the contradictions of his many words and actions. In the end, the jury brought in the only verdict possible with all the damning evidence against him. He was found guilty of murder in the first degree, and a death sentence automatically followed.

Though the Court of Appeals sustained the conviction, it was only by the barest of margins, three of the seven judges voting to reverse because of faulty rulings by the trial judge, Recorder Goff, a high-handed judge whose tactics had cost the State many a reversal. Patrick, however, may have fared better because of this close decision, for, had the court reversed the decision, a second trial might reasonably have produced the same result and a unanimous affirmation on appeal. As it was, the decision of the Court of Appeals provided the Governor with a sound reason for commuting the death penalty to one of life imprisonment.

Patrick's friends did not rest there. While he served his term at Sing Sing Prison, they were working for a parole or pardon. The fact that Jones, the actual murderer, had gotten off scot-free and had gone off to Texas was a strong point in their favor. In November 1912, Patrick was released after almost twelve years' confinement, of which only six were after commutation of his sentence. His late history is uncertain. He was in Texas for a time; his final end is obscure.

In 1910, the suits over Rice's millions were settled, and his money finally went to the institute he had founded. Future students of Rice Institute, who profit from Rice's beneficence, should have at least a thought for Patrick. Though he tried unsuccessfully to steal the estate, he did not do the one thing which would have deprived the university of the money—he did not destroy the genuine will. By leaving this intact, the estate went to the school instead of to Rice's relatives. □

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DOROTHY L. SAYERS Newsletter

A Sonnet for the New Year!

Have you noticed No. 239 of the English Hymnal, in which every line starts with the letters SAINT BARTHOLOMEW in sequence? DOROTHY L. SAYERS has fourteen letters and so will be the basis of a sonnet. The Petrarchan form (*Gaudy Night*, ch. XVIII), as the most difficult, will carry the most weight, but the English form ending in a couplet is quite acceptable, using the iambic decasyllabic meter. The best entry will be published in the New Year bulletin.

The subject matter is not confined to Dorothy L. Sayers or her works, and more attention will be given to technical mastery of the medium than to the beauty of the finished work.

Memories at Bluntisham of the Sayers family are still green, such was the impression that Dorothy made as a child and teenager. She was elegantly dressed and rather distant, notable for the variety of her unusual hats. She walked regularly along the road to church, very much the "daughter of the rectory," wearing a black bowler with a veil. She would not volunteer a "good morning" to anybody but would reply if greeted. When she first came to Bluntisham at the age of four, she had a nanny who took her for walks. Then she had a governess, a Miss Melling, and after that a French lady known as Mademoiselle. The house was often filled with other children who came to stay with Mr. Sayers for instruction. He was an excellent "crammer." The younger ones were all looked after by the governess. There were two girls of about Dorothy's age, carefully chosen, and a younger boy, son of a friend of Mr. Sayers, who was killed in World War I.

Philip Godfrey remembers having tea at the rectory, in the drawing room and not in the nursery, when Dorothy was five and he was about six months older. He remarked on the presence of flies and wished that the useless things would go away. Little Dorothy drew herself up to her full height and said, "Philip, everything is sent by God for some purpose."

Tea at the rectory was never dull because Dorothy was a fascinating talker. Marjorie Maynard remembers Dorothy coming to tea at her house. It was great fun, but she did not come again because her mother thought that she got too excited. Mrs. Sayers was very friendly and was fond of Parma Violet scent. But the Sayers were gentry and did not mix socially with the village people. They had a butler and several servants, and kept a cow and a cowman to milk it. They used to go out walking most afternoons. The Rector had a pony and trap (later a car) in which to visit his parishioners, which he did conscientiously. He was highly respected, very tall and very thin. If you greeted him while he was out walking, he would say "Good day" to you, but only once. If you met him a second time, he would say nothing.

The Rector was also very musical and trained his choir very sternly. It distracted him for his congregation to cough. He would stop the service and say, "Do not cough, please," but he used to get a good congregation because he was a good man. He enjoyed shooting, and used to shoot over old Mr. Godfrey's land. When Philip, who had been a choirboy for many years, got married in the autumn of 1919, the Rector had gone to the living of Christchurch in the Fens, but he kindly came back to conduct the service. Dorothy also used to sing in the choir, and she played her violin at village concerts in the little hall in the churchyard where the Society was kindly entertained to supper before the play last year. During 1914, she had a year at home, and she trained the trebles and altos into quite a good choir. They went carol singing. The Rector came too, but only to help them start on the right note.

Apart from that, Dorothy did not join much in village life. She did not join any societies, and they did not have parties at the rectory except for village fêtes, when there was dancing on the lawn. But the rectory was always full of people. Granny Sayers was tall and thin and dressed in black. She used to call on old ladies living near the rectory and amuse them by reading to them. She once told old Mr. Godfrey that "Charles the Martyr" (King Charles I) "should be remembered," which was not a very suitable remark for an intensely Cromwellian area! Her daughter lived there, too, and from time to time another daughter wearing a nun's habit used to come and stay. Mrs. Sayers's sister, Miss Leigh, lived there permanently.

Mrs. Sayers also used to pay her visits around the two villages, Bluntisham and Earith, "seeing her old biddies," as she used to call it. The rectory gardener used to take Sunday dinner regularly to one old lady. She told Marjorie Maynard's mother that the rectory was infested by mice, so next morning Marjorie was sent off to the rectory with a basket containing a house cat from an unoccupied farm, and gave it to Mrs. Sayers. Dorothy reported that the cat was a very good mouser and continually brought dead mice proudly into the house to show them.

When the Sayerses moved to Christchurch, the Rector specially asked that no presentations should be made to them, but they gave to the parishioners some really lovely things. Marjorie's parents were given a silver Georgian soup ladle.

Years later, when Mr. McNeil took over as rector in 1936, he thought it would be a good idea to invite Dorothy over from Witham to open the church fête. He had a lot of difficulty in persuading her, but when she agreed to come everybody was very excited at the thought of meeting her again. There was a long queue of people waiting to greet her and to talk about old times. But she was abrupt, made a short speech, and soon left. They were looking forward to her spending the afternoon there. But she did not seem to want to meet people, and may have been shy at being treated as a celebrity.

The great news this time is that subscriptions remain the same for 1983, that is: £3.00 or $7.00 (U.S.A.) or $8.00 (Canadian). So please let us have your check as soon as you can. Twenty-seven failed to renew last year, and some renewed after ten months. Don't keep us on tenterhooks, or we shall never get our mailing lists right.

The next thing is to make a note of the next convention. It will be in Witham on Sunday, 7 August 1983. There will be a lecture by Dr. Myles Clowers (U.S.A.) on *The Documents in the Case* and an address by crime writer and critic Harry Keating, followed by a DLS tour of the Fens (*The Nine Tailors*) and The Stewartry (*The Five Red Herrings*) illustrated by slides. The night before (Saturday), there will be an "at home" with Judas Iscariot at the house of Paul and Sheila de Voil.

Now for the Christmas Quiz. Accolades will be awarded.

(a) What subjects did Miss Shaw / Miss Edwards / Miss Chilperic / Miss Pyke teach?

(b) What was Mervyn Bunter before the Great War (World War I)?

(c) What was Lord Peter's voice—counter tenor, tenor, baritone, bass?

(d) Name the four persons whose funerals Lord Peter attended in the canon.

(e) In which stories did Hector Puncheon of the *Morning Star* appear?

(f) What was Mrs. Thripps's Christian name?

(g) Who was Commissioner of Metropolitan Police in the early novels?

(h) Name five people who meant to kill Lord Peter.

(i) Name a sport that Philip Boyes played.

(j) Name the manicurist who gave Lord Peter vital evidence.

(k) Who was the oldest of the five red herrings?

(l) Name the *real* crime writer read both by Ann Dorland and John Ferguson.

(m) Name a character who was brought up in St. Ives, Cambridgeshire.

(n) Name the manager of the Resplendent Hotel.

(o) Who recommended Lord Peter as a detective to Mr. Pym?

(p) Give the Christian names of Potty Peake / Tallboy / Miss Edwards / Mrs. Lefranc.

(q) Give the titles of two books by John Munting.

(r) Name two killers in the novels educated at Cambridge University.

(s) In what tale other than *Murder Must Advertise* did Lord Peter use the alias Death Bredon?

(t) Name Lord Peter Wimsey's history tutor.

(u) Which story mentions the oldest English classic horserace?

(v) What advertising agency other than Pym's is mentioned, and where?

(w) How far was Seahampton from the Flat Iron?

(x) How long does it take to ring a full peal of Stedman's Triples?

(y) Who was the sub-warden of Shrewsbury College?

(z) Which of Lord Peter's clubs did he use in *Murder Must Advertise* and *Gaudy Night?*

Will it never end?

Was there ever such a name as Dorothy L. Sayers for making anagrams? (No, don't answer that one!) The latest crop has come from Margareta Rydbeck of Varnamo, Sweden, author of a thesis on the use of literary allusions in *Busman's Honeymoon.* She receives a special prize for these:

"Stay, rosy herold, ay O rest-shy lord. O try a holy dress; try, O shady loser. O lord, try!" says he. "So dry, salty hero?" "Yes, lord, hot rays!" "O stay! Old sherry? Shy old tea?" "Sorry, toy lords are shy."

"Terry slays hood!" shy Rose told Ray. Yes, so told Harry yes...sold to Harry her sly rosy toad, so Terry sold hay. Hey! dry solo rats!

Behind The Screen and The Scoop

We sincerely congratulate Messrs. Gollancz on publishing for the first time in book form these two broadcast serials in one beautifully produced volume at £6.95. They have not been reprinted since they appeared in *The Listener* in 1930/31 (C41 and C44 of Gilbert's Bibliography), so here is a chance which will not recur of getting hold of a DLS first edition. Write to Gollancz Services, 14 Eldon Way, Lineside Estate, Littlehampton, West Sussex BN17 7HE. U.S.A. and Canadian members can write to us, and we will order the copies and have them dispatched surface mail and bill you in dollars. Send no money until you receive the goods.

DLS was an enthusiastic member of the Detection Club, formed by the leading crime writers of the Golden Age, and took over the chair from G. K. Chesterton. Writing a composite story with each member contributing a chapter appealed to her love of games and puzzles. She edited *The Scoop* and wrote the first and last chapters. She also took part in *Behind the Screen.* Every connoisseur of detective fiction should have the book to hand if only for style-comparison, together with the other composite novels (published and not broadcast), *viz.:*

The Floating Admiral (1931) Gilbert A14. Charter paperback.

Ask A Policeman (1933) Gilbert A17. Not in print.

Double Death (1939) Gilbert A29. Not in print.

If you have any doubt whether to order *Behind The Screen and The Scoop* at once, you may like to hear that first impressions of James Brabazon's *Dorothy L. Sayers* have already changed hands at double the issue price. So take advantage of belonging to the Society!

A competition for real

Or, as they say in the disaster movies, "This is no exercise!" Our indefatigable member Steve Clarke (U.S.A.) has already written over one thousand pages of explanatory notation for all the DLS stories, and the Society is helping all it can in order to achieve as accurate and comprehensive a guide as possible. Can any clever member help us in tracing the sources of these quotations?

(a) "I am striving to take into public life what any man gets from his mother" (attributed to Lady Astor, *Clouds of Witness,* Ch. 6).

(b) "Like the man in Max Beerbohm's story, Wimsey 'hated to be touching' " (*Strong Poison,* Ch. 16).

(c) "I'd rather be alive than not" (G. K. Chesterton somewhere, *Five Red Herrings,* Ch. 15).

(d) "I thought as much, it was the little window cleaner" (*Footsteps*).

(e) "Sorrow vanished, labour ended, Jordan past" (*Unnatural Death,* Ch. 11).

(f) "Where there is no love there is no wealth, but he that is bold shall have gold for the asking" (*Incredible Elopement*).

(g) "Whistle 'em up, Michael, whistle 'em up; East and West will rise from the dead at the sound of a policeman's whistle" (*Haunted Policeman*).

