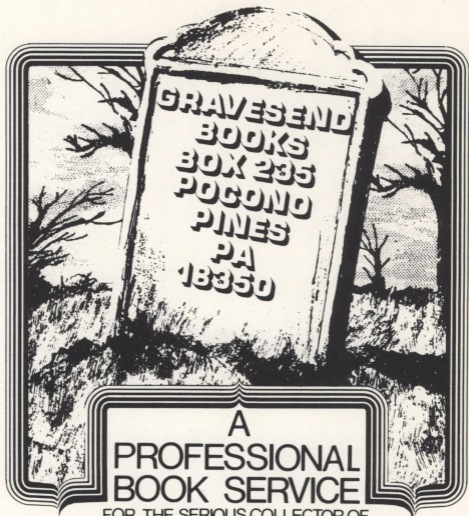


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THE UNEASY CHAIR

Dear TADian:

Jonathan Latimer and Ross Macdonald died within a month of each other, and we mourn their passing.

Latimer is more of a cult figure, obscure perhaps, but also among the best. His writing was hardboiled, bawdy, funny, and powerful; his series character, Bill Crane, drank heavily, often, and poorly. The opening pages of *Headed for a Hearse*, set on death row, are among the most harrowing in detective fiction.

Solomon's Vineyard, written in 1941 and not published in this country until 1950 (in a bowdlerized paperback edition and in 1982 in a limited edition of the original), is a frightening harbinger of the Jonestown Massacre, a stunning look at life behind the walls of a quasi-religious community. Even today, forty-two years after it was written, the novel shocks; it is easy to understand why it took so long to appear in America.

Jonathan Latimer was—especially in his early years—very much a part of the traditional school of the hardboiled; yet his wry sense of humor, sociological awareness, and sheer storytelling ability have earned him a niche of his own in the detective pantheon. If you haven't had the pleasure of meeting Crane, of dwelling for a few hours in the worlds of Jonathan Latimer, book passage now.

When speaking of the *tradition* of the hardboiled novel, three names are spoken almost in one breath, the order of their appearance very much a matter of subjectivity. Ross Macdonald, Raymond Chandler, and Dashiell Hammett are, for all intents and purposes, the "Platonic ideal" of the detective novelist, their characters the models on which almost all who have followed are based. Whenever a new writer enters the lists, the comparison is made to one or all of the above.

The Macdonald canon is by far the longest, and his breakthrough from mystery writer to novelist is an important one critically if, ultimately, inane. To my knowledge, anyway, Macdonald never saw the need to deny that he was a mystery writer; that critics felt it necessary to present him with a new mantle is their problem, their loss.

The tragic irony of Ross Macdonald's last years, the final capricious act of the Fates and Muses, is that for a man who used the past, who used memory as the core of his work, the disease which killed him struck first at his memory.

So, now, the tripartite god of the mean streets is

laid to rest; the three wise kings who came from the West with the news that murder was back in the streets where it belonged, are dead. Long live the king.

Again, subjectively, three men have assumed the crowns: Greenleaf, Valin, and Parker are, critically at least, the ones named most often as the continuum of the tradition. Today, theirs are the names most often mentioned in one breath. But there are others, in the tradition or at the edges of it, testing the boundaries.

Try, if you will, this trilogy: Bill Ballinger's *Portrait in Smoke*, Thomas Chastain's *Vital Statistics*, and William Hjortsberg's *Falling Angel*. The first is a suspenseful novel of obsession, the second a stylistic *tour-de-force*, the third a fantastical twist. All are born of the tradition; all add to it. The only one I know which has been emulated with any success is the Ballinger; Behm's *The Eye of the Beholder* is the unacknowledged child of *Portrait in Smoke*. I know of no one who will be able to do what Chastain did in *Statistics* (I've tried and could not get further than page one in my effort; that is, ultimately, a meaningless aside); and Harlan Ellison is my candidate to build on Hjortsberg... though I imagine he will prefer to go in his own new directions.

Another trio: Pronzini, Collins, and Chesbro—"Nameless's" bleak existence as much a handicap as Fortune's missing arm and Mongo's dwarfism.

Mickey Spillane took the White Knight on the Grail search and decked him out in red, white, and blue; Sara Paretsky and Marcia Muller have made him a *her*. Stuart Kaminsky, Loren Estleman. Stanley Ellin. Larry Block, Tucker Coe, William Campbell Gault, Thomas B. Dewey, Arthur Lyons. The problem now, the danger of the listing, is that I will leave someone out, insult someone by neglecting him. So the list ends here... the moving finger, having writ, moves on.

This is a toast to the past, and the tradition it has given us, the model upon which we may build, a glass of wine (or, perhaps, more in keeping, a jug of fine Kentucky mash) lifted in memory and celebration. We celebrate those who are continuing the tradition or creating the new one, expanding our vision while thrilling us and keeping us safe from those who stalk the night.

And, finally, it is in congratulations to the winners of the second annual PWA Shamus Awards: Larry Block for his hardcover novel *Eight Million Ways To*

Die, William Campbell Gault for his paperback *The Cana Diversion*, and John Lutz for his short story "What You Don't Know Can Hurt You."

The streets may be no less mean because of their efforts, but our own passage along them is eased by their passing through first.

Best mysterious wishes,

Michael Seidman

MICHAEL SEIDMAN

It is a mixed blessing: We get the best people we can to do columns for us, and that means that at times they are going to be heavily involved in other projects, projects which prevent them from meeting deadlines. Last issue it was Al Hubin, whose work on the

Bibliography had to come first. This time, Otto Penzler and Raymond Obstfeld both found themselves in the bind, so the column on collecting and "Paper Crimes" do not appear. They'll be back, though. You can count on it.

—MICHAEL

Jonathan Latimer Remembered 1907–1983

By Maurice F. Neville

On June 23 of this year, the noted mystery novelist and screenwriter Jonathan Latimer died at age 76, of lung cancer, at his La Jolla home.

Born in Chicago, Latimer received his training as a writer in the early '30s, first while reporting for Chicago's *Herald Examiner*, and then with the *Tribune*, covering the activities of Al Capone in the course of his apprenticeship.

The first of his ten novels, *Murder in the Madhouse*, published in 1934, introduced hard-drinking, wise-cracking Bill Crane, the detective hero who appeared in most of Latimer's thrillers. Writing in the hardboiled tradition, Latimer went on to publish *Headed for a Hearse* (1935), *Lady in the Morgue* (1936), *The Search for My Great Uncle's Head* (1937 under the pseudonym Peter Coffin), *The Dead Don't Care* (1938), and then in 1939 the last Bill Crane title, *Red Gardenias*. In 1941, he published in England *Soloman's Vineyard*, his hardboiled masterpiece. In America, it was published in 1950 as a paperback entitled *The Fifth Grave*, the text of

which was considerably expurgated. The original text and title were finally published in a signed limited edition only last year.

During the '40s (in addition to a stint in the Navy 1942–45), Latimer wrote or collaborated on eighteen screenplays, perhaps the most notable being his version of Hammett's *The Glass Key* (1942) and adaptation of Kenneth Fearing's *The Big Clock* (1948) and Cornell Woolrich's novel *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes* (1948).

Latimer's first new novel in fourteen years, *Sinners and Shrouds*, appeared in 1955, to be followed four years later by his last work, *Black Is the Fashion for Dying*.

Latimer remained active in the field of crime writing by working on the *Perry Mason* television series from 1960 until 1965, when the series ended.

Latimer will probably be best remembered for his unique blending of fast-paced action with his own special brand of humor. □

THE ASIA HAND

BY MARK SCHREIBER

Creator of one of the newest series of "Asian detective" novels, British writer James Melville realized one of his long-held ambitions upon publication of *The Wages of Zen* in 1979. A career diplomat and "Old Asia Hand" with over twenty years in the Far East, Melville (real name, Peter Martin) has since penned four more novels. Set in the Japanese port city of Kobe (pronounced *ko'bay*), his stories about the Prefectural Police now include *The Chrysanthemum Chain*, *A Sort of Samurai*, *The Ninth Netsuke*, and the most recent release in the series, *Sayonara, Sweet Amaryllis*.

The heroes of Melville's stories are three Japanese policemen: Tetsuo Otani, Superintendent of the Prefectural Police and the most "official" member of the trio; Inspector Jiro Kimura, a fluent speaker of

English who wears flashy clothes and has a reputation as a man-about-town; and "Ninja" Noguchi, so nicknamed because of his ability to make himself inconspicuous while on undercover assignments on the docks and in the sleazy parts of the city. Always humorous in their study of contrasts between East and West, Melville's novels tie in members of Kobe's foreign community with more "local" aspects of Japanese society. And somewhere, there is always a murder for the trio to solve.

After two decades in Asia, Melville recently stepped down from his position as Representative of the British Council in Tokyo. He has now returned to England, where he plans to write full time. In addition to his Inspector Otani series, he has begun a pilot project for a Japanese publishing house,



Kobunsha, about a British detective on assignment to the Japanese police in Tokyo. Shortly before his retirement from work in Japan, Melville talked to TAD's correspondent about his past work and future plans.

MS: I have a pet theory that the three main police characters in your series (Inspectors Otani, Kimura, and Noguchi) are really three aspects of one single entity; but you knew it would be too difficult to create a credible Japanese character with such diverse talents, if you will, so in place of a single, central "hero" the books wound up with your "unholy trio."

JM: You know, that's very interesting. That's the first time it's ever been put to me like that. One writes out of one's subconscious, and without any real plan of doing this or that, and it's quite interesting to look back on it and to see it through other people's eyes. When I look at my own books, I don't see these things particularly; when someone like yourself reads it from an external point of view, he sees things which I can later recognize even though I wasn't conscious of doing it at the time. In fact, if we talk about Ninja Noguchi—his character I have begun to realize now that I have written five, going on six, books about him, or in which he appears at least, is that he more nearly resembles my own late father than anybody I know.

MS: You mean your father didn't talk much?

JM: My father didn't talk much, he was crude, he was a bit of a slob, but he had a kind of streetwise shrewdness about him. . .

MS: What was his occupation?

JM: He was a greengrocer—he used to sell fruits and vegetables. And he had very little education. But he was shrewd. Had he been educated—well, this is a might-have-been—but the fact is that although it's strange to think that this elderly Japanese could be based on an Englishman who's been dead for a good many years now, I look back on it and I see that certainly the members of my own family, when they comment on this, claim to be able to recognize our father in Noguchi very easily. In spite of all the cultural accretions I've put around him.

MS: Are there any other characters in your books based on people you know?

JM: Well, no, as I say, not consciously, and I didn't base Noguchi consciously on anybody I know. He walked onto the page. He really did walk onto the page. And he quite surprised me when he appeared. I didn't think to myself, "Well, to offset the central figure of Otani I've got to have two sidekicks, as they

were, one of whom has obviously got to be an English speaker and who ought to in some way represent the "with-it" kind of Japanese, and the other needs to be someone who is wise to the ways of the seamy side of society. But then Otani himself walked onto the page—because he was never intended as the central character of a series of books.

MS: The others tend to steal the show anyway. . .

JM: I think they do, because they are more obviously eccentric in their various ways. Otani is in many ways a very conventional man—and old-fashioned at that. The only respect in which he is not so credible perhaps as a middle-aged Japanese is his taste for sarcasm and teasing.

MS: I thought you were going to say his affection for his wife, which is not too common among middle-aged Japanese men—or is it?

JM (laughs): Well, I don't suppose it is all that common, no, perhaps not. And in fact, I've been frequently enough chided by Japanese friends who



say their life isn't like that. Certainly, I've never consciously met Otani or anybody like him. But I know that, if he were to be portrayed on the screen, I'd want him to be portrayed by Toshiro Mifune.

MS: That would automatically guarantee good results at the box office.

JM: That's how I visualize him, rather squat and a little bit swarthy, and...

MS: And that handsome?

JM: Not necessarily, no, but again they could hardly choose a plain-looking fellow.

Again, looking back on what I did, unconsciously, I suppose in order to offset the essentially seedy and seamy aspect of crime, I have a slightly idealized, romantic background for him. I'm sure I did not, in any way, copy the idea of Van der Valk and... his wife. I've certainly read all those books, but I don't think I felt I would have to make that kind of a figure.

MS: I've formed a visual image of Noguchi and Otani, but not of Kimura. I see Kimura up to his neck, but I can't put a face on him. He couldn't be too bad looking, because he's got a blond Swedish girlfriend—quite an accomplishment for someone on a cop's salary in Japan.

JM (laughs): Well, I wanted to make Kimura slightly conceited, a type of overconfident Japanese who undoubtedly does exist. I've met plenty of people who might have been partial models for Kimura speaking English.

MS: He's a good cop, though.

JM: Yes, but... he pushes his luck, and he gets shot down occasionally. I think the flashy side of him could be found in real Japanese.

MS: I'd like to see more of Inspector Sakamoto in future books, because he represents an antagonist within the police department—one being an inflexible stickler for the rules. Also, so many Japanese do go by the letter of the law.