(h) "You are my garden of beautiful roses, my own rose, my one rose, that's you!" (*Whose Body,* Ch. 3).

(j) "Blossoms of honey-sweet and honey-coloured menuphar" (*Have His Carcase,* Ch. 4).

(k) "Any book had served as well, Any book had stopped the bullet, that may be, I cannot tell" (*Have His Carcase,* Ch. 16).

(l) "Mais si quelqu'un venoit de la part de Cassandre, Ouvre-luy tost la porte et ne le fais attendre, Soudain entre dans ma chambre, et me vien accostrer" (*Have His Carcase,* Ch. 15).

(m) "Now is it that it will no, or that it cannot speak" (*Murder Must Advertise,* Ch. 6).

(n) "Like the lady in the Maeterlinck who's running round the table while her husband tries to polish her off with a hatchet" (*The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club,* Ch. 18).

(o) "Oh dry those tears."..."Oh say, what are you weeping for?"..."I weep, I know not why."..."In the deep midnight of the mind" (*Murder Must Advertise,* Ch. 19).

(p) "He whispers, he hisses, he beckons for the bodies of his saints" (*The Nine Tailors,* Ch. 5).

(q) "The University is a Paradise. Rivers of knowledge flow there" (John Donne, but where? *Gaudy Night,* title page).

(r) "God made all integers; all else is the work of man" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 3).

(s) "The word and nought else / in time endures. / Not you long after / perished and mute / will last but the defter / viol and lute" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 3).

(t) "...a greater than he, which is my lady of Shrewsbury" (Sir Francis Bacon, but when? *Gaudy Night,* Ch. 3).

(u) "...not you but Fate has vanquished me" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 4).

(v) "His lordship has drunk his bath and gone to bed again" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 8).

(w) "Mulier vel meretrix, cujus consortio Christianus prorsus interdictum est" (college regulations? *Gaudy Night,* Ch. 12).

(x) "...to spread the tail of vanity" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 16).

(y) "If she bid them, they will go barefoot to Jerusalem" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 16).

(z) "King Darius said to the lions, Bite Daniel, Bite him" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 16).

(aa) "And she was as fine a melon in the cornfield, Gliding and lovely as a ship upon the sea" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 17).

(bb) "The real tragedy is not the conflict of good with evil, but of good with good" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 17).

(cc) "The greater the sin, the greater the sacrifice and consequently the greater devotion" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 17).

(dd) "Ye'll no fickle Tammas Yownie" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 17).

(ee) "The Duke drained a dipper of brandy-and-water and became again the perfect English gentleman" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 17).

(ff) "Make her a goodly chapilet of azured columbine, / And wreathe about her coronet with sweetest eglantine, / With roses damask white and red and fairest flower delice, / With cowslips of Jerusalem and cloves of Paradise" (*Gaudy Night,* Ch. 20).

(To be continued...)

To join the Dorothy L. Sayers Society, send a check for £3.00 or $7.00 (U.S.A.) or $8.00 (Canadian) to the Society at Roslyn House, Witham, Essex, England CM8 2AQ. □

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S BLACK COFFEE —WITH HYOSCINE

By Albert Borowitz

Agatha Christie said of *Black Coffee* (1930), her only original play featuring Hercule Poirot: "It was a conventional spy thriller, and although full of clichés it was not, I think, at all bad." Despite the portrayal of Poirot by Francis L. Sullivan, who was to remain Dame Agatha's favorite embodiment of her celebrated detective, *Black Coffee's* first English run had only a modest success; after being tried out at the Embassy Theatre in Swiss Cottage in North London, it transferred in the spring of 1931 to the West End, where it ran for a few months at the St. Martin's Theatre, the future home of *The Mousetrap*. After suffering brief oblivion, the early play was successfully revived, and, according to Charles Osborne, "has remained a favourite with repertory companies and amateurs throughout the world." In November 1982, The Cleveland Play House staged a fine production of the work as one of its offerings for the holiday season.

Black Coffee's mysteries center on the poisoning of a reclusive inventor, Sir Claud Amory, and the theft of his formula for a proto-atomic device he possessively named Amorite. For all the conventionality of its spy-thriller genre and country-house setting, and the almost balletic stylization of its stage action, the play bears close examination for what it reveals of the roots of Christie's narrative trickery and of her underestimated talent for satirizing the traditional formulae of English crime fiction.

How is it that Christie can fool us time and again? Clearly, her power to deceive is due in part to adroit manipulation of two time-honored plot devices of the Golden Age detective novel—the "least likely person" and the "least relevant detail." By 1930, Christie had tired of the most threadbare version of the "least likely person" formula, in which it is revealed in the last chapter that "the butler did it." In *Black Coffee,* Christie permits flapper Barbara Amory to sneer at the excessive use of this contrivance: "I'm very orthodox in some ways. I've been brought up to suspect the least likely person." But in the hands of the great mistress of the classic detective novel, even this "orthodox" motif yielded new possibilities, as in the early Christie masterpiece in which the murderer was ultimately identified as the narrator of the story. When this solution first stupefied the world, Christie's competitors were left with no *less* likely person to brand as a murderer—except the reader himself. She still held fast to this formula in *Black Coffee,* however: a final twist of the play is that Christie, after laughing off the butler as a suspect, reveals as her murderer a character almost as inconsequential.

A second ruse favored by Christie is to hide the most relevant clue in what is in appearance the least relevant detail of setting, conversation or personality. As in *The Big Four* (1927), it is Hercule Poirot's compulsive neatness that plays a crucial role in the action of *Black Coffee.* His notice of the absence of dust from a medicine box and his rearrangement of a vase of paper spills, which at first glance seem only to be manifestations of his eternal fussiness, ultimately result in determining the time of the murderer's procurement of the poison and in discovering the hiding place of the stolen formula. Such sleight-of-hand in the hiding and triumphant revelation of clues came easily to Christie, who possessed remarkably keen powers of observation. Perhaps Hercule Poirot is paying a tribute to his literary creator when he observes to Richard Amory in Act II of *Black Coffee:* "Women, M. Amory, have a great observation for detail."

However brilliantly Christie varies and elaborates these two plot strategems, they cannot be regarded as exclusively her own. What puts a unique stamp on her best mysteries is the same characteristic (in addition to a fine ear for dialogue) that makes her stories translate so readily to the stage—a gift for visual deception of her readers or audience through misdirection of their attention or psychological responses. We see a group of characters gather in an

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isolated place to form a closed society; motives for their presence and reciprocal grievances are established; and the preparations for murder proceed before our very eyes. In *Black Coffee,* over twenty significant actions are taken in our full view by eight characters involving the fatal black coffee and its ingredients, but many of us will be none the wiser for having seen them all. Christie counts not only on her ability to distract us but also, more decisively, on her talent for leading us into psychological misjudgments of the behavior we have observed—into confusion of hostility with self-sacrifice, of dominance with submission, of the hunter with the hunted. With the charming self-parody that is a characteristic of her early work, Christie neatly hits off this recurrent trick of induced misinterpretation of observed conduct, in the opening pages of "The Adventure of 'The Western Star'," the first story in the collection *Poirot Investigates* (1924). Hastings, looking out on the street below Poirot's window, sees a richly-dressed young woman being shadowed by three men and a middle-aged woman. They have been joined by an errand boy who points after the young girl, gesticulating as he does so. Describing the scene to the detective, Hastings poses what seem to him to be the two alternative solutions to the "drama" being played. Is the girl a crook, and are the shadowers detectives preparing to arrest her? Or are the pursuers scoundrels planning to attack the innocent victim? As in the best Christie work, neither solution is correct. In fact, as Poirot quickly recognizes, the young woman is a famous film star "being followed by a bevy of admirers who have recognized her."

In their reliance on interpretation of ambiguous personal relationships as well as physical clues, Christie's narrative puzzles are well suited to the detectival methods of Hercule Poirot, who, while skilled in the interpretation of footprints, places primary emphasis on the "psychology of the case" and the exercise of his "little gray cells." The penchant for psychological riddling appears very strongly in *Black Coffee,* where the central human puzzle is the quality of the marital relationship between Richard and Lucia Amory.

Agatha Christie and other English detective story writers of the Golden Age are sometimes accused of antiforeignism, a trait cleverly spoofed in Anthony Shaffer's recent burlesque whodunit, *The Case of the Oily Levantine.* But that this charge is not squarely on target in the case of Christie can be seen in her choice of a Belgian detective and in her repeated barbs against the insular prejudices of the English in *Black Coffee.* Once it becomes clear that the coffee has been poisoned, the presence of an Italian guest in the Amory household summons up fantasies of Lucrezia Borgia, the reputed grand poisoner of Renaissance Italy. But an inside joke which Christie

shared with much of her London audience was that hyoscine, the drug in question, had made its first recorded appearance as a poison in an *English* criminal case of 1910. Cleveland (the site of the recent revival of the play I have referred to above) may claim a share in the joke, for the poisoner in the case was one of that city's two most celebrated doctor defendants, an American graduate of a Cleveland homeopathic medial school named Hawley Harvey Crippen.

Dr. Crippen was living an unhappy married life in North London with a flamboyant aspiring entertainer who had one professional appearance to her credit (during an actors' strike). After Crippen's roving eye fell on a younger woman, he murdered his wife with a lethal dose of the narcotic hyoscine (a near chemical relative of belladonna), probably administered in sweetened tea or coffee. Afterwards, he dissected her body and buried the remains under his cellar floor, thus inspiring Seymour Hicks to remark that the murderer had "married in haste and cemented at leisure." Crippen, who is to be seen in Mme. Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors, has earned more substantial stage credits than his unfortunate spouse; he has been the subject of a musical comedy by Wolf Mankowitz and of a Kurt Weill–Alan Jay Lerner ballad in *Love Life,* and his choice of poison has been echoed in *Black Coffee.* □

Minor Offenses

By Edward D. Hoch

During the years of my youth, when mystery magazines were far more plentiful than they are today, I was constantly encountering the somewhat curious Solar Pons stories of August Derleth. I'll admit that at an early age I didn't know quite what to make of them. They seemed to be written in the style of Sherlock Holmes, but they weren't the parodies one might expect at first glance. Derleth seemed quite serious about his Praed Street sleuth, and this baffled me all the more. During one period, I took to simply skipping or skimming the Pons stories when I came upon them in magazines or anthologies.

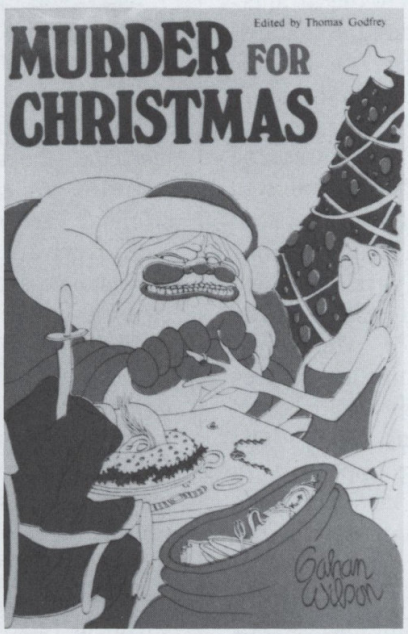
With the passing years, I came to appreciate Derleth's massive contributions to the fantasy field, both as publisher and author, and with that appreciation came a second look at the Solar Pons stories. I read them all when they were reissued in paperback collections a few years ago, and now I've read many of them again in *The Solar Pons Omnibus,* a handsome two-volume set of all 69 short stories and the single Pons novel, *Mr. Fairlie's Final Journey* (Arkham House, $39.95, boxed).

As is natural with a series of stories written over a period of some forty years, the quality of the Pons adventures varies considerably. But at their best they are sometimes better than the later Holmes tales, and simply as an independent series without reference to Holmes they probably deserve a higher niche in the detection Hall of Fame than they've achieved to date. It's good to have them together in this set, which was edited by Basil Copper and has a brief foreword by Robert Bloch, with drawings by Frank Utpatel. My only regret is that bibliographic information about the stories' original appearances is lacking.