JS: Yes. Sakamoto to me represents what I think of as the Teutonic bureaucratic strain in Japanese public life. There are plenty of Japanese Sakamotos around. The trouble with Sakamoto is that it would be difficult to bring him forward, except as a negative influence. He's essentially a boring, tedious man, and there's not much more you can say about him. But with his constant presence and disapproval of what the other two are up to, I suppose one might be able to think in terms of giving him a more prominent role in future stories.

MS: With the exception of Migishima—which is a


name I've never heard of—you do use authentic family names for your characters. Looking at some fiction about Japan, I've seen many, many examples of atrocious-sounding, impossible names.

JM: Well, [E. V.] Cunningham's character's [Masao Masuto] is not very convincing either.

MS: But it's possible.

JM: It's *just* possible—but very uncommon. Of course, the temptation when you're writing is to use the short Japanese names so readers can get their tongues around them. One doesn't want to use the names which are regarded as slightly comic, and that is why people like myself are tempted to use very simple names—Abe, Honda, and that sort of thing. There's no reason why I couldn't use longer ones, but certainly my British publisher (Secker & Warburg) has been very insistent that I should not incorporate proper names without a good reason.

One thing I consciously do do, when I've finished drafting a passage, is to go back and ask myself, "Have I colored the five senses? Are there colors here; are there smells?" and so on. I think much writing these days in fiction is very cardboard, very



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flat—two-dimensional—and I've quite consciously gone back and added some colors and some smells. . .

MS: Well in your case, you have to, because you're writing about a country that most people have never been to, and know so little about.

JM: Yes, it's a question of trying to convey something. Well, I don't know if you would agree with me, but I'm constantly struck by the collision between the very ordinary and familiar in the Tokyo area, all mixed up together. While it is very much a secondary intention, if, as some critics have suggested, my books do convey something of the flavor of contemporary Japan, then I'm very pleased—although that's not why I'm doing it. I write with no didactic purpose whatsoever. If my books occupy someone for a couple of hours on a train or plane, I'm happy; that's why I'm doing it. But now, certainly these half-dozen characters who recur in all of the books *have* become friends of mine, and to some extent it constitutes a problem in writing a new book, because the temptation is to write about how they would react if such and such were to happen, and that is the beginning of the story. That I think leads

to an excessive characterization of the story at the expense of plot, and I'm conscious of the fact that my plots are not very tight, not very neat, they're not classic puzzlers. I think I am more interested in the characterizations, and in the descriptions and moods of the stories.

MS: What sort of efforts did you make to learn about real Japanese police procedure?

JM: I've made it my business now to read text-books on the Japanese legal system and on official organization. But it wasn't until really quite recently I had ever set foot in a Japanese police station. And I was immensely relieved to discover that nature followed art, and that the sort of place I had visualized was very much what I found. The only thing I hadn't visualized was all these characters wandering around in the station, still with their belts and pistols on, but wearing these floppy slippers! (*Laughs.*) That's the sort of thing I've been saying about these incredible contrasts in Japan; they take their shoes off, but not their guns! And the fact that it was tacky and messy and so forth, not modern and automated. But all this was pure luck; I've never actually sat down and talked to a Japanese policeman about his job.

But you do see an awful lot of police work on the TV news which is quite interesting. So now my eyes and ears are open, and I absorb a lot.

MS: Do you find it difficult to concoct your plots?

JM: I do really, yes. I don't have that kind of mind. I'm not the sort of person to do crossword puzzles, for example; I'm hopeless at that kind of thing. I can't play chess. I don't have that kind of mind, and therefore the plots tend to be very contrived, like *The Ninth Netsuke*. I started by wanting an alliterative title; so I wrote the title first, and I said, "Now what comes in sets of nine?" And the only thing I could think of was the nine Muses, and that gave me the idea of the possibility of a set of netsuke being specially carved in the forms of Thalia, and so forth. But anyway, that gave me an idea, and then one thing led to another, and so that is possibly the most satisfactory plot. Whereas the others move off in different directions. I'm conscious of this, and I'm constantly working on it. But I don't have the sort of mind that could ever really produce closed-room mysteries, concealed-room mysteries.

MS: Has your editor ever come up with a statement regarding something you've written about Japan, saying it rings too unfamiliar, or is incomprehensible?

JM: Well, he's occasionally said I need to explain what a *kotatsu* [a low foot-warmer table used in Japanese homes in the winter] is, or something like that, because no one has certainly ever heard of one.

Or else he has asked for an explanation or some reference to a Japanese term which cannot be satisfactorily translated, such as *genkan* [a combination porch and shoe locker area in the doorway of a Japanese home], that sort of thing, but otherwise, no.

The other question, of course, is a problem that always crops up, so that one gets to the point where one develops murderous impulses. I nearly killed Noguchi in my most recent book [*Sayonara, Sweet Amaryllis*].

MS: You didn't mention where the bullet hit . . .

JM: He got it somewhere in the chest, but it didn't kill him . . . but I nearly killed him, and my original intention at the time was it's time Noguchi got killed. But you're not allowed to do that!

The other problem which arises is the simple problem of chronology. Now, I've got my people stuck around 1980, in the very early '80s. Now, either I have to go on setting books at about the same time as now, or sooner or later this fellow's going to have to retire. Otherwise he'll be like Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin—Goodwin must have been about 65 and Wolfe about 90 by the time of the last books, and yet Stout froze them in their later forties or early fifties.

But my point is that one has this problem, because I don't know how long I shall want to continue with this series, but assuming I go up to a dozen, I'm either going to have to retire this man, or stay stuck at the present time. Anyway, I certainly don't feel I'm running out of steam yet. One thing that does amuse my editor in London is that whenever he challenges me over some really crazy idea—at least he thinks it is—then I can almost always send him a newspaper clipping to show that is exactly what happened.

MS: You save newspaper clippings?

JM: I do keep a clipping file, mostly out of the *Mainichi Daily News*, which carries a lot of Kansai [West Japan] news. One particular thing which I've put to use already is that a bunch of *yakuza* [gangsters] hire a Setonaikai ferry and go on a cruise around the Inland Sea. And my editor said, "Oh, come on." And this was true; it actually happened. They had a conference on board this ship; it was a top-level *yakuza* kind of summit meeting, you see, which actually happened. In the same book, the gang's godfather, Yamamoto, dies. When I described the scene of people going to pay their respects, my editor challenged that this would really happen so openly. Again, I showed him a view taken from a police helicopter, when Taoka [an actual Japanese gangster boss] died, of these queues of people going up Tor Road, all around the block and everything. And he had to write back again and say, "You win."

I keep a tremendous concertina file at home in which I try to save anything and everything. About once a month I turn out this thing, shake the contents all out on the floor and go through it. It's a very useful exercise.

MS: In your years with the diplomatic consular staff in Japan, were you yourself ever involved in the death of a British national in the line of work?

JM: No, not personally. In fact, *The Crysanthemum Chain* is very loosely based on the genuine murder of an American. I wasn't involved, except very indirectly, because this man used to let it be thought that he was British, and had a very British style. He never actually went about saying he was British, but when people assumed he was, he didn't correct them. And so when he was killed some fifteen years ago, I was in a position where the newspaper called me up and said, "How well do you know this Mr. X?" and since Mr. X was a well-known homosexual I said, "Well come on, now!" I'd met him, you know, and they said, "We want an official statement from you. He's just been murdered!" And I said, "Well, you want one, but you're not going to get one from me. He's not even a British subject."

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MS: I think of all your books, *The Crysanthemum Chain* had the strongest sub-plot, because you did show more of things going on completely outside the police, involving the press and local diplomats who were conducting their own sort of investigations.

JM: I enjoyed writing that book, but the real puzzle was simply that of the man keeping his cards indexed, which lead to the so-called "Crysanthemum Chain."

MS: Among books about the Orient or Oriental detectives, who are some of your own favorites?

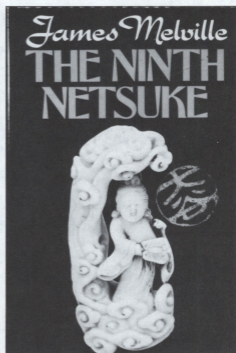
JM: You mentioned already my great favorite, van Gulik. I always enjoyed his stories, his Judge Dee books from long ago. And I enjoyed also Harry Keating's Inspector Ghote, the Indian detective. I think if you're talking about exotic detectives, those two were the ones I liked best. But I never consciously set out to do that, or to do something like that; this emerged much later. I didn't visualize doing a series in the first place.

MS: Had you published any books prior to *The Wages of Zen*?

JM: No, only under my real name, in collaboration with my former wife, in a book about Japanese cooking. This is a Penguin book called *Japanese Cooking*, which came out in 1970. And to my amazement, that book is still in print, and still selling well. It's been going along quietly and happily for the past thirteen years. But that was the only book I ever wrote before this one.

MS: Do you think your career interfered somewhat with your earlier ambitions?

JM: Yes, I think like most people who ever get around to writing, I remember back when I was a very young man indeed, when I was doing my National Service, as they called it then back in the late 1940s—I was eighteen to twenty then. I remember sitting down and solemnly writing a novel, which was terribly pretentious and really dreadful, and I blush to think about it... and I wanted to write, and when I saw what I'd done I had enough residual good sense to tear it up and flush it down the lavatory. I never thought I would do any writing again. In those days I fancied myself as an intellectual—I no longer do. I certainly never had any desire since then to write what I would call mainstream fiction, although now I would like to diversify, now that I'm going to have more time to write. I would like to diversify, trying my hand at some short stories, maybe a play or something like that. But I visualize remaining in the genre of crime fiction, or possibly moving a little into historical fiction. I had in mind it might be interesting



to do a novel which would essentially deal with the February 26, 1936 incident [an unsuccessful Japanese army *coup d'état*]. That's the sort of thing I mean. I think that I don't necessarily want to get stuck as the man who only writes about Japan. I feel I would like to try my hand at something else. But I feel I'm sufficiently attached to the genre to stay within, because, after all, I'm 52 years old, I won't have so many years left—I'm not being pessimistic, but I reckon I can count on fifteen years maybe, and there's a limit to the amount that I can do in that period of time.

MS: Have there been any problems in your writing under a pseudonym?

JM: No. When I first came to Japan in this job, in 1979, it just coincided with the appearance of *The Wages of Zen*, and I did keep very quiet about it, because at the time I thought that as an official in the British Embassy I wouldn't have a lot of time to devote to that sort of thing. Also, I thought it might just possibly be an embarrassment to the Embassy, or to my official government contacts. So I kept quiet. A few close friends knew, but it wasn't general-

ly known until about a year ago when *The Sunday Times* of London blew my cover. Then the *Asahi Shimbun* dropped over. My official superiors had known about it, obviously—but to my surprise and pleasure the revelation has not bothered any of my Embassy colleagues, who have tended to take a rather amused attitude about it, nor has it bothered any of my Japanese friends. Now, that's possibly because not many of them have read them.

So now looking back, I now realize that I was overly scrupulous about this, and I needn't have worried so much. Certainly now that my books are going to start coming out in Japanese translation, I can afford to be more open about it.

MS: When will your first Japanese translation be coming out?

JM: In July. That will be *The Ninth Netsuke*. The Japanese publisher wanted to do it first. And then, as you know, I have this book written for the Japanese market coming out this summer, and I'm really very much puzzled by the formula proposed by the Kobunsha [publishing] people. And if it comes off well, this might lead to something else—what, I can't say at the moment.

MS: What sort of response do you get from your readers? Do you receive a lot of fan mail?

JM: I get a trickle of fan mail; and they come from funny places. They come mainly from Britain and the United States, but I got one from Australia just the other day, and one from Hong Kong. Certainly I've never gotten anything disagreeable in the mail. In fact, I've been quite surprised that some of my more old-fashioned friends have never objected to the sexy parts in my books. But it's quite true that when I look back on them I'm slightly surprised at myself, at the amount of interest I seem to have displayed at one sort of sexual perversion or another.

MS: There's very little physical action or violence in your stories. In fact, your murderers never seem to make it to the hands of justice, or we never know how things turn out past the actual apprehension of the killer.

JM: I agree. I personally shrink from violence, and I always shut my eyes to the violence portrayed in some movies—I can't bear it. I suppose, like many another crime writer, I don't really like to think about what actually happens to people in jail, how unpleasant it really is. Also, you will notice that my victims tend to be "expendable"; you don't miss them too badly.

But I've just been rereading *Farewell, My Lovely*, and this poor guy's getting sapped on the head every fifteen minutes in this book, and you know it's so unbelievable, so ridiculous—it's like Tom and Jerry.

It doesn't bother one, because it's so unbelievable. I don't mind that kind of thing, any more than I mind seeing Tom going off on a rocket. But what I dislike is realistic, believable mayhem; this is a real turnoff to me. I think I'm never going to be able to write convincingly about violence.

MS: Your villains aren't really that scary either. There's no one really bad in your stories.

JM: No, I suppose I really ought to see, as a test of my literary craftsmanship, if I can do something about that, because in a sense I don't mind that too much, because people go on buying them anyway. But there's enough blood and guts being spilled all around the place. On the other hand, one has to be realistic within the conventions of the form.

MS: What words of advice would you give an aspiring young writer who is planning to write fiction about the Far East?

JM: What I would try to avoid at all costs is the "Mystic Orient" syndrome, where everything is just so weird it is totally incomprehensible. One's got to accept the fact that there are a lot of things that go on here and throughout the Orient which are entirely familiar and humdrum, and it's that which sets this off which makes such a dramatic contrast.

So that's a question of technicality that you have to think about. But as far as making your background credible... the safest thing is to write about what you know. The only reason I presume to write about Japan is that I've been knocking around Japan for twenty years. But that doesn't mean I know everything. But still, I can imagine how wrong I am by imagining a Japanese who's been living in Britain for a long time suddenly writing books about an English policeman.

With that having been said, I'm convinced that the sort of book which emerges when someone has been on a short trip to get some background for two or three months and then goes back and writes a book about it, either degenerates into a meaningless pictorial guide out of a travel book or else it's literally incredible. I think one *has* to make one's background credible by not selecting all the odd things and all the exotic things you can think of, but by trying to present a judicious mixture, because it's the mixture that's interesting, by the jolts from one cultural background into another.

I particularly enjoyed a scene where Yamamoto is in a teahouse in Kyoto, in a completely classic atmosphere, and yet he's in a business suit, and he goes and gets in his car, and there are telephones in the teahouse and so forth. And this is the kind of mixture that's interesting. And that beyond Kawara-machi in Kyoto there are noisy, sleazy strip clubs, and so on. It's that that's interesting. □

Arlette

NICHOLAS FREELING'S CANDLE AGAINST THE DARK

By Jane S. Bakerman

To the dismay of hosts of his fans, Nicholas Freeling killed off his initial hero, Piet Van der Valk, in *Auprès de ma Blonde* (1972; English title: *A Long Silence*). Some of his readers, upon hearing that news—and before reading the book—lapsed into dismay, and at least one critic still bewails Piet's passing. Just last year, John Leonard, writing for the *New York Times* Book Service, commented that he

certainly wasn't buying Van der Valk's widow, Arlette, as a substitute for the real man, any more than I bought Mrs. Columbo on television as a substitute for Peter Falk. Widows, in my opinion, should wear black and smoke cigars, as they do in Greece and Korea instead of solving crimes and thinking existential.

Most Freeling buffs, however, had the good sense to abandon fretfulness and replace it with respect for Arlette's developing character and with eager anticipation of her further appearances. To their

gratification, there have, so far, been two of those later appearances. In addition to becoming the protagonist of the second half of *Auprès de ma Blonde*, Arlette has been featured as the hero of *The Widow* (1979) and of *Arlette* (1981), both fine, thoughtful (though admittedly discursive) novels.

Arlette Van der Valk Davidson is, in fact, one of Nicholas Freeling's most fully rounded, convincing creations. Her pursuit of her first husband's killer in *Blonde* was an extremely effective introduction to her new prominence, and the two later novels which feature Arlette herself are equally strong. In each of the books, Arlette copes with three difficult situations: her own changing role in both her personal and professional lives; her attempts to solve a crime or crimes; and the struggle of every contemporary human being to come to grips with a rapidly changing, evidently (in Freeling's view) deteriorating world.

Arlette's efforts to understand her city, her world, and her times offer Freeling wide scope for social commentary, a fact which would surprise no careful reader of the male-dominated novels. By making his female hero a symbol of search on the philosophical as well as the narrative level, Freeling continues a well-established practice and gives it a new slant. Arlette and her creator don't bother much with political posturing, but they do offer a refreshing, moving, beautifully crafted examination of evil from a female point of view. Not many male detective fiction writers practicing today could bring that off. Freeling can; Freeling does.

To put Arlette Van der Valk Davidson into perspective, it is useful, for once, to look at the comments about the author on the jacket flap of the most recent Freeling novel, *Wolfnight* (1982). The comment is brief:

Novels, says Nicholas Freeling, are about crime, or they are only about class differences. Only the first kind, he maintains, is really worth writing.

He lives in the Vosges countryside, close to Strasbourg. The watershed between France, Germany, Italy and Flanders. His home, once a farm, bakery, country pub, is now a lighthouse on a twilight Europe.

While this comment is craftily composed to arouse reader interest, incite, perhaps, a touch of wistful melancholy, tantalize with a thrill of intriguing fear, it nevertheless strikes fully and closely to home. In many ways, Arlette and her city, Strasbourg, can be seen as Freeling's way of demonstrating what one individual, bonded firmly with her support group, can do to maintain integrity, decency, honor, and personal strength in the face of what may well be political, economic, and ecological disintegration. Arlette may not be a lighthouse, but she is at least a candle gleaming in the gathering darkness.

Quite probably, of course, Arlette now lives in Strasbourg because her author lives there. Nevertheless, in Freeling's hands and in Arlette's consciousness, the city assumes important symbolic significance which parallels the symbolism imposed upon Freeling's female hero. Strasbourg is the seat of the Council of Europe; it is a city both plodding and filled with dreams, both cosmopolitan and provincial, both attractive and ugly.

The old town of Argentoratum, squeezed in the loop of the Ill, became Strasbourg and was cut off on the other side by the fortified moat of the False Rampart. It has been split by broad modern roads, creating naturally a howling desert: the Place Kleber, desiccated concrete lid of an underground car-park, has no character left at all. Still, around the cathedral, while the Students, the Jews, or the Goldsmiths would not recognize the narrow medieval streets named for them, the proportions have not altered much. . . . The municipality hereabouts has made coy beginnings at a

pedestrian sector. If it can steel its timid heart to make this universal as far as the waterside, where it speaks vaguely of planting greenery, the old town can be nursed back to life. Painfully and expensively. (*Widow*, 172)

Like many, many late-twentieth-century urban areas, it sprawls rather more than it sensibly grows, but, importantly, it is functioning. In what may well be a dying culture, Strasbourg is alive and perhaps even well—certainly, it is *trying*. Similarly, Arlette is alive and well and functioning, and Freeling's most obvious use of Arlette as a pattern of what (no matter how little) the individual can do to stave off the death of the culture is dramatized through her redefinition and restructuring of her personal life.

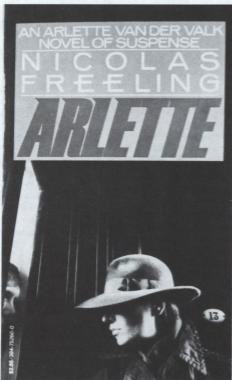
Auprès de ma Blonde begins with Piet Van der Valk as protagonist; relegated to a bureaucratic job—kicked upstairs—Piet, typically, tries to do his best at it, prepares for his coming retirement, continues his rather rich internal life, and, from curiosity and human concern, undertakes, privately an unofficially, an investigation. That investigation causes his murder and makes Arlette a widow. During Piet's lifetime and their marriage, Arlette took little part in civic life. Though vigorously a full partner in their marriage, she, a Frenchwoman reluctantly and complainingly living in Amsterdam, remained aloof from her new country and most of its customs as well as from her neighborhood. Upon Piet's death, she retreats to their little house in the French countryside until the Dutch officials' failure to find and punish her husband's killer motivate her to undertake the case.

In order to do so, she must return to Amsterdam, and, importantly, she must have help. She finds that help not from the police but rather from her former neighbors, a desiccated piano teacher, the local butcher and his wife, and new friends, the couple who live in the Van der Valks' old apartment. Always before a loner, Arlette learns a crucial lesson during her search for Piet's killer: bonding is essential. Further, she learns that strong, useful bonds can (and must) be forged with seemingly unlikely folk. By forcing herself to accept needed help and by coming to value the givers of that help, Arlette rehearses what will become a major change in her personality. She learns to be a functioning member of a community, a community defined not by nationality or locale or profession but rather by mutual concern—by the willingness to pay attention to other human beings.

The corollary to this lesson, however, is equally important; bonding cannot replace individual responsibility, for when her aides plan the extralegal execution of Piet's killer, it is Arlette who must decide that vengeance is not redemptive, even though she has well and truly known moments when she wished to kill the murderer. (Nevertheless, Freeling

does satisfy the thirst for vengeance for Piet Van der Valk's death and by so doing also satisfies fans' demands for overt justice and restored order.) Instead, she behaves according to her developing ethical structure, her growing awareness.

After a second retreat to her country house, Arlette moves to Strasbourg, largely because of the educational needs of the Van der Valks' daughter, and there she trains for and takes a job as a physical therapist. She also meets and marries her second husband, Arthur Davidson, an English sociologist who works for the Council of Europe. In *The Widow*, Freeling sketches the early days of this marriage, establishes Arthur Davidson as a major character, depicts the start of Arlette's latest career, and dramatizes her transformation from former widow to functioning, indeed happy, wife. All these factors are important to Freeling's use of Arlette as symbol and paradigm. *Arlette* continues the story of her new career, extends the symbolism.



Over and over again, Arlette protests, insists, explains that her new job is *not* being a private detective. Instead, she runs a "help" service, offering counsel and good sense, impersonal judgment and practical suggestion.

Things happen [Arlette notes]. To us all. . . . Unexpected, disconcerting, perhaps tragic. Who is there, that might help, at the best do something, at the worst listen? (*Arlette*, 74).

She serves as intermediary between human beings in conflict, and always, she listens and really hears. In short, she lives up to her professional promises; she gives advice; she gives genuine help.

Her protestations notwithstanding, Arlette's cases always involve some kind of crime. Some of these are private, family matters (a father threatens his rebellious, touchy daughter with imprisonment in a mental hospital; Arlette retrieves a young rebel who has fled from his family and into trouble in Argentina; she counsels an Englishwoman whose French common-law husband has become abusive). In other cases, she confronts organized crime of various kinds (she penetrates a dope-smuggling ring; she falls into the hands of the Argentinian government, for example). *All* the cases, however, involve crimes of the human heart. Thus, Freeling pursues his major literary interest, writing about crime, and furthers his social commentary, suggesting that crime is, in fact, endemic, and that it is equally destructive whether perpetrated by individual or by government, whether it is familial or national in scope. Endemic crime is, of course, Freeling's symbol for the decline of Western Civilization, just as Arlette Sauve van der Valk Davidson is his symbol of human attempts to stave off disaster.

This use of the private individual as detective is not, of course, new. In that she is a volunteer, exploring dangerous areas with which she is unfamiliar, Arlette's role is similar to that of the traditional amateur detective. But Arlette is not, precisely, an amateur; her investigations are not a hobby. In making "advice," help, her business, she formally pledges herself to oppose evil in much the same manner fiction's professional private investigators do: she discharges a human responsibility, and she does so for pay. Her commitment to her job and her clients arises not only from her talent for it (and her ability to absorb the punishment the work entails) but also from her developing philosophy of life. Travis McGee and Lew Archer would recognize that commitment and respect that philosophy.

Because she is both professional *and* amateur and because she is endorsed by the legal establishment but is neither official nor functionary, Arlette is, really, much more "one of us," the readers, than is the fictional police officer, private detective, or eccentric

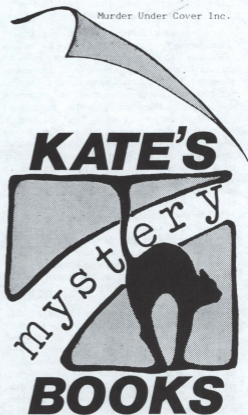
amateur sleuth. In this way, Freeling suggests strongly that the battle against evil is everyone's business—each individual must do what she can, as she can. Flawed and sometimes fumbling, doubting but daring, Arlette van der Valk undertakes heroic tasks. Freeling depicts her as a model for decent behavior, thus issuing a challenge for his readers to follow her lead.

Because Freeling is a realist and because the novels are realistic, his hero is not always successful. Some clients die; others gain only such help as can sustain them temporarily, and Arlette, herself, pays the price traditionally exacted from the traditional fictional private detective—she suffers. Inwardly, she painfully examines and contemplates what she cannot accomplish. The fussy little accountant whose consultation involves her with the dope smugglers is killed, and Arlette feels partially responsible, even though she is aware that he forged a good portion of his own destiny because of fear, a failure of trust, a hesitancy to act. Norma, the abused common-law wife, is destined to resume much the same kind of life she has been living even after, with Arlette's help, she flees her lover. Yet, Norma is a survivor, and she represents exactly the kind of restrained, limited hope which is the only comfort Freeling allows himself and his readers: she takes whatever decent action she can to exert some modest control over her destiny.

Like her predecessors in the private-eye game, Arlette also suffers physically. Criminals slash her right had to warn her off a case; she confronts a strong, angry man who considers the best vengeance on women to be rape; and, for some days, she is a prisoner of the Argentinian government. These events are very frightening, and they certainly make their marks on her consciousness, but they do not stop her. She learns much about her own durability, and she learns a good deal about her own capacity as a survivor. Particularly, she learns that despite the dangers, she can—so far—withstand them through her own strength and with the help of others.