Thanks to St. Martin's Press, two long-running British series are now available in America on an annual basis. *Winter's Crimes 14* ($11.95), edited this year by Hilary Watson, features eleven stories by British writers, nine of them new. The other two, by Peter Lovesey and Julian Symons, are among the best in the volume and appeared last year in EQMM. *John Creasey's Crime Collection 1982* ($12.95), the annual volume of the Crime Writers' Association, is edited as usual by Herbert Harris and includes twelve reprints along with five new stories. The best new ones are by Peter Godfrey and Harris himself. Godfrey's "Gone. . .", a wonderfully evocative tale of a deaf artist seeking to solve the riddle of an impossible disappearance that has haunted him since childhood, could well become an anthology favorite.

The early 1983 issues of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* contained some especially memorable items, including a fine offbeat story called "Loopy" by Ruth Rendell in the February issue. The March issue featured Stanley Ellin's first new short story in nearly three years and an especially clever surprise from Patricia Moyes titled "A Lonely Profession."

Ruth Rendell's latest collection, *The Fever Tree,* mentioned here last issue, has now appeared in an American edition from Pantheon ($11.95). *The Tigers of Subtopia* by Julian Symons (Viking, $14.75) collects eleven of his stories, mainly from EQMM. And Lawrence Block's first collection of short stories, *Sometimes They Bite,* will be published by Arbor House in July. The little story is a memorable fishing yarn from *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine.* It's good to see these three books in print at a time when American publishers seem more reluctant than ever to bring out collections of short mysteries.



But if collections are scarce, 1983 is proving to be a banner year for mystery anthologies. The final months of '82 saw Thomas Godfrey's *Murder For Christmas* (Mysterious Press, $19.95), a massive collection of holiday mysteries by 26 classic writers, plus bonus cartoons and special features. And now we have a new themed anthology from Avon edited by Carol-Lynn Rossel Waugh, Martin H. Greenberg, and Isaac Asimov titled *Show Business Is Murder.*

Their next, *Halloween Horrors,* is due from Avon in October.

Bill Pronzini and Martin Greenberg are the busiest anthologists around at the moment. Alone, Pronzini is editing a July title, *The Arbor House Treasury of Detective and Mystery Stories from the Great Pulps.* And with Marcia Muller he's doing an anthology of mysteries by women writers, *The Web She Weaves,* due in October from Morrow. Pronzini and Greenberg together are editing *The Mystery Hall of Fame,* a Morrow title for November, based upon a poll of MWA members to determine the best short mysteries of all time. The book features twenty or so of the top vote-getters, including the five best: Stanley Ellin's "The Specialty of the House," Roald Dahl's "Lamb to the Slaughter," Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," Thomas Burke's "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole," and Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Speckled Band."

Another landmark anthology, published in England by Dent this July, is Josh Pachter's *Top Crime: The Authors' Choice,* in which thirty world-famous mystery writers choose and introduce their best stories. Let's hope there'll be an American edition soon.

I'm pleased to note that my predecessor in writing this column, Ed Hunsburger, has returned to short fiction. His very good mystery short-short, "This One's On Me," appeared in the December 14 issue of *Woman's World,* and we hope there'll be more to follow. □

A CATALOGUE OF CRIME

By Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor

S191 Cumming, Sir John
A Bibliography Dealing With Crime
Patterson Smith, Montclair, N.J., 1970

Originally published in 1935, this third edition revised a "contribution toward" its subject which was first brought out in 1914. The contents are divided into (I) History, Nature, and Causes of Crime, (II) Prevention, Detection, and Trial, and (III) Repression, Punishment, Remedies, Reformation. The authors and works listed form a kind of standard library, much of which is now well known and still usable or interesting or both. There are curious omissions, despite a noble attempt to cover the U.S. and "The Empire," and the author was a bad proofreader. Yet one values this slim volume, for the amateur of true crime has nothing else to turn to but Gaute's more recent but less organized work (q.v.).

S192 Doody, Margaret
Aristotle, Detective
Harp 1980

Nothing is more difficult than to make the ancient world lifelike; the dangers are cuteness and pedantry. Margaret Doody avoids both. The workaday details and conversations, the attitudes and characters—especially Aristotle's—are immediately believable and permanently engaging. And the narrative flows steadily. It is a triumph of skill by a classicist who is actually a professor of English literature at Berkeley. Nor is it merely as an enjoyable reconstruction that the tale has merit: the detection is very good. Aristotle, if one may say so, is a memorable ratiocinator, and the plot and trial scene are also first-rate.

Only two flaws, one big and one small, mar this debut. The serious one is the lack of foreshortening. The book is made too long by having every necessary episode presented in full, to the detriment of speed and suspense. The lesser fault is the attempt at authenticity through spelling—Akhilles, Makedonia, Lykeion, Oidipous, Skythians, Akademia, leader of the Khoros, and so on. It is pseudo-Greek, since the alphabet used is *not* the Greek, and the foolishness is made all the greater by the inconsistency of retaining Aristotle, Athens, Medes, Persians, acropolis, and Alexander. In English it is best to write English.

S193 Fletcher, J. S.
The Mystery of the Hushing Pool
Hillman-Curl 1938

Slow (or shall we say "deliberate"?) as this narrative is, it is well worth reading by anyone who likes the wilder parts of the English northeast coast and who enjoys Fletcher's love of depicting it. Dick Blake comes back from Canada to rejoin his partner, Richard Malvery, a native of Brychester, who was supposed to have arrived there weeks earlier. Both have made money, and Richard had a good deal on his person when, as it turns out, he disappeared.

Blake resolves to find out what has happened to his friend. In the dilapidated Malvery mansion and tower lives a melancholy sister of the missing man. Off in the flats near the estuary, a clan of strange characters—mother, headstrong son, beautiful daughter—lead strange lives. Near them is the Hushing Pool, a mass of whirling water that is guaranteed to drown and keep its victims, while in town is a shady solicitor who hides fierce passions. All these make for good melodrama, which Fletcher artfully combines with systematic search and periodic surprises. To say it again, if you can sip a book, this is a vintage product and possibly Fletcher's best.

S194 Gielgud, Val
The Candle Holder
Maem (London) 1970

This specimen of the Prinvest adventures is largely given over to the weak one of the trio, Clymping, who tells it with too much modesty and breast-beating and a surfeit of compliments to his wife, mother, and partner. But apart from this recurrent annoyance, the tale is well managed and offers a variety of interests—polo, some ill-assorted but well-drawn characters, a well-spaced and original set of puzzling events, and a series of plausible dénouements to the several intrigues temporarily knotted together at the scene of the single (and sensible) murder.

S195 Neville, Margot
Murder of a Nymph
CCD 1950

The scene is Australia as usual, with Inspector Grogan and Sgt. Manning performing in their usual good-natured, folksy way. Come-Hither-Bend is a tight little community of young and young-married people, where there is little or no gossip because everybody *knows*. The one mystery is the mind and purpose of Enone McGrath, who works in the nearby town and thus has a double opportunity to indulge her man-eating habits. It is she, of course, who is soon found bludgeoned not far below the road on which she alighted from her home-bound bus.

As is largely true of this author, the human relations among her people are well done. The byplay between Grogan and the sergeant with his underdog ideology is especially entertaining. So the narrative holds one nearly to the end, when moves and motives multiply in a deplorable muddle. Surely there was a way to end this workmanlike piece without causing bewilderment and disbelief.

S196 Shore, W. Teignmouth
The Baccarat Case
Hodge (NBT) 1932

The pathetic story of Sir William Gordon-Cumming has been told a number of times, notably by John Welcome in *Cheating at Cards*. But nothing less than the full trial is needed to convey the horror of the over-loyal soldier's martyrdom in an unworthy cause, that of sparing the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) a suppositious scandal. Sir William acted foolishly in signing a paper under pressure from his idiotic friends. His hosts were ignorant and culpable in behaving as they did. The Prince was unimaginative and heartless in his self-centered way. And after reading the trial one can only conclude that the jury combined in their twelveness all the faults of the principals in the case.

Notes, Miscellaneous

1. International exchange is as haphazard in crime fiction as in world currencies. What comes over here from England or gets a hearing there follows no sensible pattern of taste or saleability. When you add the Continental countries, surprise is the rule. Thus after a third of a century a French publisher has brought our Patricia McGerr's *Pick Your Victim* as *Pariez sur la victime* (Eurédif, Paris).

The translation by Michel Duchein is not sparkling, but it is idiomatic and correct. The book is preceded by the Preface that these reviewers wrote for the reissue of the book in "Fifty Classics of Crime Fiction" (Garland, 1976), but they knew nothing of the French adoption till the thoughtful author sent them a copy. One may wonder what, apart from the feminist interest, could attract French readers to so typically American a story, but there it is: explain why Agatha Christie is the rage in Germany and Simenon in the U.S.

2. People who consult *A Catalogue of Crime* by way of insurance against disappointment and misspent cash sometimes discover that appetizing books praised in that work are unobtainable even in libraries, being twenty, twenty-five, or thirty years in the past. They should become aware of Harper's "Perennial" and Scribner's "Classic Mystery" paperback series, both of which series follow *C. of C.* recommendations with touching fidelity and trust. □

CURRENT REVIEWS

Sleep of Death by Anne Morice. St. Martin's Press, 1982. $10.95

Tessa Crichton is back in a new play, *Elders and Betters*—a play as unlucky as *Macbeth* if we are to believe the numerous mysteries written on that theme. Nevertheless, *Elders* suffers from changes in stars and directors, rewrites of the script, and serious financial trouble. Bumbling, aging star Philip Mickleton receives some threatening letters—a fact he ignores while it sets the rest of the cast even more on edge. Eventually, the threats are carried out, and it is up to Tessa to unofficially solve things.

In spite of the potential of the plot, and a personal liking for theatrical crimes, *Sleep of Death* is disappointing. Morice's style of almost continuous conversation, without fully identifying the speakers, is aggravating. Most of the characters never come alive. It is difficult to remember each actor's part and function in the plot. This is the type of book that's good for mindless reading on a plane or bus. It's easily broken into, easily forgotten.

—Fred Dueren

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Dealer's Wheels by Steve Wilson. St. Martin's Press, 1982. $10.95

Dealer's Wheels is one of those books, like Gerald Hammond's *The Revenge Game,* which, from the dust jacket, appears to be so strictly limited as to have appeal to only a very narrow audience. While Hammond's world evolves around dogs and guns, Wilson's treats of motorcycles, drugs, and the IRA, yet both are thoroughly enthralling to a wide readership, as they carry the reader along without patronizing into the mechanics of the writer's special knowledge. In *Dealer's Wheels,* proof of this fascination comes in the reader's tolerance of—indeed, enthrallment with—the minutiae of equipping, buying, starting, and running the motorcycle that is Jack Hallam's way out of a bad depression. As the motorcycle revs up, so does Jack, and his journey over the freeways, highways, and lanes of London and the British Isles becomes a metaphor for the route he traverses in his mind.

Jack happens, during his normal routine as a van courier driver, to chance upon an IRA bombing, and what strikes him is not only the carnage he has witnessed but also the impression that the bomb's planter was his long-lost "mate" Denny, a biker who has moved in with Jack's ex-girlfriend Sheila in the time since Jack, on the lam from a drug deal, has fled England for Argentina. Denny, it turns out, is only a pawn for a sinister organization called INLA, which has an interest in the activities of the IRA as it carries out its "longest running guerilla struggle." Soon Jack, enmeshed in a web of terrorist activities, is running for his life, and Wilson's detailed account of this flight and chase makes it clear that Jack, so accustomed in his drug dealing to running away from authority, now has little alternative but to run toward it. Enlisting an old contact called Sirk, who is now in intelligence work, Jack finally confronts his adversaries and, in so doing, buries his past and begins, for the first time, so look ahead.