Much of Arlette's personal strength and professional toughness arise, of course, from her own personality. She is competent as a provider of advice, aid, and redemptive action primarily because of her own experiences. She draws upon her earlier work—as wife, mother, and physical therapist—for insights into the people she serves as well as for evidence that survival is possible.

But also, she prevails because she continues the bonding pattern she learned in her initial foray into social responsibility and criminal investigation, her search for the murderer of Piet. Both her own personality (prickly, staunch, introspective, matured, open to new concepts) and her past experience help her to bond with her clients. She understands parent-



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child relationships and teenagers' rebellion because she has lived through them and because she has observed others doing so. She recognizes Norma both as a "type" and as fellow-survivor, and she responds to a police officer feeling his way through a career crisis because she has both lived with Piet for many years and redefined her own professional life.

Past experience further combines with present circumstance to promote bonding with various individuals who can help her in her work and who reaffirm the amateur-professional motif. Her understanding of Piet and his colleagues as well as her need for some sort of semi-official status and training in self-defense contribute to her useful, warm, solid professional union with a police official and a female officer. She comes to like as well as to employ an attorney who also contributes to her success. One of the most moving examples of redemptive, supportive bonding, however, occurs between Arlette and a chance (but not a casual) acquaintance, Annick, proprietor of a needlecraft shop in a Strasbourg suburb. Annick responds immediately to human need and gives Arlette exactly the kind of practical and emotional support she needs after the rape attempt. The episode between the two women is one of the most beautiful in these three novels, and it serves to underscore a key theme—that supportive aid sometimes comes from unlikely sources and that bonding is central to survival and to redemptive action.

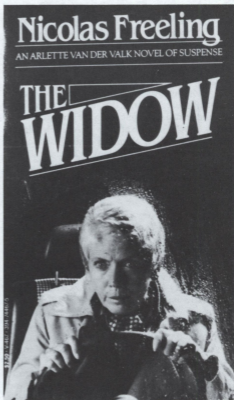
These various characters and their help are vital to the stories and to Arlette's success, but the most important human bond Arlette forges is, of course, that depicted in the strong, growing, carefully delineated relationship with Arthur Davidson, her second husband. It is Arthur who presses her to establish the advice bureau; it is Arthur who locates and establishes connections with most of the professional members of her support group; it is Arthur who designs her office and locates some of her equipment. Again, both realism and symbolism join to integrate this pattern into the novels. On the realistic level, marital partners often do influence and nurture one another's careers, and because Arthur is a decent, sensible person, the person currently most intimate with and knowledgeable of Arlette, it is logical that he is able to understand and ease her very real struggle with the decision to undertake an active, open part in the war against decay, to assume the responsibility of which Arlette is fully capable.

Experience, bonding, Arthur's urging, *all* these combine with Arlette's developing sense of responsibility and social obligation to push her into her new work:

What have I done, to deserve this [good] fortune? I've lived my life; it's been a pretty good one. I've brought up three

children. I was left a widow: that happens. . . . I had a job here, a place to live. A pension, and in fat heavy Dutch guilders. I could feel satisfied, couldn't I? . . . Am I to be memsahib? Arrange the flowers, clap my hands for the boy? Give little parties from time to time, where the food of course will be exceptional. Bed and the kitchen: woman's job. (*Widow*, 46-47)

No, acceptance of life as it "happens to happen" is no longer enough for her.



On the symbolic level, Arthur functions in several ways. A part of the establishment (his professional connections give him access to officialdom), a student of human nature, a man himself willing to act redemptively, Arthur stands for the tenuous, only vaguely defined relationship between effective personal effort and humane official action. Motivator, mentor, burden-sharer—and once, even co-conspirator—Arthur facilitates as he supports.

Yet, he is neither domineering nor dominant. A major character in the later novels, Arthur remains subordinate in plot as he is in Arlette's job. At home, the two share the work—they both cook, for instance, and they both enjoy it just as they both gripe about it occasionally. He usually waits to offer professional advice until he is asked for it; he seems, despite his genuine love and concern for his wife, to understand very clearly that danger is a part of her



work as it is a part of contemporary life, and he restrains himself from engineering either emotional or practical limits to her self-actualization.

In the van der Valk-Davidson marital relationship, then, Freeling also marries the two most prominent philosophical concerns examined in these novels. The Arlette-Arthur marriage demonstrates that not only must human beings act *together* to stave off social disintegration but also that human beings are always,

no matter how firmly bonded, alone. In that solitude each must do what she can; in that bonding all must do what they can do together.

Certainly, both Arlette and Arthur indulge in "thinking existential," as John Leonard remarks. Their thinking, however, also leads to action; it presupposes individual as well as joint responsibility. Thus, it is never extraneous or burdensome to the reader, and it always contributes to the characterization of Arlette as example of what one person can do in the face of cultural suicide.

Both Arlette and Arthur also think a good deal about the roles females and males perform in traditional marriages and traditional societies. Arlette is aware of current feminist thought; she considers and weighs it, she accepts and rejects various parts of it. She *always* interprets it according to her own experience and her own needs. Aware that she is changing her own thinking as she is changing her own style of living, she sees her new job (and her new marriage) as both means and symbol of her own development:

The "agency" existed, and for a purpose. It exists in the first place, she thought, suddenly, to get rid of the Widow. A woman I have lived with for long enough. I am shaped, informed, ripened by my past, but it's not going to get up on my back and ride me around. Piet's legs, heavy-muscled, too hairy, wound round my neck strangling me. . . thanks. (*Widow*, 69)

The old, house-and-self-centered Arlette is, like Piet, gone; the new, service-centered Arlette is, like Arthur, alive and about her business. In this motif, also, then, Freeling extends his theme: The individual must make her own decisions, employ those bits of past experience and though which remain serviceable, discard habits which no longer serve—define and redefine herself constantly; join together with others while remaining aware that one is always alone.

Because Arlette is so clearly "one of us," she is a special challenge to readers. Her assumption of personal responsibility and of the pains and pleasures of redemptive bonding cannot be considered in the same way that the crime-fighting Piet van der Valk and Henri Castang (Freeling's other protagonists, both professional police officers) can be evaluated. They are society's hired guns, and ordinary persons, we tell ourselves, are not expected to discharge their duties. But we can, Nicholas Freeling reminds us powerfully, be expected to discharge Arlette's duties. In *Auprès de ma Blonde*, *The Widow*, and *Arlette*, the author presents a paradigm for proper, contemporary human behavior. Arlette is an example of a functioning person who examines her world, makes her choices. Freeling invites—or challenges—his readers to examine, consider, accept or reject her as a model. □

MORE THAN A THRILLER:

THE BIG

By Robert M. Ryley

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Some plot elements are discussed in this essay, knowledge of which may diminish the enjoyment of a first reading of the novel.*

Kenneth Fearing's *The Big Clock* is so consummate a thriller that only aficionados of the genre take it seriously. How else to explain the neglect of the book except in surveys of mystery and detective fiction? There it's said to be "a truly brilliant story," "a tour de force worthy of the highest praise," "a breathless tale of pursuit," an "enthraling" book that holds "a permanent place among the great crime novels." Consider, in contrast, the estimate of Fearing's work by an anonymous eulogist in the Marxist journal *Mainstream* who praises the poetry at length for its social significance but dismisses the novels in a sentence as "pot-boilers." With this judgment establishment critics evidently agree. Fearing's poetry gets a chapter in an anthology of criticism on the 1930s, but his name doesn't even appear in the companion volume on the '40s, a decade in which he published three novels, including *The Big Clock*. Elizabeth Hardwick's brief, contemptuous review in 1946 seems to have put the book in its place once and for all. It is "wittier and more accomplished than most thrillers," she concedes, "but still a thriller."¹

More than novels lacking action and suspense, to be sure, thrillers are likely to be potboilers. But the notion that action and suspense are necessarily incompatible with artistic merit is a peculiarly modern form of intellectual snobbery. As a matter of

fact, *The Big Clock* ought to satisfy just about anybody's requirements for seriousness in fiction. I will discuss the novel's many excellences under three heads: originality and vividness of characterization, sophistication of literary technique, and significance of theme. To refresh everybody's memory, I had better begin by summarizing the plot.²

George Stroud is executive editor of *Crimeways* magazine, one of a large group published by the *Time-Life*-like Janoth Enterprises under the leadership of Earl Janoth. Stroud, married and the father of a school-age daughter, has a brief affair with Janoth's mistress, Pauline Delos. After a night together in an Albany hotel, Stroud and Delos spend an afternoon drinking and visiting antique shops in Manhattan. In one of these Stroud buys a painting, outbidding a woman who turns out to be Louise Patterson, the artist who painted it. After more drinking, Stroud drives Delos to within a block of her apartment building, where he sees Janoth arrive in his limousine. Janoth also sees Stroud but cannot recognize him. In her apartment, Delos tries to allay Janoth's jealousy by telling him the truth about her innocent afternoon with Stroud, lying only about his identity and about their night together in Albany. A quarrel ensues, and Janoth beats Delos to death with a decanter. Removing all evidence of his presence, Janoth slips away undetected and takes a taxi to the apartment of his best friend and managing editor, Steve Hagen. Using the information provided by Delos before her death, Hagen maps out a campaign

CLOCK

for tracking down and murdering the unidentified witness who can place Janoth at the scene of the crime. This is of course Stroud, who, having had earlier success at finding missing persons as part of his job at *Crimeways*, is put in charge of the search for himself. He doesn't go the police because to do so would be to expose his affair with Delos and destroy his marriage. And though he might refuse to head the search for the missing witness, he takes the job in order to misdirect it. Both as a result of and in spite of his efforts, he finds himself trapped in the Janoth Building as witnesses who can identify him as Delos's companion close in. He is saved at the last moment by the removal of Janoth as head of Janoth Enterprises, the culmination of a corporate struggle whose rumblings have been heard throughout the novel. But Stroud's deliverance is partial and temporary, and the conventional happy ending is undercut by intimations of his inevitable exposure. Fearing's subtle management of this sad and ironic plot resolution is one of the novel's most original achievements, and I will return to it later on.

This is obviously Stroud's story, and much of its feeling/ tone derives from him. One of the many flaws in the overpraised movie version is that Stroud, played by Ray Milland, is reduced to a bland cliché—a hard-working, conscientious executive who is victimized by the demands of his job.³ The original Stroud is much more complicated. For one thing, he shares a number of characteristics with the tough-guy heroes of Hammett and Chandler. The hardbitten

intonations of a Marlowe or a Continental Op can be heard, for example, in this account by Stroud of a chance meeting with Pauline Delos:

I picked up my drink and went to her table. Why not?
I said of course she didn't remember me, and she said of course she did.
I said could I buy her a drink. I could.
She was blonde as hell, wearing a lot of black. (p. 32)

As well as a style, Stroud shares with the tough-guy heroes a metaphysical despair, a conviction that human suffering is inescapable and meaningless. The big clock that gives the novel its title is his metaphor for the blind mechanism of the universe and for the human institutions—society, corporations—that reflect its inexorable and crushing power. Like the tough-guy heroes, Stroud gives his loyalties to individuals rather than to abstractions, and like them he accepts without self-pity the ordeals of pain and endurance that his loyalties demand.⁴

But Stroud is both less admirable and more likable than the conventional tough-guy heroes. He is less admirable because, unlike them, he willingly participates in the corruption and hypocrisy he disdains. He wants bourgeois success: a higher salary and a bigger house in a more exclusive section of the suburbs. He works at a job he dislikes, with colleagues he regards for the most part as pompous fools, to produce a magazine he knows exerts an unwarranted and baleful influence on the public. He betrays his most important personal loyalty, that to his wife. The

affair with Pauline Delos is only the most recent in a long series of infidelities, and we know it won't be the last. The conventional tough-guy hero, judged by his own standards, is very nearly a saint. Judged by anybody's standards, Stroud is, in Julian Symons's phrase, "morally null."⁵

But it was Cardinal Cushing, I think, who said that while saints may be all right in heaven, they're hell on earth. For all his virtues, the tough-guy hero doesn't exactly inspire affection. It's not only that he's almost always right about everything, or that, as one critic



Kenneth Fearing

points out, he discovers guilt everywhere but in himself.⁶ It's also that the bleakness of his vision reflects the bleakness of his soul. To protect himself against the disappointments that his radical pessimism tells him are inevitable, he smother his own capacity for joy. The range of emotion in tough-guy mystery novels is extraordinarily limited, for all loss and disappointment and sin are absorbed into the uniform drabness that constitutes the tough guy's world.

Stroud is different. In spite of his tough-guy *Weltanschauung* and along with his tough-guy

capacity to endure pain, he has the vitality, the *joie de vivre*, the charm of an aristocratic amateur sleuth in a traditional British mystery. "Normally," his wife says of him, "he wrapped himself in clouds of confetti, but anyone who knew him at all understood exactly what he meant and just where he could be found" (p. 134). The confetti is playfulness and whimsicality, exemplified by the funny and imaginative (and, it may be added, significant) stories he tells his daughter, and by his delight in harmless eccentrics like Gil the tavern-keeper, who stores an enormous pile of junk behind his bar and defies his customers to name something he doesn't have. Stroud's interests are wide and varied. He is moved by the beauty of a landscape, reads poetry, theorizes about the aesthetics of film and radio, knows boxing, and collects antiques and modern paintings—the latter a passion that nearly results in his exposure. If this exuberant versatility makes his metaphysical pessimism almost paradoxical, it also makes poignant his weaknesses and failures. Loss has meaning in *The Big Clock* because there is more than tough-guy seediness to lose.