Wilson's style proves to be literate, rich in allusions, and steeped in a sense of place. His London is that of a 1980s Dickens, rich in detail and movement, and complicated and convoluted. *Dealer's Wheels,* in the final analysis, offers considerably more than the bare-bones outline of its plot would suggest, and Wilson gives the reader much more than a depiction of the "shoot-'em-up" world of drugs and violence.

—Susan L. Clark

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Death Turns a Trick by Julie Smith. Walker. 174 pp. $11.95

Hammett's Sam Spade and Joe Gores's "skiptracer" Dan Kearney have entranced lovers of San Francisco mysteries in the past. The contemporary adventures of Bill Pronzini's Nameless Detective and Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone have brought the city's sleuthing saga up to date.

Now former San Francisco *Chronicle* reporter (and currently full-time mystery writer) Julie Smith presents her credentials in *Death Turns a Trick,* a lively romp of a novel which heralds an interesting new detective personality and augurs a promising series for fans of the Frisco mystery story.

There is nothing that pricks the ears and keens the nostrils of whodunit aficionados more than the arrival of an adroit and unusual new sleuth. Not only is Smith's Rebecca Schwartz the very latest San Francisco investigator to walk out of the fog into our hearts, she is also the first "Jewish feminist attorney" (Smith's own phrase for her) in San Francisco mystery history.

Rebecca's debut is marked by one of the friskiest first chapters this reviewer has read in many a mystery. Imagine Rebecca playing a little ragtime piano in the parlor of a San Francisco sporting house (well, to be strictly accurate, a "feminist co-op bordello"). Before she can finish her Scott Joplin medley, the joint is raided, and playful Becky has to hightail it out of there in the company of an unsavory political bigwig, only to have their getaway car—well, enough said. Thereafter, much to Smith's credit, pace and momentum never lag.

But what is a nice girl—all right, intelligent professional woman—like Rebecca Schwartz doing tickling the ivories in a cathouse where Garfield never meowed?

Easily explained. Rebecca, you see, is legal counsel for HYENA ("the loose women's organization"), a coalition of working girls who have hired this novice attorney to give them a little vertical legality and help remedy their horizontal hostility.

Granted, a young lawyer in San Francisco needs whatever experience and exposure she can get. But when a blackmailing call girl named Kandi is found dead in our heroine's apartment and Rebecca's own boyfriend (who happens—omigod!—to be Kandi's brother) is booked for the murder, ragtime must wait. Ms. Schwartz the attorney must become (as Mrs. Schwartz would say) My Daughter, the Detective.

The Kandi caper brings Rebecca all sorts of problems. A powerful, perverse Senator tells her that she knows too much for her own good. And there's a brutal cop, of the same opinion, whose treatment of her would never earn the approval of Miss Manners.

The life of a feminist attorney, it seems, is really not as glamorous as a Katharine Hepburn movie. Through it all, however, Rebecca maintains a combination of worldly poise and wide-eyed vulnerability which keeps us close to her and absorbed in her case. She is not as easily explained as the ethnic-philosophical-professional label which Smith (in one of the book's more evident weaknesses) has her exclaim over from time to time. There is nothing particularly Jewish, feminist, or even attorney in Rebecca's makeup, but no matter. What counts is that she is very much her own person. Our curiosity about her tantalizing character is as much a driving force as our curiosity about the baffling crime.

"She is not really like me," Georgia-born Smith says of her Marin-bred Rebecca. "She has more equilibrium than I do. I have a temper, but she has a sense of humor that allows her to coast along. Yet she and I are alike in one respect: both of us are often bewildered by what goes on in life."

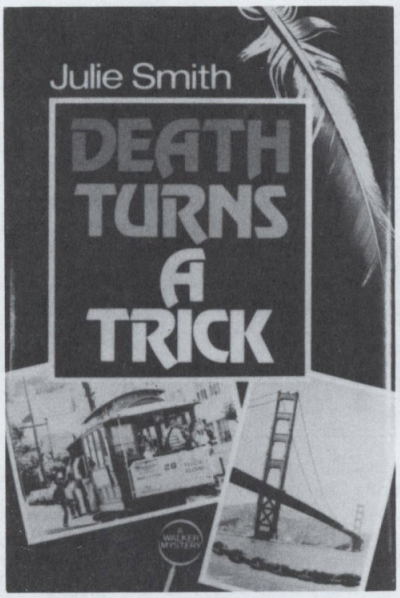
As for some of the seamier elements in her novel, Smith avers that these were simply a well-known part of the civic scene which she happened to observe during her *Chronicle* tenure. She retired from journalism at the end of the 1970s to devote full time to fiction and decided, like P. D. James, that the mystery story would allow her to make the best use of her talents and fantasies as an apprentice novelist.

The intimate connection between prostitution and power politics may startle some of Smith's readers, but the alliance of the world's two oldest professions is old news to this veteran reporter.

"My novel is a fiction," she explains, "a work of imagination, based on real facts. I may be open to charges of sensationalizing my material, but it's so closely based on the realities of San Francisco life at a certain time in the past that it simply didn't occur to me

that the stuff I wrote about was really outside the norm."

And make no mistake about it, Julie Smith can write. Like a certain madam (if you will pardon the analogy) described in these pages, Smith is "a born raconteur and she can make life in a bordello sound like a Restoration Comedy." Well, whoever said that a solemn murder mystery couldn't also be a costume-changing farce? Indeed, the novel's sense of humor and wide-eyed wonder at life's little atrocities often redeem its sordid subject matter.



And when it comes to allowing her reader the means of playing along in the intricacies of the detection game, Smith shows an Agatha Christie-like capacity for making much ado about clues, concocting straw hypotheses, and surprising us, in the end, with one who should have been the obvious suspect from the start. A nice sleight-of-hand there.

Smith's crisp storytelling, her easy knowledge of local practices (legal and well as unnatural), and her likeable, unpredictable heroine will make readers look forward to more of sleuth Schwartz's adventures. Rebecca's next case, Smith confides, will plunge her into the yeasty batter of a sourdough bread war, a corporate power struggle over loaves which may also see Becky develop more than a professional relationship with "Chron" reporter Rob Burns.

Romance, mystery, and sourdough bread? How very San Franciscan!

—Howard Lachtman

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Falling Angel by William Hjortsberg. Fawcett/Popular Library, 1982. $3.25

William Hjortsberg's 1978 novel *Falling Angel* is a wild hybrid original, a gothic/occult/allegorical detective story that succeeds in combing all those diverse genres in a crisp 275-page package which possesses not one ounce of the academic condescention that has marred previous attempts to allegorize crime fiction.

It is New York City in the spring of 1959. Private eye Harry Angel is hired to find big-band crooner Johnny Favorite, who disappeared or was snatched from a New York hospital at the tail end of World War II. The man who hires Angel is reminiscent of Hammett's Caspar Gutman with even sharper claws, and soon the private eye is caught up in a vortex of occult evil: voodoo sects in Harlem, malign magicians in every corner of Manhattan, hideously butchered stiffs popping up in symbolic postures all over the Big Apple. "Whirl is king," as Aristophanes once wrote, and when he has unraveled his case Angel discovers that the whirlwind is fueled by a force so pervasive that it toys with the gods.

Hjortsberg covers a great deal of ground at breakneck speed, faltering with leaden colloquialisms redolent of the worst of Raymond Chandler, and with many needless juxtapositions of New York City locales. Minor quibbles. *Falling Angel* is a brilliant piece of fiction, and Hjortsberg (who is not a crime novelist but rather a writer of surrealistic novels) creates a gallery of supernaturally-driven grotesques who are as real as the earthbound loners and losers who inhabit the best of detective fiction. With the utmost respect for the genre, he has created a world of his own and in the process given us vindication of our worst nightmares—a key to the hieroglyphics of Hell.

—James Ellroy

* * * * *

Master of the Moor by Ruth Rendell. Pantheon, 1982. $11.95

A non-Wexford novel, *Master of the Moor* is one of the psychological studies on which Rendell has built her reputation. While not "likable," they have a fascination and compulsion that is almost impossible to resist. They succeed by making characterizations everything, reducing plot to broad brush strokes covering a portion of someone's life and eliminating dialogue almost entirely.

Things are not really hidden or misdirected in a Rendell novel. Her purpose is to illuminate and point out. The reader can anticipate what the next plot turn will be by paying attention to what is openly revealed. It all comes off with a sense of inevitable fate. What was predestined had to be, and Rendell is merely showing some of the prior events that ordained the present crisis.

The hero-protagonist in *Master* is Stephen Whalby. He is obsessed with Vangmoor, his literary giant grandfather Alfred Tace, and the mother who abandoned him as a child. Stephen is dominated by his father, impotent with his wife, and suspected of strangling two women on the moor. Every move he makes increases his guilt in the eyes of Inspector Manciple. The final confrontation with the truth is as compelling, as unsettling, as excellent as most of Rendell's work.

—Fred Dueren

The False Inspector Dew by Peter Lovesey. Pantheon, 1982

The False Inspector Dew is one of those excellent books that has a major flaw. Loosely (and openly) modeled after Dr. Crippen's murder, it is the story of a young woman falling in love with her dentist and then plotting with him to kill his wife. All proceeds according to plan at first. For the trip to America, the dentist, Walter Baranov, even light-heartedly assumes the name of the Scotland Yard inspector who captured Crippen. But thwn things begin to go wrong, the ship's captain asks "Inspector Dew" to help find the murderer.

Life aboard a luxury liner is wonderfully described. Baranov, his wife Lydia, and Alma Webster, his new love, are brought to life as only a master can do. These are not merely characters but people we love, hate, and care about. Other minor characters are developed equally well. They may be minor, but they are vital to the plot and given the necessary care by Lovesey.

Lovesey shows himself to be an expert at not saying things and at misdirection. The reader egotistically stays several steps ahead of Baranov in his deductions but is miles behind Lovesey in reaching the truth. Suspense and mystery build as the story switches among the Baranov trio and other passengers. Just how those plots will mesh is not clear until the end. The finale is full of surprises, satisfying and ironic.

If it is all so good, where's the flaw? In a character's action. I can't say more without giving away too much, but one character acts as no one would. It leaves a gap that allows other things to occur, but the gap should never be there at all, and it somewhat undermines everything else. In spite of that, for sheer audacity, interest, and superbly ironic plotting, there are few better books.

—Fred Dueren

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Red Dragon by Thomas Harris. Putnam, $13.95

Red Dragon plays a variation on the theme of "It takes a thief to catch a thief." Will Graham, who as an FBI man caught two maniacal mass murderers, comes out of retirement to stalk Francis Dolarhyde, who is responsible for killing two entire families in Atlanta and Birmingham. Graham has "a knack for the monsters" because his "remarkable visual memory," coupled with his "pure empathy and projection," enable him to think like the psychopaths he tracks. He puts these abilities to good use in his investigation of the atrocities committed by the man first labeled the "Tooth Fairy" (the reader later finds out why he's such a "biter") and subsequently self-styled "The Red Dragon" after Blake's drawing "The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun—the Man-Dragon rampant over the prostrate pleading woman caught in a coil of his tail." The interlaced episodes moving toward the Dragon's capture spotlight first Graham and then Dolarhyde, with numerous flashbacks to

Graham's earlier cases (Dr. Hannibal "the Cannibal" Lecter both taunts and advises Graham from his prison cell) and Dolarhyde's childhood, characterized by deformity, bed-wetting, and castration fears.

Red Dragon is certainly well done, but it's a dreadful book nevertheless. Harris displays a draftsmanlike precision with his motifs (Graham even uses "Dragon's Blood" finger-print dusting powder, echoing Dolarhyde's identification with the Book of Revelations's Great Red Dragon, as well as with the Red Dragon character on the Mah-Jongg piece), he knows how to pace a plot (his earlier credits not coincidentally include the best-seller *Black Sunday*), but he exhibits an extreme callousness, not only in linking physical deformity to mental depravity (Dolarhyde had a cleft palate in his "leaf-nosed bat face") but also in routinely casting women as somehow responsible for inciting men to do horrible things. That Dolarhyde's grandmother "inspires" his subsequent spree of mutilation-slayings and rapes is hard enough to stomach without Harris having drawn the only other two women in the novel as mere vehicles for man's salvation. In other words, the standard "female as man's down-fall or savior" (the Eve and Mary opposition) informs Harris's thinking. A "good" woman like Graham's wife Molly, or like blind Reba McClane (the only live woman Dolarhyde ever takes to bed) is only "good," on the one hand, as long as she supports Graham's decision to track Dolarhyde, or, on the other hand, as long as she limits her amorous attentions to Dolarhyde alone. Woman is there to warp, thwart, or service man, and, suffice it to say, this is an extremely limited perspective which explains away the sexual violence of a Dolarhyde as well as the emotional coldness of a Graham and effectively displaces responsibility for these traits from the man to the woman.