If Stroud is an unconventional hero—part tough guy, part Cheeveresque suburbanite, part intellectual and dilettante—Janoth is an unconventional villain. And as Stroud in the movie version dwindles into the stereotype of a minor executive, so Janoth, played by Charles Laughton, dwindles into the stereotype of a tycoon—self-important, imperious, fanatically devoted to efficiency. The original Janoth has at least three personalities, none of them much like that of the movie character. Here is Stroud's initial description of him (one that also suggests, of course, Stroud's intelligence and sensitivity):

There was one thing I always saw, or thought I saw, in Janoth's big, pink, disorderly face, permanently fixed in a faint smile he had forgotten about long ago, his straight and innocent stare that didn't, any more, see the person in front of him at all. He wasn't adjusting himself to the big clock. He didn't even know there was a big clock. The large, gray, convoluted muscle in the back of that childlike gaze was digesting something unknown to the ordinary world. That muscle with its long tendons had nearly fastened itself about a conclusion, a conclusion startlingly different from the hearty expression once forged upon the outward face, and left there, abandoned. Some day that conclusion would be reached, the muscle would strike. Probably it had, before. Surely it would, again.

He said how nice Georgette [Stroud's wife] was looking, which was true, how she always reminded him of carnivals and Hallowe'en, the wildest baseball ever pitched in history, and there was as usual a real and extraordinary warmth in the voice, as though this were another, still a third personality. (p. 6)

The passage about Janoth's mysterious inner life prepares us for the outburst of violence that will later destroy Pauline Delos. What Stroud senses in Janoth

but cannot define is a proneness to waves of despair, to the feeling that "everything in the world was ashes" (p. 64). In many ways innocent, lacking Stroud's cynicism—"He didn't even know there was a big clock"—he is an uncertain judge of men. Contrast Stroud's accurate assessment of Janoth with Janoth's underestimation of Stroud:

He was [Janoth says of Stroud] what I had always classified as one of those hyper-perceptive people, not good at action but fine at pure logic and theory. He was the sort who could solve a bridge-hand at a glance, down to the last play, but in a simple business deal he would be helpless. The cold fighter's and gambler's nerve that Steve [Hagen] had was completely lacking in him, and he would consider it something foreign or inhuman, if indeed he understood it at all. (p. 126)

It is true that Stroud finds Hagen's toughness inhuman, but Janoth's certainty that Stroud can't match it comes at a time when he is single-handedly opposing the entire Janoth organization.

More serious than Janoth's misjudgments of others is his inability to understand himself. He naively imagines that his own feelings of despair are unique, and he is astonished as well as homicidally enraged when Delos accuses him of having a homoerotic relationship with his best friend, the bachelor Hagen. Everything Janoth does after the murder—obliterating his fingerprints, stealing out of the apartment, taking a taxi two blocks away from the building and getting out two blocks away from his destination—shows that he wants to conceal his guilt. But in his conversation with Hagen, he seems really to believe that he intends to turn himself in to the police. Unable to contemplate the baseness of his own motives, he needs to be told that his escape will serve the interests of his employees and the public. This isn't so much hypocrisy as self-hypnosis, and it isn't entirely unattractive because it implies at least some respect for the idea of altruism if not for the reality. A measure of Fearing's departure from the conventions of popular fiction is that almost the only character in the novel to have ideals is the murderer.

The Big Clock also differs from run-of-the-mill thrillers in the subtlety of its narrative technique. Fearing tells the story by means of multiple narrators, a device that he uses in all his novels, not always happily. Sometimes there are too many narrators (*The Hospital*, *Clark Gifford's Body*); sometimes (*Loneliest Girl in the World*, *The Generous Heart*) chapters narrated by minor characters turn into self-contained short stories. *The Big Clock*, on the other hand, effects a perfect marriage of plot and points of view. Fearing insures that Stroud will be the focus of the reader's interest and concern by having him narrate eleven of the novel's nineteen chapters and by delaying the first shift in point of

view until almost a fourth of the way into the book. By this time the direction of the plot is so clearly established that, without distracting the reader from Stroud's story, Fearing can use each of the six other narrators for a variety of subordinate purposes. For instance, Stroud tries to misdirect the search for himself by assigning people jobs for which they are temperamentally unsuited. To stake out Gil's shabby Third Avenue bar he sends Edward Orlin, a humorless literary intellectual with an interest in Henry James. Orlin himself tells the story of an afternoon at Gil's in a chapter that not only furthers the plot as Orlin gathers information that may help to identify the missing witness, but also produces social comedy as Gil's tackiness registers on Orlin's effete sensibility. A variation on this device occurs in a later chapter narrated by the painter Louis Patterson. Through her irreverent eyes the reader sees the stuffed shirt sent by Stroud to interview her. Respectability's judgment on the disreputable in one chapter is balanced by Bohemia's judgment on respectability in the other.

The latter chapter also contains one of the most dramatic moments in the novel when Patterson, brought to the Janoth Building to identify the missing witness, meets Stroud and realizes that the leader of the hunt is also the quarry. Since the plot requires that she conceal her knowledge, having the confrontation narrated from her point of view serves to clarify her motives more fully than might otherwise have been possible. But there are additional advantages. Other narrators have noticed that Stroud looks haggard and drawn—Fearing's way of emphasizing the pressure he is under, while at the same time preserving his silent stoicism in the chapters he narrates himself. Patterson the artist, however, is more sensitive to the signs of strain than anyone else in the novel:

His eyes were like craters, and I saw that their sockets were hard and drawn and icy cold, in spite of the easy smile he showed. I knew this, and at the same time I knew no one else in the room was capable of knowing it... (p. 159)

Perhaps the most important advantage of the use of a slightly hostile narrator in this chapter is that the reader is distanced from the protagonist at a moment of intense crisis. This has a strangely unsettling effect, like that of being denied communication with a friend while watching him undergo a painful ordeal.

The climax of *The Big Clock* parodies almost too cleverly the nick-of-time escapes of conventional thrillers. Howard Haycraft thought it nearly ruined the novel:

First [Fearing] resolves the immediate predicament by a dubious *deus ex machina* device. This is structurally weak but not fatal. What is much more serious, he rests his

ultimate conclusion on an assumption so amazingly disregarded of the stated facts that credibility is all but destroyed and enough plot ends are left to choke a reasonably conscientious pulp editor.⁷

It must be conceded that the coincidence by which Janoth is deposed at the very moment when a posse closes in on Stroud is made especially outrageous by Fearing's unwillingness to let the reader know beforehand that a crucial executive meeting is in progress. I write "unwillingness" rather than "failure" because the absence of preparation for the meeting is clearly deliberate, an intentional effort to force the reader to share the ignorance of Stroud and his colleagues. In this connection it is instructive to compare Fearing's use of multiple narrators with that in nineteenth-century mystery novels such as Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* or *The Moonstone*. Each of Collins's narrators writes all that he knows, and what he knows completes the jigsaw puzzle of the plot, so that those who survive can read and understand the whole. Fearing's narratives, however, are interior monologues and are therefore inaccessible to the other characters. Furthermore, the most important narrator doesn't tell all he knows. That Stroud has had an affair with a woman named Elizabeth Stoltz is made known in the chapter narrated by his wife; that he used to get drunk and pass out at Gil's is made known in the chapter narrated by Orlin. Stroud reveals just enough about his arrangement with the manager of a residential hotel to indicate that he's been using the hotel for his sexual liaisons, but not enough to indicate how or when the arrangement began, or how often he's taken advantage of it. Such indirectly conveyed and incomplete information suggests a side of his character that's vaguely disquieting, not so much because it's sordid as because it's impenetrable. Even when the various narrators tell all they know, uncertainty remains. Since none of them has taken part in the conspiracy to unseat Janoth, neither they nor the reader can know how it happened. This isn't careless exposition. It's twentieth-century epistemological scepticism.

Still, since the reader is privy to more information than anyone else, he's expected to make connections and draw inferences on his own. He's expected, in fact, to tie up the loose "plot ends" that Haycraft denounced. There are three of them: Stroud's handkerchief, with his laundry mark, left behind in a bar he had been to with Delos; pictures of people known to have been acquainted with the victim, including one of Stroud, that the police are showing to the staff of the hotel where Stroud and Delos spent the night; and a taxi driver, tracked down by Stroud, who remembers driving Janoth on the night of the murder from the neighborhood of Delos's apartment to the neighborhood of Hagen's. Though much is made of

these pieces of evidence when they are introduced, they seem to lead nowhere because, at the end of the book, Stroud is still unsuspected as the missing witness and Janoth, who has killed himself, is still protected by an airtight alibi. The reader has to infer, however, that by means of Stroud's photograph the police will expose his affair with Delos and thus destroy his marriage; that the handkerchief will place him with Delos shortly before the murder and thus make him a suspect; but that the taxi driver will explode Janoth's alibi and thus save Stroud from being punished for a crime he didn't commit. And to help the careful reader make the proper connections, after the climax Fearing has Stroud tell his daughter a story about a little girl who "started to pick at a loose thread in her handkerchief"—significant detail—and who ended up as "just a heap of yarn lying on the floor." The moral of the story, Stroud explains, is "not to pull out any loose threads. Not too far." (pp. 169-70). In the final scene of the novel, still giddy with relief at his miraculous escape, Stroud is on his way to meet his wife for a night on the town. He knows that the big clock will "get around to me again. Inevitably. Soon." (p. 174). But he refuses to make conscious his knowledge of the evidence that will trap him. *Pace* Haycraft, he refuses "to pull out any loose threads. Not too far."

Though *The Big Clock* is rich in implication, to my knowledge there are only two published interpretations of the book. Harry R. Warfel calls it the story of "an unconscious rebel against society" who is "in search of himself," and Frank Ochigirosso declares that the big clock, a symbol of time and mortality, "reminds [Fearing's] protagonist—and us—that there is one kind of conformity from which all of us have ultimately no escape."⁸ There is much to be said for both of these readings, but Warfel's characterization of Stroud as "an unconscious rebel" identifies the theme that Fearing himself thought central to the book. His original title, and his favorite, was *The Temptation of St. Judas*,⁹ an allusion to a misinterpretation of the subject of the Louise Patterson painting that Stroud buys on the afternoon of the murder. The picture shows "two hands, one giving and the other receiving a coin" (p. 50). Patterson calls it *Study in Fundamentals* (p. 153), a wittily punning title that can refer to the subject, the treatment, or both. It is Delos—perhaps because of her own betrayal of Janoth—who invents the title *The Temptation of Judas* (p. 51), and Stroud who makes Judas a saint:

On the spur of the moment I decided, and told [Delos], that Judas must have been a born conformist, a naturally common-sense, rubber-stamp sort of fellow who rose far above himself when he became involved with a group of people who were hardly in society, let alone a profitable business.

"Heavens, you make him sound like a saint," Pauline said, smiling and frowning.

I told her very likely he was.

"A man like that, built to fall into line but finding himself always out of step, must have suffered twice the torments of the others. And eventually, the temptation was too much for him. Like many another saint, when he was tempted, he fell. But only briefly."

"Isn't that a little involved?"

"Anyway, it's the name of my picture," I said. "Thanks for your help."

Stroud's reasoning is even more involved than Delos supposes. His Judas is the negative image of himself—a born conformist who has chosen to rebel, rather than a born rebel who has chosen to conform. His sanctification of Judas is not only an act of non-conformity in itself, but suggests his identification with anyone who struggles to play a role that all his instincts oppose. Such a role in its most extreme form Stroud plays in directing the search that, if successful, will result in his own destruction. However extreme, though, his predicament is emblematic of

what he freely chooses to endure in his job every day. All acquisitive conformity, Fearing implies, is self-betrayal.

Fearing resisted the use of the title *The Big Clock* because, he told his editor, "the novel is apt to be received merely as an action, murder-mystery . . . this is the last thing I had in mind when I wrote the book."¹⁰ That his worst fears were realized is not the fault of the title. On the contrary, the title alludes to the most explicitly philosophical passages in the novel. No, the book has been received "merely as an action, murder-mystery" because it is a thriller before it is anything else, and thrillers, no matter what their titles, are routinely consigned by highbrow critics to the dustbin of literary history. If *The Big Clock* is to be recognized for the serious, artfully crafted novel it is, much work of restoration will have to be done. This essay tries to make a beginning.