Harris's concern with destruction/salvation has one other less disturbing and, on the whole, more clever manifestation, and that is his allusion to contemporary events and personages to give both topicality and dimension to Graham's chase of Dolarhyde. The recent real-life Atlanta murders lend a degree of intensity to Harris's fictive ritual mutilations, and, moreover, the choice of *Will* Graham as a protagonist's name sounds very much as if the FBI man's "rid-the-cities-of-this-devil" mentality echoes the attitude of one *Billy* Graham. Harris finely hones his writing style and his ear for dialogue, but he is not subtle at all in his allusions or in his overall concerns. *Red Dragon* is, in the final analysis, a disturbing book on several levels, and the pathological deviancy of its killers is only matched by the acceptance of man's predilection for grisly violence by the book's protagonist, Graham, and author, Harris: "the vicious urges we control in ourselves and the dark instinctive knowledge of those urges."

—Susan L. Clark

RETRO REVIEWS

The Solar Pons Omnibus by August Derleth. 2 vols. in slipcase. Illustrated. Arkham House, 1982. 1958 pp. $39.95

He looks, acts, and speaks like Sherlock Holmes, but he isn't. Not with a name like Solar Pons. Not with a London address like 7B Praed Street. And not with a biographer whose name is Parker rather than Watson.

And yet there are enough parallels to make us wonder if the difference between the two detectives is more apparent than real.

Who, then, is the mysterious Solar Pons? Is he a twin brother, envious understudy, or even—can it be?—Sherlock himself, resuming his career under an alias which (like Pons himself) is reminiscent of the original?

And why is this squat, sturdy, finely-printed, and quaintly-illustrated collection of Solar's complete adventures being offered for a price exactly equal to that which one would pay for the lecturn-sized majesty of *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes* (the cornerstone of anyone's Sherlockian library)?

For the answers to these and other mysteries, we must travel back in time to the autumn of 1928, when Madison, Wisconsin college student and amateur writer August Derleth looked in his mailbox one morning and found a postcard from his literary idol, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Derleth had written Doyle to ask that revered author if his recent decision to give up writing the chronicles of Sherlock Holmes was as final and irrevocable as it seemed. ("I fear," Sir Arthur had announced to his universal reading public, "that Sherlock Holmes may become like one of those popular tenors who, having outlived their time, are still tempted to make repeated farewell bows to their indulgent audiences. This must cease and he must go the way of all flesh, material or imaginary.")

Like many readers, Derleth simply could not get enough of that lean, hawk-faced sleuth in the deerstalker and Inverness cape. He knew all the Holmes stories by heart and was appalled at the thought that he would never again have the pleasure of looking forward to another untold tale from Dr. Watson's dispatch-box. What he did not suspect was that Sir Arthur was more relieved than saddened to bid farewell to a character who had haunted him for forty years and who (as Doyle complained) "stood a little in the way of the recognition of my more serious literary work."

To Derleth, nothing was more serious and worthwhile than Sherlock Holmes. Life without Holmes was simply an intolerable prospect. And so the young student took the liberty of writing the one man who could recall the great detective from the grave.

One wonders if Doyle read Derleth's letter with a smile. At any rate, Sir Arthur was familiar with this kind of reader request. For what Derleth wanted was Doyle's personal assurance that the end had not yet come; his promise that there was at least a chance—an open door—for quick-witted Sherlock and his faithful, plodding Watson to come back from the Great Silence into which they had passed.

Without being unkind, Sir Arthur offered little encouragement: "I cannot promise to write more," he advised his young admirer, gently but firmly sealing the fate of the most celebrated detective agency in literature.

It was then that the college student decided to work a miracle. Since old Doyle had permanently retired Holmes from active service, young Derleth promptly resolved to bring the master sleuth back to life. An admirable ambition! A noble resurrection!

And thus was born the pastiche hero Solar Pons (in place of Sherlock Holmes) of 7B Praed Street (instead of 221B Baker), and his staunch friend and trusty Boswell, Dr. Lyndon Parker (rather than John H. Watson).

Readers quickly applauded the way in which the two detectives seemed to regard one another from the vantage points of their respective eras (Holmes's late Victorian and Pons's 1920s), as if each stood on the other side of a reversible looking-glass; and yet much of the continuing appeal of the Pontine pastime lies in our ability to pretend that a single sleuth stands before us and that the deerstalkered image in the mirror is only the reflection of one man.

Derleth himself called his tongue-in-cheek tribute "an elaborate game, not an art, and one that only someone who has time and energy at his disposal—to say nothing of a certain amount of brash self-confidence—can undertake."

But the fact is that no one ever raised the Sherlockian pastiche to a higher level of artistry than the energetic, brash, confident Derleth. His Praed Street portfolio amounted to nearly seventy short stories and one novel (*Mr. Fairlie's Final Journey*) before his untimely death, in the summer of 1971, brought the series to an end.

Or almost an end. When Pinnacle reissued the Derleth series in paperback, British writer Basil Copper extended the exploits of Pons in several novellas, thus achieving an imitation of an imitation, or a pastiche of a pastiche. While Copper's works are best forgotten, he

himself is not. As editor of the Pons omnibus, his function probably included cleaning up some of the "Americanisms" that occasionally crept into Dr. Parker's otherwise scrupulous narratives.

The purpose (and value) of the omnibus itself is easily explained. Highly prized by collectors and highly priced by dealers, limited edition originals of the Pons tales (published by Derleth's own Arkham House enterprise under the distinctive deerstalker colophon of "Mycroft and Moran") have become increasingly rare in recent years—as scarce, one might say, at Watson in his clinic.

Now Arkham has remedied Pons's virtual disappearance in cloth format with this solid, two-volume set that establishes the official Pontine Canon and confirms the imaginative breadth of Derleth's achievement. These nearly 2,000 pages of neo-Holmesian exploits are an affectionate tribute to the author who created the best of all Sherlockian fantasies as well as an essential text for his growing audience of fans. The omnibus contains more than its fair share of clues for readers to follow in order to outwit Dr. Parker/Watson and, for those who are so inclined, to detect the secret of Pons's appeal.

"During a span of about a century," as Robert Bloch suggests in his brief but eloquent foreword, "there have been literally hundreds of Sherlockian imitators, ranging from parody to direct duplication, but no one except August Derleth ever succeeded in capturing the essential charm of Doyle's original concept. I like to think that the Praed Street stories survive because they were created not out of envy, rivalry, or ridicule, but out of love."

It is in that spirit—and for the sake of a "game" which is often as entertaining as the Baker Street Saga itself—that readers should have no hesitation in placing *The Solar Pons Omnibus* next to the most important Holmes tomes on their mystery bookshelves. The difference between the two detectives, after all, is only superficial; the resemblance, sublime.

"He is a clever impersonator," as Vincent Starrett once said of Pons, "with a twinkle in his eye which tells us that he is not Sherlock Holmes, and knows that we know it, but that he hopes we will like him anyway for what he symbolizes."

That "twinkle" of self-conscious (but never smug) humor, combined with Derleth's own tireless ingenuity as a facile and clever plotter of short stories, have made a "dip in the Pons" a refreshing pastime for all readers who wonder and worry—as Derleth himself once did—whether there is life after Sherlock Holmes. The fact that this frankly and unashamedly derivative detective has a distinct personality all his own lends Pons the additional charm of a literary imitation who has succeeded in becoming a literary original.

—Howard Lachtman

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The House of the Arrow by A. E. W. Mason. Hodder, 1924; Doran, 1924

"We are the servants of Chance, the very best of us. Our skill is to seize quickly the hem of her skirt, when it flashes for the fraction of a second before our eyes." With this motto, the great Hanaud of the Sûreté launches his second outstanding investigation recorded by A. E. W. Mason. And in this one, Hanaud grasps Chance's elusive skirt far more firmly than in his debut performance, *At the Villa Rose* (1910), in which his impressiveness was somewhat spoiled by an unbalanced plot the resolution of which drags in half a book of explanatory flashbacks.

No such structural flaw mars our relish of Hanaud's virtuosity in *The House of the Arrow* (1924). A young English solicitor, Jim Frobisher, through whose eyes the whole action unfolds, rushes to the aid of his client Betty Harlowe, a charming young English lady now residing in France, after she has been maliciously accused of murdering her aunt. Jim predictably falls in love with Betty and so recoils from the apparently cold impartiality of Hanaud, the star police detective who has been called on the case and who naturally appears to suspect everybody of something unpleasant.

But Frobisher also idolizes the French sleuth, viewing him as as awesome "master swordsman whom he was committed to fight." And in the ingeniously-worked-out relationship between the two—an especially fruitful variation on the Holmes-Watson theme—lies one of the great strengths of the book.

Jim's character coalesces for us through the conflict between his love for Miss Harlowe and his admiration for the continually dazzling Hanaud. The detective's character, moreover, is revealed to us through the reactions he provokes in Jim, which are continually modified by fresh impressions: now Frobisher believes that Hanaud is engaging in a secret duel with Betty Harlowe, "a duel in which now one, now the other of the combatants got some trifling scratch"; and now Hanaud is dueling with another suspect; and now with Frobisher himself, who feels himself being "played and landed like a silly fish"—and a moment later, "Jim could not doubt Hanaud's sincerity at this moment, nor his friendliness. They shone in the man like a strong flame." The mercurial detective may one moment play the buffoon (reminding us of the vain and strutting Hercule Poirot), the next moment act the part of a stern and implacable judge, and the next display an unwonted delicacy and sensitivity. "Never was a man so mysterious, so important in his mystery," Jim decides, and we readily agree.

And as Hanaud seems mysterious seen through Frobisher's eyes, so all of what transpires in Dijon seems twice mysterious, as it is filtered partly through Hanaud's eyes, and then entirely through those of Frobisher.

Hanaud quickly disposes of the pathetically comic Boris Waberski, Betty's accuser. Meanwhile, we have found that Hanaud did not really come to Dijon to handle this matter at all but to investigate the source of a flood of poison-pen letters that have been horribly violating the sleepy peace of Dijon. This surprise sprung, another soon follows: even the anonymous letters are not the whole explanation of Hanaud's interest in the case, it seems. For Betty's aunt, rather than dying of natural causes, was in fact murdered after all!

By the time we dizzily arrive at this point, we are prepared with Jim to abandon our complacent expectations and submit to the consummately capable guidance of Hanaud, who attacks the problem with the energy of a "tornado." Of course, we cannot help wondering, and feeling the urgency of a situation in which we are inundated with complications, in which a desperate killer—who naturally might be anyone we know—is at large, in which bizarre clues are continually appearing, suggesting the operation of unspeakable malignity, and in which further crimes are committed when and where we least expect them.

Much of this might in summary seem merely the conventional fare of detective fiction, but what makes it live are Mason's considerable powers as a dramatist (he was in fact a playwright as well as a novelist). Everything in *The House of the Arrow* flows in terse, natural dialogue; characters interact, presenting various and conflicting views of a situation; and these views themselves quickly contribute to creating the succeeding situation. For example, it is doubtful that Ann Upcott, Betty's companion, would have confessed her startling experiences in any other climate of opinion; and when she does confess, that immediately alters everybody else's opinions and subsequent actions.