Notes

1. Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor, *A Catalogue of Crime* (Harper & Row, 1971), p. 175; *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection* ed. Chris Steinbrunner and Otto Penzler (McGraw-Hill, 1976), p. 147; Melvyn Barnes, *Best Detective Fiction: A Guide from Godwin to the Present* (Linnet Books, 1975), p. 87; "Kenneth Fearing: 1902-1961," *Mainstream* 14:27-34 (August 1961); Sy Kahn, "Kenneth Fearing and the Twentieth Century Blues," in *The Thirties: Fiction, Drama, Poetry* ed. Warren French (Everett/Edwards, 1967), pp. 133-40; *The Forties: Fiction, Drama, Poetry* ed. Warren French (Everett/Edwards, 1969); "Fiction Chronicle," *Parisian Review* 13:587 (1946). For a brief but serious treatment of *The Big Clock* outside of the literature of mystery and detection, see the work by Harry R. Warfel cited in n. 8 below.
2. *The Big Clock* (Harcourt, Brace, 1946). Page numbers in parentheses refer to this edition. For an edition in print, see the paperback in the Harper & Row Perennial Library, 1980.
3. Screenplay by Jonathan Latimer, directed by John Farrow, produced by Richard Maibaum for Paramount Pictures.
4. On the characteristics of the tough guy, see the excellent essay by Sheldon Norman Grebstein, "The Tough Hemingway and His Hard-Boiled Children," in *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties* ed. David Madden (Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), pp. 18-41, especially pp. 20-27.
5. Julian Symons, *Mortal Consequences: A History—from the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (Harper & Row, 1972), p. 160.
6. Max Byrd, "The Detective Detected: From Sophocles to Ross Macdonald," *Yale Review* (n.s.) 64:83 (1974).
7. "With Clay Hands," *Saturday Review of Literature*, October 12, 1946, p. 50.
8. Harry R. Warfel, *American Novelists of Today* (1951; reprinted by Greenwood Press, 1972), p. 146; Frank Occhiogrosso, "Fearing, Kenneth (Flexner)," in *Twentieth-Century Crime and Mystery Writers* ed. John M. Reilly (St. Martin's, 1980), p. 547.
9. Patricia B. Santora, "The Poetry and Prose of Kenneth Flexner Fearing" (Dissertation, University of Maryland, 1982), p. 136. I want to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Santora for sending me a copy of her work immediately after its acceptance by her dissertation committee.
10. Letter, evidently undated, from Fearing to Lambert Davis, quoted in Santora, p. 136. □



AJH REVIEWS

Short notes...

These notes may be a bit shorter than usual. That and my total absence from the last issue can be attributed to my singleminded commitment to the new edition of my *Bibliography of Crime Fiction*. My manuscript (5,038 pages!) is done, and the book should be out from Garland Publishing by the time this TAD appears. I can now think of sleeping and reading and reviewing again.

J. S. Borthwick debuts very strongly with *The Case of the Hook-Billed Kites* (St. Martin's, \$12.95). She integrates character, emotion, setting, and passion (for birdwatching) with polished writing; more, Ms. Borthwick! Sarah Deane, Boston teacher/grad student, rendezvous with her maybe lover for some Spring birdwatching in a Texas refuge which is filled with at least as many binoculars as birds. Murder intrudes immediately. Do bird fanciers kill each other? How about an academician from Utah illegally collecting butterflies? Did any of the three females with excellent reason to hate the dead man seize an opportunity? Is there a connection with drug-running across the Rio Grande?

Those old enough to remember dramatic radio in its heyday in the U.S. will rue its passing—all we have left is mindless TV. But, thanks to Douglas G. Greene, we can relive some of the best of dramatic radio as created by John Dickson Carr. *The Dead Sleep Lightly* (Doubleday, \$11.95), edited and introduced by Greene, offers nine heretofore unpublished Carr radio plays, written for American shows or the BBC. Allow your imagination here to create the scene, the timbre of the voices, the menace, the unspeakable...enjoy!



Allen J. Hubin, Consulting Editor

Photo: Robert Smull

Max Collins launches himself in hardcovers and unintentional Iowa sleuth Mallory in criminous adventures in *The Baby Blue Rip-Off* (Walker, \$11.95). This is told in perhaps overly folksy first person, but once past that difficulty you'll



find the setting and situations intriguing. Mallory, an ex-cop, is pushed into social activism by a passing mistress. Delivering hot meals to the geriatric set should be fairly un Hazardous—unless, as Mallory does, one stumbles on a

burglary which proves fatal to the aged and harmless target. Local cops invite Mallory's nonparticipation, but other folks, for a variety of reasons, activate his thinking and reacting mechanisms. Amusing antics.

In *Freak* (Dodd, Mead, \$10.95) by Michael Collins, the eleventh Dan Fortune novel, the owner of a New Jersey computer company retains Fortune to find his son. Said offspring sold the house his father had given him and disappeared with his wife and proceeds. Dan finds that others are also looking, that the trail is littered with corpses. If this sounds a bit familiar, it is, but Collins tells it well enough to pass an evening.

Sweden's Jan Ekstrom makes his first appearance here, in translation, in *Deadly Reunion* (Scribner's, \$12.95). The dust jacket draws favorable comparison with a variety of celebrated writers; the closest comparison is with John Dickson Carr, but here is not the color or humor of the Carr I remember. A locked-room murder there is, as well as a great deal of talking amongst the characters and police at the home of a matriarch, whose family, unto the third generation, has gathered to celebrate her birthday and worship her money. Insp. Bertil Durell investigates. Intriguing if not compelling.

Some will criticize this year's Dick Francis novel, *Banker* (Putnam, \$14.95), for almost complete lack of conflict or sense of menace for more than half its length. But despite this much greater placidity, I attended Francis's tale with nearly undiminished absorption: he tells a story so beautifully. The narrator is the titular banker, rising in a family institution, taking a loan risk on a champion race horse being turned to

stud. When the value of the collateral goes to zero, said banker—his judgment rating badly on the decline—looks for a way out and finally comes across territory unexpected indeed. Fascinating characters, lovely story; Francis has lost none of his skill.

I rather like *Death Stalk* (St. Martin's, \$10.95) by Richard Grindal more than the period pieces he writes as "Richard Grayson" about Insp. Gautier of the Paris police. Grindal, Executive Director of the Scotch Whisky Association, uses his background well here. The setting is one of the Hebrides Islands, on which the only industry is an old, high-quality distillery. An alcoholic American writer, fleeing a failed marriage and seeking peace, is the prime suspect as the islanders close ranks when a saucy lass is murdered. The island, its people and customs, are well rendered; the resolution is a bit unsatisfying.

I found most pleasant my first exposure to Gerald Hammond and his series about gunsmith Keith Calder. This is *The Game* (St. Martin's, \$10.95), which appears to be the fourth. Here a most untimely murder seems to have taken place at Scotland's most elegant and enterprising bordello. The attentions of the police being unwanted and the weapon seeming to be a classic firearm, Calder is induced by friendly blackmail to investigate. The affair gets nasty, Calder responds in kind, and the bordello's entrepreneurial proprietress earns her wages. Nice style, very satisfying conflict and resolution.

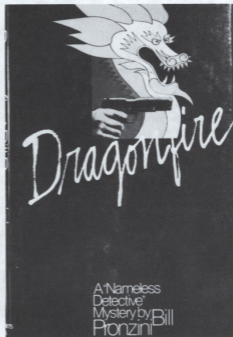
The latest in the 47-year-long John Appleby series by Michael Innes is *Sheiks and Adders* (Dodd, Mead, \$10.95), more a comedy of manners and society and elegance of language than anything else. Appleby, now long retired from the Yard, finds himself at a charity fête at the rural estate of someone large in the City. It's a fancy-dress affair, well attended by an abundance of "sheiks" as a cover for the attendance of a real one. In due course

the murder of a sheiky look-alike suggests some urgency in getting his highness away quickly and safely. Appleby fits snakes and a balloon into a creative solution. Amusing.

I. I. Magdalen, the pseudonym of a "well-known novelist" in England, offers complex spying intrigues in *The Search for Anderson* (St. Martin's, \$11.95). Agreeably mystifying though this is, the book is also filled with patter and internal monologues not crystal in clarity. Derek Flaye is a minor agent of British Intelligence. One day in 1963 he is addressed in the street by an old spying colleague, who calls him by the wrong name (Anderson) and gives him a parcel. The name is a

Gladys Mitchell has been writing about her uncommon sleuth, Dame Beatrice Bradley, since 1929. Her latest is *Uncoffin'd Clay* (St. Martin's, \$9.95). Despite Mitchell's 82 years and well over fifty volumes in the series, *Clay* is not without interest and color, though it lacks something in credibility. The scene is the English village of Strode Hillary, which is beset by burglaries, peculiarities involving local Arabs, and finally a corpse in an unlikely place. Bradley finally ties all the criminous activity into a fairly tidy package.

Magdalen Nabb, potter and playwright turned novelist, has lived in Florence since 1975. Here she sets



clue; Flaye is assigned to follow it. He does so, balancing a mistress and a succession of former wives and their offspring with trips to São Paulo and Prague. Who is Anderson Minor, and why must Derek track him down?

Death of an Englishman (Scribner's, \$10.95), introducing Marshal Guarnaccia, whose second appearance is already on my shelves. This is an agreeable debut, nicely observant, in which a flu-ridden marshal, his eager police cadet, and a visiting

pair from Scotland Yard inquire into the titular demise.

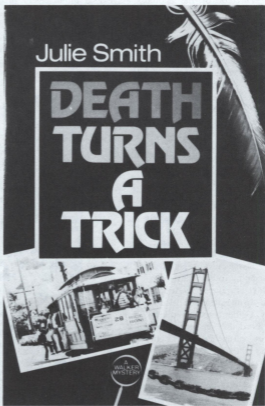
Thomas Perry, an administrator at USC with a Ph.D. in English from the U. of Rochester, won an Edgar for best first novel for *The Butcher's Boy* (Scribner's, \$13.95). While not my choice for the honor, it is a vigorous and compelling tale of a nameless killer for hire. He disposes of a troublesome union member in California and a more bothersome Senator in Colorado. But troublesome to whom? The FBI and Dept. of Justice take an interest as events center on Las Vegas, Mafia stronghold normally off limits for mob bloodshed. But not this time, as the whole affair comes apart for all concerned.

Dragonfire by Bill Pronzini (St. Martin's, \$10.95) continues the saga of his nameless P.I., whose life hit the pits last time and here falls to new depths. He's lost his true love, he's lost his license to private eyeball, he's reduced to drinking beer with his only remaining friend, Lt. Eberhardt. While they're quaffing suds, a visitor arrives and puts bullets in both of them. Eberhardt lies in a deep coma, survival highly problematical. Nameless has a bad chest wound and determination to find out whodunit. The answer seems to have something to do with the unbriable Eberhardt having taken a bribe. Grimly effective; but it will be nice to have a bit of sunshine in San Francisco one day soon.

Julie Smith, who grew up in Georgia, graduated from a university in Mississippi and was a reporter in New Orleans and San Francisco, arrives in our precincts with her first novel, *Death Turns a Trick* (Walker, \$11.95). This has some good ideas: a liberated young Jewish lawyer lady befriends the proprietress of a posh S.F. bordello and plays a little piano on the premises. This leads to a corpse in the lawyer's apartment, a variety of embarrassments (like explaining all this to a proper Jewish mother), and perforce a little sleuthing. Entertaining.

The second of Peter Turnbull's Glasgow police procedurals (after *Deep and Crisp and Even*) is *Dead Knock* (St. Martin's, \$10.95). Here a woman who asks the police for protection and then walks away, shortly to turn up dead, and a shipment of prawns laced with heroin engage the attentions of Insp. Donoghue and his minions. Some very nasty types indeed are around,

is outside TAD's normal purview, Bleiler's work distinctly overlaps our field and I know many TADians' interests extend to Bleiler's regions. This work, 723 large-size pages of small print, provides bibliographical, biographical, thematic, and critical commentary relating to 1,774 books and over 7,000 stories—a veritable treasure trove of information it is. Title and author index it has as well,




and the tale has a starkly effective realism.

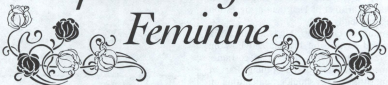
Finally, a note on an important reference work. Although the primary focus of Everett F. Bleiler's *The Guide to Supernatural Fiction* (Kent State University Press, \$55.00)

but more importantly there is a Motif Index, where the major headings "detective situations," "murder," and "occult detectives," among others, will at the least whet TADian appetites.

—AJH



A Practical Psychologist, Specializing in the Feminine



By Robert Sampson

"I have yet to meet a man bold enough to face me down. How could I surrender myself to one whose soul was secretly afraid of mine? So here I sit. You know that the Madam I have hitched to my name is just to save my face. No one would believe that a woman as beautiful as I could be still unmarried and respectable. But I am both, worse luck."¹

That is the authentic voice of Madame Rosika Storey, celebrated psychologist and consulting detective. As usual, she speaks with hard, good sense, tempered by a dry wit that flickers like imp light around her remarks. She has long since discovered that you may boldly speak personal truths if your voice is suitably ironic.