The settings, too—from the dusty chambers of gloomy mansions to the vision of cloud-capped Mont Blanc in the distant blue, standing in impartial vigil over all—are economically sketched, richly atmospheric, distinctly and crisply memorable. And the plot is remarkably efficient, with scarcely an ounce of fat. Nearly every character, every deceptively trivial incident, or object, is eventually made use of as Mason, with an exquisite sense of timing, springs surprise after astonishing surprise on the reader.

Especially worthy of note is the midnight chase after the elusive murderer, culminating impressively in a psychologically trenchant confrontation of innocence and evil that bears comparison with those of such classics of psychological suspense and horror as Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas*.

As if all this were not enough, Mason's novel offers also the charmingly absurd Gallicisms of Boris Waberski ("She snap her the fingers at me!"), the amusingly obsessive correctness of Bex, the notary, a number of insightful reflections and expressions (e.g., "Jim thought of some stricken patient who wakes in the morning to believe for a few moments that the malady was a bad dream; and then comes the stab and the cloud of pain settles down for another day"), and even a few delightfully startling paradoxes of the Sherlockian variety. Slipping with Hanaud down a dark alley one night, Frobisher stiffens at the sound of stealthy footsteps behind them. "We are being followed," he whispers to Hanaud. "Yes," replies the wily

detective, "by one of my men who sees to it that we are not followed!"

With the lure of treats like these, it is only fair to warn that the plot is somewhat weakened by a few devices which were trite even sixty years ago; and certainly now we sneer at secret passages, exotic poisons that leave no trace, and criminals who— Well, without giving away any secrets, we have to admit that it is not really very hard to guess at much of the truth.

Yet, as Julian Symons has observed, "this fact affects very little the pleasure one has in reading the book." This pleasure derives from following one of the most beguiling sleuths in the literature as he works feverishly to unmask a villain who is a fully worthy opponent, and, among the beauties of plot, characterization, and setting, from contemplating the hows and even the whys of the case. The greatest mysteries are those of human nature, illuminated but naturally unsolved at the end. And there are more than enough of these in Mason's masterpiece to warrant our reading it in spite of a few outmoded features. The ultimate mystery, of course, is the reason why it has been unavailable for so long!

—Alan Weissman

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In the First Degree by Roger Scarlett. Doubleday, 1933

In TAD 11:1, Ned Guymon's "Uneasy Chair" editorial related the tantalizing tale of the outrageous plagiarizing of Roger Scarlett's (Dorothy Blair and Evelyn Page) *The Back Bay Murders* (Doubleday, 1930) by Don Basil in "his" *Cat and Feather* (Earle, 1931; Holt, 1931). Once this was discovered, Blair and Page told Guymon in a letter, Basil's book was withdrawn. Curiously enough, in TAD 9:2, George Cloos had disclosed in the "Letters" section (p. 161) that he had noticed the similarities while reading *Cat and Feather.* Although I have not seen *The Back Bay Murders,* I am certainly puzzled by the whole matter after having read *In the First Degree.* Why would Basil do such a thing? He surely didn't choose this author on the basis of the style. Perhaps it was for the plotting or possibly for Scarlett's relative obscurity.

In the First Degree employs many of the classic elements and conventions of the detective fiction of its age, including the visit of the agitated client, Mr. Faraday, to Police Inspector Kane's rooms on through to the old house, the invalid patriarch, and the odd family assortment. Somehow, though, the ingredients set to cooking fail to produce the aroma of the Golden Age. The potential of the setting, the city of Boston as well as the mysterious mansion, is never fully realized. The series of wanderings from room to room, up and down stairs, push the story along lamely most of the time.

At the urging of his visitor, Kane walks by the house, hoping to find a way to visit the ailing Mr. Loring, whose urgent message Faraday has conveyed. What he sees is a "Room for Rent" sign being hastily withdrawn from one of the front windows. He goes up to the door and inquires about a room. Loring's wife, over the protests of her sister Julia, agrees to rent to the stranger. Eventually, the invalid is poisoned, and Kane decides to investigate by himself without a word to his colleagues.

Incriminating letters, an odd will, a mop hanging out a window to dry, a vandalized portrait, and the dismissal of Faraday all serve to set the pot/plot a-boiling. After a second poisoning, Inspector Kane, admitting he hasn't "been very brilliant," finally comes up with the solution. A solution to a mystery served well by the rather plain, awkward style, stilted dialogue, and stereotyped characters which dull the reader's sensibilities enough to allow the author's improbabilities and sleights-of-hand. It is in the latter that the author has shone a little brighter: the clues are given, and some of the comings and goings are handled more adroitly than they seem to be at first glance. The author tops all this off, however, with a last chapter that is an odd exposition and reconstruction of what happened. It sounds like an authorial report rather than Kane's explanation to anyone.

—Steve Thomson

* * * * *

The Red Right Hand by Joel Townsley Rogers. Simon and Schuster, 1945; Pyramid, 1964

This book is terrific. Its absence from any of the cornerstone lists is a total mystery, for it really deserves to be designated a classic. Some significant recognition did come when it was reprinted in the Mystery Library series a few years ago. From its vaguely ominous title to its amazing resolution, the narrative drives ahead at a nightmarish speed on a nightmarish journey. With his choice of narrator and plot structure, Rogers has achieved a marvelously sustained mood of terror, uncertainty, and suspense.

The narrator, Dr. Harry Riddle, captures the reader with his first words, which plunge directly and deeply into the middle of this bizarre tale of murder and seemingly inhuman cruelty and violence. The doctor sits in a semidark room at a desk, trying to think through the bewildering chain of events he has stumbled into. Elinor Darrie, who set out with her fiancé Inis St. Erme to be married a few days before, now exhausted by this night of horror, lies sleeping on a nearby couch. Somewhere in the darkness, Riddle knows, the murderer awaits his opportunity to spring out of the darkness to kill him.

From what he has heard and witnessed, Dr. Riddle reconstructs the following sequence of events. Only several days before, in New York City, Inis St. Erme, a rich entrepreneur and investor, proposed to Elinor Darrie after a brief courtship of a few months. To avoid any mandatory waiting period, Inis suggested that they borrow his business partner's car and motor through New England to the home of a friend of his father in Vermont where they could be married. Outside of Danbury, Connecticut, they impulsively stopped and picked up a hitchhiker. He was a small, unkempt man with sharp-looking teeth, dirty, ragged hair, and a torn left ear. He was wearing a blue, sawtooth-brimmed hat and baggy trousers that gave him the appearance of having oddly twisted legs—he is later dubbed Corkscrew by the police. To top things off, there was a dead kitten cradled in his arms which he said he had found in the road, and he called himself Doc. A little farther on, at Dead Bridegroom's Pond, the lovers stopped for a picnic, leaving Doc in the car. Elinor noticed him spying on them, and St. Erme charged after him. She heard a scream and fled, sure that Doc had harmed her fiancé. The two men took off in the car.

At the same time, Riddle had been called to the dying John Buchanan's home—coincidentally where the lovers had been headed—to operate on him. He was too late, and Buchanan died. He decided to borrow a car and drive back to New York City immediately. At a fork in the road ten miles above Dead Bridegroom's Pond, the car stalled. Though he spotted a figure on the other road disappearing into the woods, he was alone in a desolate place. He tried to start the car for an hour without success, so he began walking. Incredibly, he never saw the huge car containing St. Erme and Corkscrew that other witnesses swear was careening up the road at the same time. He finally found a house that turned out to belong to a Professor MacComerou, author of a book on homicidal pathology, whom he once knew. The car was retrieved and fixed, and Riddle left, only to encounter the girl wandering along the road. He brought her back to the Professor's house, the police were summoned, and the search was on for Corkscrew and Inis. Several bodies were found, including one whose right hand was missing.

Menace and meaning are omnipresent. Riddle's reconstruction of the relentless murderer's path is complemented by an undercurrent of uneasiness engendered by numerous odd coincidences. Elinor's thinking Riddle's voice is like Corkscrew's; the fact that she works for Riddle's uncle and they live across the street from each other in the city; the amount of money the doctor received for going to Buchanan equals the amount St. Erme carried; Riddle injures his ear—Corkscrew's ear is torn; and so on. Finally, Dr. Riddle comes to a startling conclusion; he reviews the events and clues in a different light. And, as he knew would happen, the climax must be a stunning confrontation with the killer.

Afterwards you may say it's fantastic and unbelievable, but you can't deny the artistry that makes you "live" it and see it Rogers's way when you're reading it. I haven't seen his other three books, but I can't see how he could top this. Find a copy and read it.

—Steve Thompson

LETTERS

From Guy M. Townsend:

I would like to clear up a possible misunderstanding which might arise from J. Randolph Cox's letter in TAD 15:4. In it, Mr. Cox remarks that "*The Mystery Fancier* does not publish anything unless the writer agrees to subscribe to the magazine." Although I am sure that Mr. Cox did not mean it this way, some of TAD's readers who do not subscribe to TMF may have gotten the impression that TMF requires payment from non-subscribing writers before they will be published in its pages.

In fact, *The Mystery Fancier* is fortunate in having a number of prolific and knowledgeable subscribers who keep it awash with good, publishable material. For that reason, I have no need to solicit contributions from non-subscribers, and I do not do so. Indeed, it would be an act of ingratitude on my part were I to return a good, publishable piece to a subscriber in order to make room for an equally good piece by a non-subscriber.

Should it ever happen that TMF's subscriber-contributors fall off in their production and leave me with pages to fill, then I will consider publishing material written by non-subscribers. That is not likely to happen, however, and for that reason I would recommend that non-subscribers not waste their time and postage making submissions to TMF.

It is ironic that Mr. Cox's letter, with its no-doubt unintended implication that one has to pay to be published in TMF, should have appeared when it did, as I had just announced, in the November/December 1982 issue, that TMF would begin paying for contributions (at the admittedly paltry rate of ½¢ per word for articles and ¼¢ per word for reviews) just as soon as the subscription roll tops 500, which is likely to happen this year. Rather than having to pay for being published in TMF, therefore, subscriber-contributors will soon be receiving payment for their efforts.

I am grateful to Mr. Cox for having alerted me to this possible misinterpretation of TMF's editorial policy regarding submissions, and to TAD for allowing me this space to clear it up.

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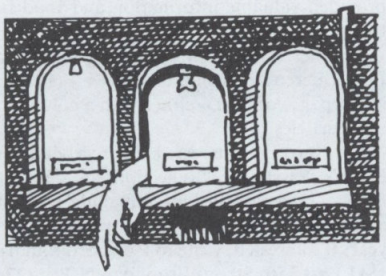
From Bob Hayman:

I enjoyed the latest TAD as always. The reviews are probably my favorite sections, closely challenged recently by Otto Penzler's "Collecting Mystery Fiction." The latter series has a special appeal to me since I am both a bookseller (not of detective fiction) and a collector of detective fiction. But more of that later. Also of special interest to me in this issue was Greg Goode's piece on "The



Oriental in Mystery Fiction" and Thomas Chastain's interview with Stephen Greenleaf. But my primary purpose in writing this letter is to comment on Bob Aucott's thought-provoking letter in regard to the premium being charged for books with dust jackets as opposed to those without.

I agree with most of his points but think he has jumped to an erroneous conclusion when he says that the premium charged for a jacket has gone from about 50% to about 800% in the past ten years. He seems to have based this conclusion primarily on the comparison between prices charged in a catalogue issued by J & S Graphics about ten years ago and on the values suggested by Otto Penzler in his article on collecting Charlie Chan. In my opinion, this is not a valid comparison. Rather than reflecting what has happened to dust jacket prices in the last ten years, it is merely a statement of the philosophy of two individual dealers in regard to their feelings about the value of a dust jacket. In other words, it is my feeling that if J & S were to issue the same catalogue today, the prices for the books would undoubtedly be up drastically but the relationship between an unjacketed and a jacketed book would be the same percentagewise as it was ten years ago. And by the same token it is probable that Otto Penzler ten years ago had the same thoughts in regard to the dust jacket premium that he has today. In the past twenty years, I have read many thousands of dealers' catalogues, and it is my feeling that in that time there has been no drastic change in the premium charged for jacketed copies in the book trade as a whole. The wide differences in price merely reflect the varying attitudes of many different dealers. As Penzler has correctly pointed out, the pricing of out-of-print books is a complex process and the decision arrived at is a highly subjective one. What I am saying, I guess, is that Penzler's evaluations should be taken as the views of one knowledgeable dealer but not necessarily as the last word since other equally knowledgeable dealers may differ considerably from his views. This is not to say that one dealer is right or wrong, just that they should all be considered. I would imagine that Otto Penzler would not disagree with that.

I enjoyed seeing "The Mystery of a Diamond Robbery" from Harvey Scribner's *My Mysterious Clients* in print again, even though, as Penzler notes, it is no great literary achievement. Scribner was an Ohio writer, and the book shows up here occasionally, but it is scarce, as Penzler suggests. I can supply a little more biographical information about the author. Scribner was born in Mount Vernon, Ohio in 1850, moved with his parents to Toledo in 1869. There he studied law and became a well-known lawyer in the city. And I am sorry, Otto, but *My Mysterious Clients* was not his only book; he wrote at least two others—*A Messenger from Santa Claus and Other Christmas Stories,* published in Toledo in 1904, and *Memoirs of Toledo and Lucas County,* published in Madison, Wisconsin in 1910.

↙ *Sorry, I meant to say,* My Mysterious Clients *was his only mystery book. I certainly agree that different dealers, even knowledgeable ones, will have vastly different opinions about specific books and the value of dust wrappers. If that were not so, it would be difficult to buy books from other booksellers. or to sell books to them, as we would all have them priced the same. Nonetheless, I'm right, and the dealers who disagree with me are wrong. (Just kidding.)* —*Otto Penzler*

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From Thomas Carlock:

This is a short letter of appreciation for the Otto Penzler column on collecting S. S. Van Dine books. As a new reader of TAD, I was especially pleased to see an article on one of my favorites, with illustrations of those scarce dust wrappers.

I would like to offer some slight additions to Mr. Penzler's list that some other readers might have noticed: a series of Van Dine's books bound in red cloth with gold imprint and embossed on the face with a bust of the author and the words "The Philo Vance Series" above and "S. S. Van Dine" below the picture. The series was produced in 1930 and so presumably didn't go beyond *The Scarab Murder Case.* Perhaps this was a gift set offered for the Christmas season?

In 1928, Scribner's brought out a series of classic mysteries dubbed "The S. S. Van Dine Detective Library," selected by Van Dine and introduced by him. Each is bound in black with an art deco figure clutching a dagger embossed in silver on the face. The seven-book series included *The Sign of Four* by A. Conan Doyle, *The Big Bow Mystery* by Israel Zangwill, *The Eye of Osiris* by R. Austin Freeman, *The House of the Arrow* by A. E. W. Mason, *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* by Gaston Leroux, *The Rasp* by Phillip

Mac Donald, and *The Cask* by Freeman Wills Crofts.

I recently stumbled upon the July 1932 issue of *The Illustrated Detective Magazine,* the cover of which proclaims "Beginning S. S. Van Dine's New Picture Exploits of Philo Vance." Inside the magazine is a five-page story titled "The Clyde Mystery," basically a series of illustrations with dialogue following each picture. Does anyone know of any other stories in this series? Perhaps "The Clyde Mystery" might be an interesting candidate for the Classic Corner.

Again, thanks for the quality pages of TAD.

✓ "The Clyde Mystery" is new to me and sounds very *interesting indeed. The two series you mention are reprints, which is why I did not feature them in the article, though you're correct to note that they may be of interest to the completist.* —*Otto Penzler*

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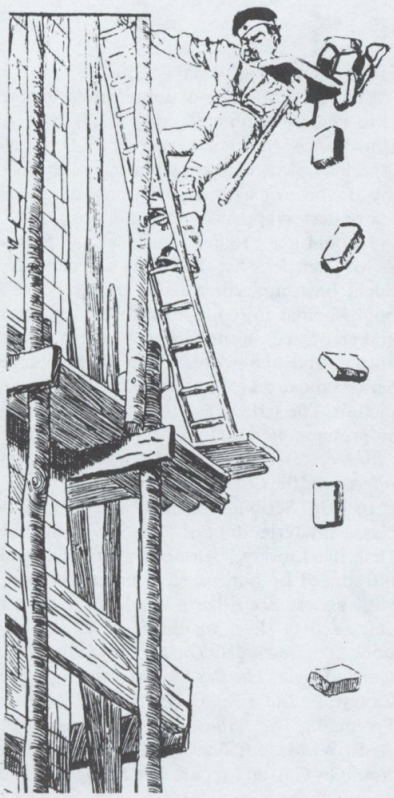
From Bob Randisi:

Given my recent feelings about TAD, I found 15:4 one of the more enjoyable issues in some time. Top of the list were the Stephen Greenleaf interview and the Nick Carter article. Also interesting to me was the article on the Oriental in mystery fiction. The regular columns and reviews were up to par, and I was glad to see a fair number of letters.

Finally, a letter from Bruce Taylor, and it has to be one of my favorites of all time. I feel the same way Bruce does about the Rex Stout Newsletter, and I feel this way about the Dorothy Sayers Newsletter as well. How many of these newsletters are going to be allowed to run in TAD? Pretty soon there will be no TAD, just another DAPA-EM. I would also like to see the end of the Classic Corner and Crime Hunt.



As usual, Michael Seidman's Uneasy Chair provided valuable information and food for thought.

Another letter I enjoyed very much was Fred Dueren's. I would like to see Fred back in the pages of TAD, either with a column or some articles.

For anyone interested in receiving the PWA's newsletter, "Reflections in a Private Eye," we are establishing a mailing list. The cost will be $10.00 for ten or twelve issues a year. If interested, write to PWA c/o Randisi, 1811 East 35th Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11234. (Also use this address if you are interested in an active membership—which is $15.00 a year—or non-active, which is $10.00.)

Now that Stephen Greenleaf has been interviewed, I look forward to interviews with James Crumley, Loren Estleman, Richard Hoyt, Michael Lewin, Jonathan Valin, and others.

I'd also still like to see an all-private-eye issue of TAD.

Has anyone else noticed the current trend of 160- and 170-page hardcover mysteries? I hope this is merely coincidence, and not a coming thing.

✓ Thanks for your comments, Bob. As I'm sure you've noticed, the PI does get attention in our pages; I just don't think I can, right now, devote an entire issue to the field. Fred Dueren does continue to submit reviews, for which I am as thankful as you. Finally, I think economics is dictating the length of hardcovers—as I've indicated in the past, what is between the pages is often the last consideration... —*Michael*

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From Greg Goode:

I would like to add the following to my "Bibliography of Secondary Sources" on the Oriental in crime fiction and film, TAD 15:3:203-11. Mark Schreiber, from Japan, was good enough to send me photocopies of: Thomas Lawton, "Robert Hans van Gulik: Ambassador Extraordinary," *Orientations,* Nov. 1981, pp. 12-22, and Schreiber's own piece, "'Sherlock Holmes' Chinese Style," *The Asia Magazine,* Feb. 1, 1981, pp. 9 ff. (4 pp.). Both articles give bibliographical information, Schreiber's being a popular introduction and Lawton's being longer and more detailed. That is for Judge Dee. For Fu Manchu, I found a reference in a German bibliography of secondary sources to Julian Symons's "The Ups and Downs of Fu-Manchu," *The Sunday Times* (TLS?), Dec. 24, 1972, p. 23. I have not been able to find it here in Germany. Also interesting, though not written in English, in the book on Charlie Chan by Alfred Andriola: *Charlie Chan: 1938-1939,* Vol. I, Paris: Futuropolis, 1980. It is a reprinting of seven of Andriola's Chan cases for the comic strips for the McNaught Syndicate during those two years. All the conversation, narration, and characters' dialogue balloons are translated into French. Pages 5-14 contain an essay on Chan's cases: "Charlie Chan: ombres Chinoises sur ciel Californien" by François Rivière. Illustrations include some reproductions of French editions of Chan novels (dust jackets and paperback covers), as well as some rarely seen Chan film posters.

* * * * *

From Meville C. Hill:

I read my first J. Edgar Wallace, Sax Rohmer, Edgar Allan Poe stories back in 1927 by walking the two-mile round trip to our local library branch two or three times per week and taking out the maximum number of books allowed me each time, so I consider myself a longtime devotee of the genre. By the time I had become a serious reader and collector, we were into World War II and I was away in the South Pacific doing my bit in the U.S. Navy.

You just cannot keep ducks away from a pond nor a dedicated book lover from books, so as soon as I was discharged I got back into the thick of it as a reader and collector of my favorite subject—only now the year was 1946 and the mass-market-produced paperback was flowing and flooding the country. Who could resist (I couldn't) Rex Stout's *Fer-de-Lance,* A. Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes Pocket Book,* Earl Derr Biggers's *Charlie Chan Carries On,* or Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon,* plus the three hundred or more other titles all produced by Pocket Books, Inc. of New York for 25¢ (bless them). Well, you know what happened—we were immediately inundated by books because they were to be found everywhere and at super prices, nickel and dime each.

We have come a long way and are privileged to have bought, read, traded, sold, thousands of the once lowly, ignored, third cousin—the paperback. Have you been watching the prices for some of the early Avon Chandlers or Dell Hammetts? Do so and be amazed.

As a subscriber to TAD, I was thrilled to receive my copy of 15:2 with our illustrious publisher's delightful continuing (keep it up) article on "Collecting Mystery Fiction" highlighting Charlie Chan. I had been aggressively pursuing completion of all publishers' productions of E. D. Biggers's titles in paperback with intentions of writing an article and had spent at least five years before finally completing the entire collection. Last week (Oct. 10), I completed my article and fired it off to my publisher, Lance Casebeer, for our paperback periodical *Collecting Paperbacks?*

Let me digress for a moment and tell you—I had written an article on Damon Runyon for Lance, and he had published it in Vol. 4, No. 1 of *Collecting Paperbacks?* I had agonized over submitting it because I had failed to locate all information regarding movies that were made based on Damon Runyon stories, but, as there was a deadline to meet, I mailed it off without complete information on nine of the 23 movies.

Well, you can guess what happened. I received a letter from a subscriber, a Mr. Victor Berch, who just happens to be librarian at Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass. He mentioned the fact that if I had only asked, he would have gladly supplied me with all the missing facts re Damon Runyon stories that were made into movies. Well, too late for the Runyon article but not for Charlie Chan, as I had not, at that time (Sept. 1) finished my article, and I still needed information on at least thirty of the 49 movies featuring our hero. Mr. Berch came through with flying colors and filled in all of my blank spots. It looks as if we'll have a long-time association collaborating on future articles.

Now to get back to Charlie Chan. I received my TAD 15:3 and, delight of delights, Greg Goode's article and bibliography re the Oriental in mystery fiction appears. My cup runneth over! If only I had put off completing my meagre offering another week or so, I would have then been able to possibly locate some of the bibliographic items mentioned in his article and then been able to have reshaped and honed my own article. Well, it's done, so there isn't anything we can do about it now. All I can say is that I hope I and Mr. Berch have managed to supply someone with an enjoyable few moments of entertaining information.

As an added note: Faint of heart—be encouraged. I located and purchased a nice jacketed copy of Ellery Queen's *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes*"—not a first, but still a scarce and welcome addition to my collection, so, you out there, keep trying.

* * * * *

From J. M. Purcell:

The negative review in TAD 15:3 of Anne Morice's *Death in the Round* came to my attention just after I had had the pleasure of locating an interlibrary loan copy of *Murder in Married Life,* one of her three American non-publishables. I could not disagree with the reviewer more, and, since the notice amounts to an all-out attack on "Morice's" (Felicity Shaw's) ability to write mysteries, let me make my reply a general apologia for the novels of this still much underestimated author. It is no secret that the broader general level of purely fictional interest in the contemporary mystery novel has been accompanied by a falloff in its page-by-page appeal to the reader's ingenuity. Morice in return gives us the best of both possible worlds, a narrative prose competitive with Ross MacDonald's and a playfulness with suspects and situations that revives the Christie-Carr tradition.