Unmarried, Madame Storey began her series in the 1922 *Argosy All-Story Weekly* and unmarried she left *Argosy* in 1935. She appears in about thirty novelettes and short stories, one short novel, and four serialized novels. Her adventures, written by Hulbert Footner, were collected into ten books that contain all the novels and most of the shorter material. During this professional activity, her heart was touched several times. But beautiful detectives who carry series do not easily love and marry. Not if the series writer is alert. And Hulbert Footner was most alert.

Rosika Storey appeared about thirty-five years after Sherlock Holmes's initial case. Even across that

distance in time, Holmes's shadow fell weightily on her. She practiced The Science of Deduction only casually, but there were other, greater similarities. Like Holmes, Madame Storey was steeped in idiosyncrasies, with a personal superiority that denied the possibility of error. They shared a similar penchant for disguise and a distinctive home base, and both guided the usual covey of bewildered police. Finally, both enjoyed that most necessary ingredient, a literary friend to record their adventures in the terrible authority of the first-person singular.

Madame Storey makes her first entrance as a smiling and enigmatic figure, dressed in high fashion.

She was very tall and supremely graceful. It was impossible to think of legs in connection with her movements. She floated into the room like a shape wafted on the breeze. She was darkly beautiful in the insolent style that causes plainer women to prim up their lips.

She wore an extraordinary gown, a taupe silk brocaded with a shadowy gold figure, made in long panels that exaggerated her height and slimmness, unrelieved by any trimming whatsoever. . . . [S]nuggled in the hollow of her arm she carried a black monkey dressed in a coat of Paddy green and a fool's cap hung with tiny gold bells.²

She arrives like cultural shock. Let the women prim up their lips. Their reaction acknowledges her skill at displaying exquisitely calculated glimpses of a unique professional image. She has coolly planned the effect of her appearance, her offices, her eccentricities. For

she is a businesswoman, selling her intellectual skills to a society which prizes the unique and expensive. A society, also, where women are rarely granted more than secondary partnerships. Her image is of serene competence, remote and imperturbable as the floor of Heaven. It "kept fools at arm's length," and it drew the wealthy clients in.

That image is enhanced by various theatrical devices. These range from her jewel-box office suite to her monkey and her cigarettes.

Cigarettes: She smokes constantly, and her ashtray overflows. This is suspect behavior in the 1920s. Women enjoyed such minor sins only vicariously ("Blow some my way"), since use of cigarettes implied inoperable turpitude. Not that smoking is her consuming vice. Two puffs and she is done. Her cigarette is less an artifact of Hell than a suggestion of strangeness and giddy depths.

As is her monkey, Giannino. He is a little black nuisance, trained to take off his hat and bow on command. He is customarily dressed in costumes that complement Madame Storey's clothing. Part of his life is spent sitting on her shoulder, part sitting on top of that large picture in her office. From there, he descends discreetly to steal the cigarettes smoldering in her ashtray.

Giannino affords a touch of the bizarre. He is a sort of living accent, his presence emphasizing the beauty of her office, as a painter's single touch of red focuses a composition. And her office is very beautiful. It was, says Bella Brickley, the series narrator,

more like a little gallery in a museum than a woman's office; an up-to-date museum where they realize the value of not showing too much at once. With all its richness there was a fine severity of arrangement, and every object was perfect of its kind. . . . It was only as I came to know it that I realized the taste with which every object had been selected and arranged.³

Taste, Discrimination, Perception, Control: Characteristics more appropriate for a Roman senator than a feminine detective in a pulp magazine. However, Madame Storey rises above her virtues. Within that darkly shining exterior prances a joyous girl, delighted with her own effects. Not that she is overwhelmed by her own image. If the essence of a French salon glows about her, it is not only for her private enjoyment but because it is indispensable to the conduct of her business.

Behind the gracious façade, she runs a tightly controlled establishment. She employs a permanent cadre of investigators. She has direct ties in the District Attorney's office and police headquarters. She is constantly embedded in crime investigations of freshly murdered folk, underworld characters, and glitter-eyed geniuses gone bad.

For all this, she does not consider herself a detec-

tive. She is, she says, a "practical psychologist specializing in the feminine." As a psychologist, she is intensely sensitive to the small change of human interaction—the face's movement, the voice's hesitation and slur, the unconscious drives that shape dress and conduct.

She is extraordinary and unique. No other heroine in popular literature approaches her. Through the series she slips with self-possession and wit, exquisite



First part of "The Under Dogs" (*Argosy All-Story Weekly*, January 3, 1925). Madame Storey, not shown, is working the handle of the broom.

and unapproachable. She attains a stature rivaled by no other female investigator until the rather different flowering of Jane Marple, six years later in 1928.⁴

In 1922 mystery fiction, a female detective was no longer a shattering wonder whose presence caused horses to shy. For sixty years, since about 1861, legions of policewomen, private inquiry agents, and amateur lady investigators had earned glory in popular fiction pages.⁵ Of these clever women, some became secondary continuing characters in extended series—as did Ida Jones, who joined the Nick Carter

works in 1892. Others starred briefly in their own series, although few lasted as long as Ida. Among these detecting women were Loveday Brooke (1893), Dorcas Dene (1897), and Lady Molly of Scotland Yard (1910), English all and very capable. "The special qualifications of these heroines lay in their vivacious energy and brisk common sense, aided by their 'female instincts'." Some were aided by other special skills. Judith Lee's 1912 investigations were made possible because she was a lip reader. When her cases were reprinted in *All-Story Weekly* (1915), the letters column buzzed with controversy. Was lip reading possible? Were there to be no more secrets?

Before the Judith Lee agitation, several other feminine detectives had occupied series in American magazines. In 1912, Arnold Fredericks (pseudonym of Frederic Arnold Kummer) published the first of five novels featuring Grace Duval, one half of The Honeymoon Detectives. The adventures ran in *The Cavalier*, *All-Story Cavalier Weekly*, and *All-Story Weekly* into 1917. Grace was all female instincts and also trouble prone. Customarily she worried one end of the string, while her husband, a renowned investigator, fussed at the other.

During 1913, Arthur B. Reeve introduced Constance Dunlap to *Pearson's* magazine. Constance, a reformed criminal, wandered through mystery-adventures densely packed with semi-scientific apparatus. Her mystery solving was more a matter of luck and good sense than technical skill.

But the style of the period emphasized luck over almost everything else. The feminine detectives of the mid-teens were not professionals in the manner of Ida Jones and Loveday Brooke. Rather, they were highly decorative amateurs, like Anna Katherine Green's Violet Strange, turned detective by chance. Their successes depended largely on the generosity of their authors.

Both Nan Russell (1920) and Dr. Nancy Dayland (1923) were extreme examples of this type.

Nan Russell was cute and dear and delightful and adorable, and how she became a genius private investigator is beyond knowing. She appeared in a five-episode series in *Argosy All-Story Weekly* written by Raymond Lester during 1920. They all adored her at the detective agency. In her presence, those cynical tough detectives turned to sugar cakes. Her portrait in oils hung in the boss's office. Her own private office was furnished in exquisite taste, a flower here, a rare antique there. She was so pure, so clever, so lovely, the flower of the agency, wrapped in steamy adulation. Nothing physical; it was all high and spiritual.

Similar uncritical adoration is the leitmotif of Florence Mae Pettee's series about Dr. Nancy Dayland. Dr. Nancy was a practicing criminologist who worked the pages of *Argosy All-Story Weekly*,

Action Stories, and *Flynn's*. She mixed Sherlock Holmes with Nancy Drew, and displayed all Nan Russell's characteristics in a jaunty, teen-aged way. Except that she stimulated awe and respect, rather than love, and so was condemned to a chronically sterile emotional life.

By the time Madame Storey arrived on the scene, the feminine investigator was a solidly established figure in the world of detective fiction. But that should not imply that these women were realistically drawn. Few were as substantial as a cloud of perfume. They adventured through a world remote from the angular realities so familiar to those who do not dwell in fiction. It was also a world distorted to shield the female detective from reality's sharper edges. A world quite purged of human emotions and human complexity. This neglected area, Hulbert Footner noted and attempted to fill.

Hulbert Footner (1879-1944) was another of those Canadian-American writers who contributed so weightily to the American pulp magazines. Born in Ontario, Footner attended high school in New York City and became a journalist there in 1905. He moved to Calgary, Alberta in 1906, to begin his professional writing in earnest. After publishing a number of short stories, he sold a first novel to the *Outing Magazine* in 1911. Thereafter his work—short stories, novelettes, and serials—appeared steadily in *Munsey's*, *Cavalier*, *All-Story Cavalier*, *All-Story*, *Argosy*, *All-Story Weekly*, and, later, *Mystery*.

His first five novels dealt with adventure in Canada and the North West. These were partially based on his experiences in the North Woods. He moved back to New York City about 1914 and, for a period, played parts in a road show of William Gillette's play *Sherlock Holmes*.⁷ Footner later used this experience in writing and producing his own plays. By 1916, he had also written the first of his mysteries. A few years later, he bought a seventeenth-century house in Lusby, Maryland (the general scene for several later novels). There he lived until his death in 1944.

The Madame Storey series started in the middle of Footner's career and continued for almost fifteen years. The series shows considerable stylistic change. It begins with a strong emphasis on character and problem, featuring those usual 1920s elements, a detective of dazzling ability scoring off police who barely get along. As the 1930s are reached, the stories shorten, become increasingly active and violent. The character portrayal and complexity of character interaction also simplify, and the problem mystery is converted to brisk mystery adventure. It is not necessarily a defect. But it is a measurable change.

Technically, all the stories may be classified as mysteries, and it is true that most propose a mystery to be solved. This is not always the most important

element. Frequently the identity of the criminal is known before the mid-chapters. The balance of the story then concentrates on that intricate duel between villain and Madame Storey as she seeks to complete her case before its fragile strands are destroyed by her opponent.

The initial tales depend heavily on character interaction. The people of the story constantly respond to each other, forming opinions and reacting as dictated by their personalities. The solution of the mystery is, first of all, a matter of psychology. Personal motives are of importance. Clues, as such, are distinctly secondary.

The continuing characters, themselves, are fully developed by 1924. They do not essentially change afterward and are treated warmly in stories rich and various.

The first of the series was "Madame Storey's Way" (March 11, 1922), published in *Argosy All-Story Weekly*. It is a surprising fiction to discover in that bastion of action adventure, for the story contains about the same amount of physical movement as an essay by Emerson.

"Madame Storey's Way" is presented in two distinct parts, like an apple sitting on an orange. In Part I, Bella Brickley, narrator of the series, answers a newspaper ad for a job, competes with other women for an unknown position, and is selected as Madame Storey's secretary and Watson.

In Part II, we are presented with the first mystery. Ashcomb Poor, a wealthy philanderer, is found shot dead in his home. His wife's secretary is arrested for the murder. The Assistant District Attorney permits Madame Storey to interview the girl in that glamorous office. (Like Nero Wolfe after her, Madame Storey recognizes the positional advantage in having police and suspects come to her.)

By this time, Rosika has privately visited the scene of the crime and removed certain clues overlooked by the police. After a series of interviews with major witnesses, she calls all together in her office and the guilty party is revealed.

Most of the story occurs within five long scenes. Madame Storey is always before us. The dialogue is crisp, clear, glittering with sudden wit. Sequences of sentences fly past, terse as in a dime novel. Whole pages of dialogue are used. You have the feeling of strong movement. Yet the characters, peering intently at each other, barely twitch. They act and react upon each other. It is a remarkable *tour de force*.

—Madame Storey conducts a satisfyingly high-handed interview with a room filled by job applicants and speaks candidly with Bella.

—She fences astutely with Assistant District Attorney Walter Barron, who has illusions of matrimony.

—She serves tea and cakes to the secretary accused of murder.

—She consults with the murdered man's wife.

—She allows two lovers to explain to each other their bizarre behavior.

Talk scenes. But not static. It is like watching planes of colored smoke drifting one through the other, the immediate interplay of character. Each scene fulfills a triple function: to elaborate the characterization of Madame Storey, to provide necessary facts about a main character, and to clarify another scrap of the puzzle.

The second story of the series, "Miss Deely's Diamond" (May 26, 1923), differs radically from the first. This is filled with movement. A large diamond has been stolen; the gem has an intensely romantic history which reads as if composed by Conan Doyle. Its history aside, the diamond seems to possess certain supernatural attributes. It is said that, if you look directly at it, your unrealized self will fully develop, like a photographic print in solution. Whether that development is for good or evil depends on the hidden state of your psyche.

Superstition or not, that personality alteration is the chief means Madame Storey uses to trace the diamond as it is carried among the small towns and rural houses of New York State, through a series of owners and violent episodes. Finally, the diamond is traced back to New York City, where it is recovered. Madame Storey does look full upon it. She remains unaffected—except that she spends every loose dollar of her fortune to purchase it, a matter of \$150,000. Practical psychology applied to the feminine seems a rewarding profession.

Bella Brickley, however, positively refuses to look at the diamond. She clasps hands over eyes and turns away. But then, Bella is not all that secure in herself.

Secure or not, Bella is one of the most interesting narrators in a popular fiction series. In person, she is freckled, red-headed, and plain. These characteristics scald her, and she has rigidly schooled herself to accept her lack of beauty.