1. The review of *Death in the Round* makes two main complaints. The more baffling, and dismissable, is that the Morices are told first-person (like Chandler, Stout, and Doyle). This objection seems to involve the reviewer's historical incompetence, not that of the book under review. But if we ned any technical discussion of what is for any novelist a necessary, subjective choice—to go first-person or third—the U.S.-available novel of "Shaw" (*Happy Exiles,* 1956) is written in third, and suggests that switching to first improved Shaw-Morice's ability to plot, pace, and write narrative prose.

2. The other main squawk concerns genre, the charge that the Morices are really Nancy Drews. (I have never read this complaint before from a woman reviewer, chiefly because most women mystery buffs have a weakness for Nancy.) True on the point of fact, but in mystery writing the two fake subgenres in the field are neither of them critically objectionable because the concern the exploits of a young female snoop. The two pseudo-genres are the Spillanized vulgarization of Hammett and the had-I-but-known, and the mutual objection to both of these is the same: that the protagonists are intellectually inadequate to play the lead in a fiction about an analytic investigation.

By contrast, Morice's Tessa Crichton is an updated revival of the detective hero of the early Ellery Queen novels and shorts: an intellectually exuberant private eye, related to a professional cop, who cannot resist inventing solutions to criminous mysteries, the solutions to which are sometimes ingeniously wrong until the protagonist finally pitches strike three in the closing chapter. Morice of course writes ten times better than Dannay and Lee, though this is partly because she has the economic advantage that the modern mystery novel in hardback is shaved to 200 pages or less, while '30s mystery hardbacks such as the early EQ's needed to pad themselves an extra hundred pages at the publisher's behest. Morice and her contemporaries have no economic need to bury their development of the main plotline in a way unnatural to the mystery form, whose natural aesthetic outlet in any case is only the long short story.

The main objection to Morice's type of mystery goes unmentioned in the review, so I repeat it here. It is simply that the criminous offense socially likely to occur in the comedy-of-manners milieu of the Christie-Morice tradition is not personal, violent homicide—"murder." (The point is not the superior morals of the suburbs but their comparably superior manners; that is, the greater social penalty attaching to personal physical misbehavior.) Morice's Tessa should be investigating not straight murder but puzzles whose criminal base lies in an adultery, embezzlement, or at most country-club midnight rape—all this, intermixed with a few quiet, domestic poisonings. But the idiot requirement of the requisite violent murder has contaminated the commercial mystery novel at least since World War I, and the non-verisimilitude which the social presence of murder introduces, even in 1982, into the comedy-of-manners mystery apparently leaves its fans and buyers undisturbed.

I impose on the reader of TAD's Letters column at such length on the grounds that with no exception the Morices are the most underrated contemporary mystery series. In her reputation there is some analogy with the comic playwright Alan Ayckbourn, perhaps an influence on Morice: the same gift for dialogue and plot construction; and the same individual, fluent, comic rhythm in the prose. Some critical readers, not only academics, may require the explicit use of literary allusion, intellectual reference (Sayers, Ross Macdonald, Doyle, Cross) to be reassured that they are reading "good prose." The bright people in Morice do not happen to indicate their critical intelligence or capacity to phrase idiomatic English by this particular clue.

In closing, one more possible complaint about the review of *Death in the Round.* In the current indulgence given academic women's-studies "experts," one finds a noticeable non-interest, even antipathy, for the unapologetically superior female talents: a Riefenstahl, a Murasaki, a Graham, an Austen. The most recent Amanda Cross (*Death in a Tenured Position,* 1981) gets its emotional impetus from Cross's explicit antipathy to a woman academic character in the novel whose professional subject and career neither of them owe any professional debt to this scam. Perhaps, however, the Morice books are too unpretentious in appearance to disturb any woman reviewer for this particular reason? At any rate, they are ten to one better than Edmund Crispin, let alone Nancy Drew. □

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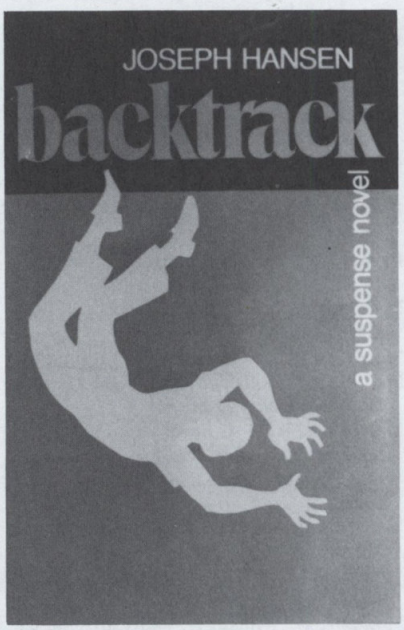

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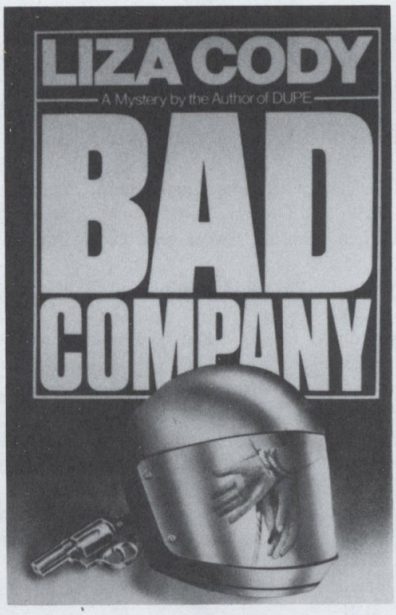

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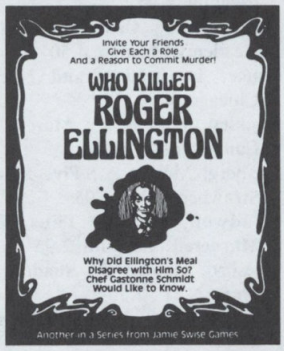

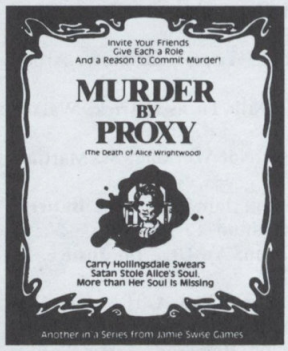

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—Paddy Smith

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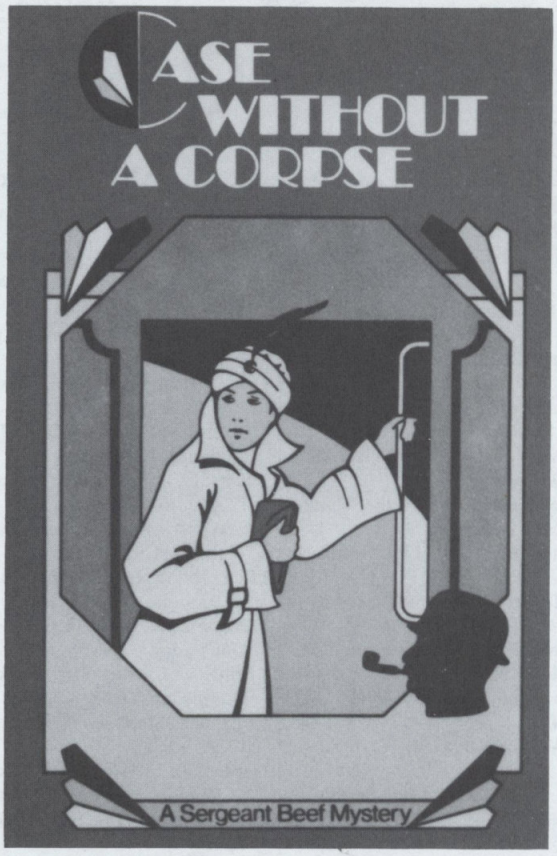

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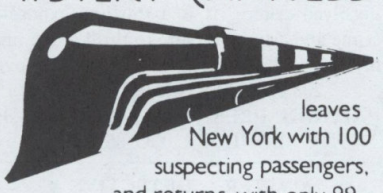

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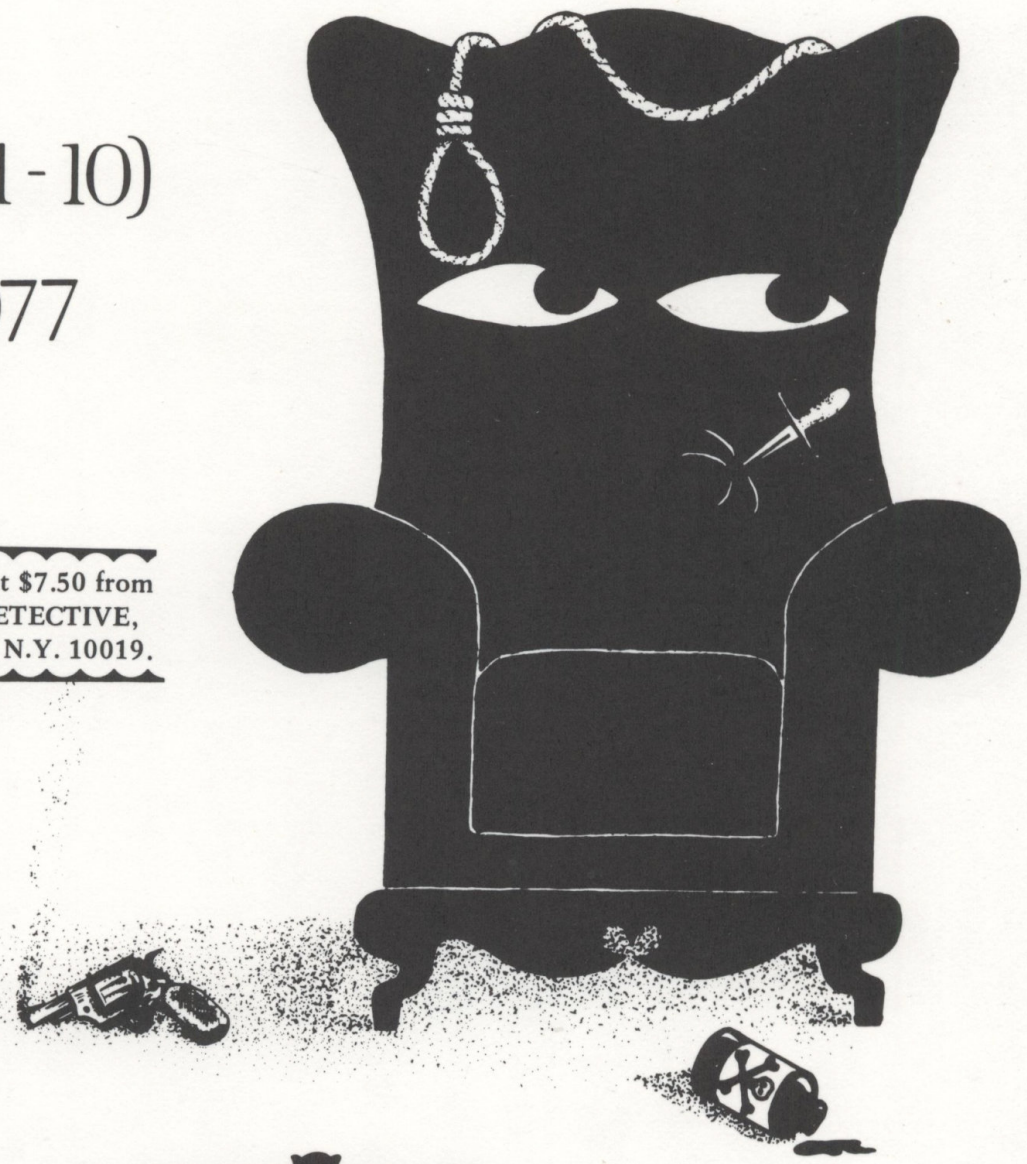

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