"I am so plain," she writes.

Or she remarks, flat-voiced: "...[H]aving no pretensions to beauty, I don't have to be jealous of other women."

Those splendid men who step into the consultation room pass by her with only cursory glances. Their indifference is recorded in icy slivers of prose.

At their first interview, Madame Storey tells her:

"...[Y]ou are suffering from mal-appreciation. Those two ugly lines between your brows were born of the belief that you were too plain and uninteresting ever to hope to win a niche of your own in the world. . . . Think that cross look away and your face will show what is rarer than beauty, character, individuality."⁴

When it suits Rosika's purposes, she is nothing if not

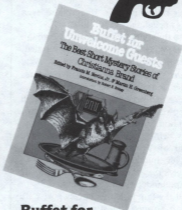
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plain spoken. It is sour medicine, administered with the knowledge that Bella will not crumble under it.

That Bella eventually rids herself of that cross look and stops dragging her hair back from the roots may be inferred. Nature provides other compensations. She is remarkably perceptive, and her tart, good sense, crisp as fresh lettuce, makes her prose a constant joy. Her opinions sting. Even plain, even red-headed, she is appealing.

She is the key to the series. All events filter through Bella. Like other Watsons, she is easily puzzled. Unlike most Watsons, she has a deadly accurate eye:

On a chauffeur: "one of those exalted creatures with the self-possession of a cabinet minister."

On an elaborate mansion: "The richness of it all was simply overpowering, but I could not conceive of anybody being at home in such a museum."

On a wealthy wife: "She looked as rare and precious as a bit of Venetian glass. This ethereal exterior covered very human feelings."

On hotel hangers-on: "They were divided mostly into two classes: philanderers and pan-handlers."

On a ball: "All the family jewels in Newport were given an airing it seemed—mostly decorating the bodies of dowagers that they could do very little for."

On meeting a fancy man: "He whirled around and bowed. . . . My hand was horribly self-conscious in

the expectation that he might offer to kiss it. I wondered if it was quite clean"

On a foolish client: "in an overstuffed baby-blue armchair sat Mrs. Julian, overstuffed herself, and enveloped in God knows how many yards of lavender chiffon."

These terse assessments glint through the stories, leaving painless cuts, as if the prose were sprinkled with delicate crystals of glass. From the beginning to the end of the series, you see through Bella's eyes. And what you see, from the homes and habits of the wealthy to the homes and habits of the underworld, is rendered in clear little terse images, delicately polarized. Miss Brickley is artlessly candid in describing her reactions, and she responds to each person and event. But be cautioned. Although you read her remarks with pleasure, remember that they are part of her characterization. Behind them lurks the amiable intelligence of Hulbert Footner, and the story told by Miss Brickley has been filtered through her and colored by her understanding.

Those things that you most devoutly desire have a way of arriving spangled with things you don't ever remember wishing for. Bella wants an interesting job working for a supremely beautiful woman. That she gets. She also gets a continuous stream of adventures dangerous enough to gray that red hair.

Detail from the heading of "It Never Got into the Papers," Part I (*Argosy All-Story Weekly*, March 24, 1928). Madame Storey and Giannino receive a client in her office. The story says that it's an office.



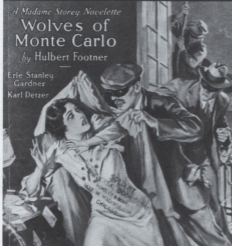
Action Stories of All Kinds
ARGOSY
AUG. 5 WEEKLY

A Madame Storey Novelle

Wolves of Monte Carlo

by Hulbert Footner

Eric Stanley
Gardner
Karl Detzer



"Wolves of Monte Carlo" was a short story, rather than a novelette, filled with non-stop movement, violence, and menace in the 1930s action style. *Argosy*, August 5, 1933.

Bella does not like adventures. Field work leaves her edgy. She does not think clearly under stress. At the moment of action, she functions in a numbed calm. But before that moment, she has the shakes and, afterward, the hysterics.

Madame Storey, on the other hand, relishes action and searches eagerly for excuses to leave her 1850 French drawing room suite to travel underworld ways, hip-swinging and shrill. Since women jaunt about most invisibly by twos, she carries Bella along—and into astonishing situations.

Madame Storey's predilection for adventure explains why Bella finds herself sitting in a hardcase speakeasy with her hair clipped short ("The Under Dogs"). Or fleeing through a deserted mansion with gunmen straining after them ("The Butler's Ball"). Or looking down Mafia pistols ("Taken for a Ride"). Or tied and gagged in an automobile being driven over a cliff ("The Richest Widow").

I was trembling like an aspen leaf. . . . By a little catch of laughter in [Madame Storey's] breath, I knew that she was enjoying every moment. Well, that is her way.

At first, the adventures are less harrowing. "The Scrap of Lace" (August 4, 1923) and "In the Round Room" (March 1, 1924) are problem mysteries, not quite as formal as those of Agatha Christie. In both cases, the investigation is conducted at vast mansions, amid the odor of money and the flat stink of relationships gone wrong. "Lace" requires a murder method somewhat too elaborate to be practical and ends with Madame Storey revealing the killer before a group. "Round Room" contains a murdered woman, a secret door, and a lot of confusion about who did what. The murderer (who turns out to be insane) has a marvelous alibi. Madame Storey must lead the county prosecutor around by the ear, since, being congenitally defective, he can do nothing but bluster and blow.

The prosecutor is an early example of the species *officulus boobus* that swarms densely through the series. Most of these are political law enforcement hacks, otherwise depicted as mincing popinjays distended with conceit. They are blood relations to the officials who swaggered brainlessly through those awful low-budget mystery films of the late 1930s.

Not all law enforcement people are fools. Inspector Rumsey, New York Police, a solid, sharp professional, is Madame Storey's main link to police headquarters. The Crider brothers, both investigators employed by the Madame, never miss a lick and are competent, clever men.

Of the various sheriffs, coroners, police commissioners, and district attorneys, the less said the better. A more appalling aggregation of blowhards has rarely been assembled.

Footner uses these dolts to make Madame Storey's life less easy. But their presence also illustrates his unfortunate tendency to cast characters as representative types—unfortunate because he was a singularly persuasive writer who could almost make one of these hollow figures come alive. Almost.

Besides the dreary catalog of law enforcement types, other standard characters pepper the series. These include the villain, whose intelligence is dangerously quick and, often as not, has an uncontrolled yen for Madame Storey.

And there are the low-echelon men and women of the underworld. Most are practicing criminals, crude, violent, and fundamentally decent. If the truth must be told, Rosika has a sneaking fondness for them. Since they are impossible socially, she can like them and, as in "The Black Ace," find her heart twinged by them.

Other standard characters include tainted society flowers; the arch-wealthy, decayed by possessions; and clever older men and women, like parental echoes, who support Rosika, no matter what the occasion.

"The Viper" (April 12, 1924) is one of the high

points of the series. The story has great force. On the surface, it seems the investigation of a series of crimes committed by a thieving secretary who has murdered her boss. Under the surface, it is a leisurely exploration of a murderer's strange character. Footner's handling of interpersonal nuances is graceful and exact. The story's action is split between New York and Paris. Bella has the joy of going to France and is decidedly deflated when she is sent home, in a couple of days, to run the American end of the investigation.

But she gets over it. And, in "The Steerers" (August 2, 1924), both women are off to England on a cruise ship. En route, they meet a merry pair who spend all their days traveling the liners, making friends with susceptible marks and leading them to another set of friends, the fleecers of these sheep. This comfortable arrangement is shattered when they befriend Madame Storey.

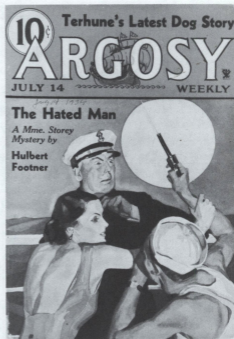
"The Under Dogs," the first novel of the series, was published as a six-part serial in *Argosy*, January 3 through February 7, 1925. Much of the adventure occurs in an underworld only slightly modified from the Jimmie Dale model described by Frank Packard back in 1914. On the whole, the criminals are more believable than those appearing in Packard's work, and they are at least as vicious. The serial also considers the links between crime in the social deeps with crime in the city's high places.

Matters begin with violence. A girl, promising sensational revelations, is on her way to Madame Storey's office. Before she arrives there, she is clubbed down and kidnapped. Attempting to search out the girl, Rosika and Bella (who is horrified by the idea) move into the underworld. The cool, high-fashion Rosika suddenly shows a genius for disguise and an ability to shine in low company, down among the East Side gin mills.

Her investigation gradually narrows to a house on Varick Street, populated by very hard cases, male and female. There are dead men under the basement floor, a chained prisoner in the attic, and a reluctant gang of crooks being blackmailed to work the will of a mastermind, dimly seen.

Masterminds, rather. The pair of them get busted in a melodramatic finish, and off they go to Sing Sing. The Big Boss, an attorney, is understandably irritated at being foiled by that "tall, skinny woman." While glooming in his cell, he works up a magnificent plan.

This drops upon our heroine in "Madame Storey in the Toils" (August 29, 1925). The frame-up is thorough. Rosika is accused of poisoning a woman with frosted cakes. The motive: to marry the woman's husband. Unfortunately for the plotters, Rosika slips gracefully from poor old Inspector Rumsey's clutch; she conducts her investigation, and



First part of "The Hated Man," later published as *Dangerous Cargo*. Madame Storey, looking about eighteen, saves a life—but not for long. *Argosy*, July 14, 1934.

routine office business, while a fugitive, and nails to the cross the entire batch who attempted to do her in.

Then back to England, on business, in "The Pot of Pansies" (April 30, 1927). This lightly science-fictional episode turns upon the development of a colorless, odorless, fast-acting gas by a scientist who wishes to end war. Instead, he gets murdered for the secret. It does the killer no good. Madame Storey is on him before he can draw an easy breath. Naturally he is upset:

"That woman is a she devil!" he screamed. "She's not human. She kept at me and at me till I near went mad. She ought to have been in the Spanish Inquisition, she should! What's she doing over here anyway, plying her trade? Aren't there enough murders in America?"

That odorless, colorless, quick-acting gas is one of the more durable devices of pulp fiction. Those with long memories will recall that the famous costumed mastermind, Black Star, used a similar gas to steal

and rob through the pages of *Detective Story Magazine*, way back in 1916; that jolly fellow, the Crimson Clown (also featured in *Detective Story*) had been using a similar gas since 1926; and Doc Savage, the bronzed scientific adventurer, would use an identical gas throughout his career, 1933-49. Whether 1916 or 1949, this gas was a science-fictional device used to accomplish the impossible and speed the action. By the time Footner incorporated it into "The Pot of Pansies," the marvelous gas was a fictional convention, accepted if not believed, like egg-carrying rabbits and Yuletide spirits. Footner uses the invention as a reason for the action, not as a device to advance the action. In so doing, he enhances the probability of his story, although not by very much.

"The Black Ace," a six-part serial, January 12 through February 16, 1929, was later published as a book titled *The Doctor Who Held Hands*.

Of this novel, the *New York Times* remarked:

"The Black Ace," a six-part serial, January 12 through February 16, 1929, was later published as a book titled *The Doctor Who Held Hands*.

Of this novel, the *New York Times* remarked:

... [N]ot only is the plot utterly preposterous but it is so clumsily constructed that the saw marks are apparent to the most inexperienced eye.¹⁰

More moderately, "The Black Ace"/*The Doctor Who Held Hands* is not the very best of the series. The plot (which is apparently what stuck in the *Times's* craw) is one of those revenge things, requiring that the villain be insane.

There is, you see, this brilliant psychologist, Dr. Jacmer Touchon—Madame Storey's teacher and rejected suitor—who has simmered for years over the flame of her growing professional reputation. Touchon has made a nice thing out of blackmailing patients. Now, hankering for ever greater achievements, he plans to bring Rosika to her knees. To crush her pride. To dominate her soul. To whomp up on her spirit. After she is well tamed, he'll marry her and show her off.

To such plans—had she been consulted—Madame Storey would have responded by puffing out a cloud of smoke and remarking, in her driest tone: "Ah, Jacmer is a most incorrigible man."

Having thoroughly misjudged his prey, Dr. Touchon puts his dream into operation. First, he sends a minion to hire Rosika to investigate the great Dr. Touchon himself. Then he proceeds to discredit her by organizing a gun attack in her office. Two men are killed in this action.

Newspaper sensation.

Touchon's manipulations permit an extraordinarily bone-headed detective to solve the murders. Rosika doesn't believe the solution for a second. But she pretends to accept it, and, while being courted by Touchon in the evening, is slipping out late at night to scour the underworld, hauling poor, quaking Bella along.

They are hunting for a young man with a scarred face, the third member of Touchon's gang.

Scarface doesn't know this. His boss (Touchon) has kept well concealed, known only as a mysterious voice. Scarface would, in fact, like to kill the man (Touchon again) who shot down his best friend in Madame Storey's office.

Once more disguised as flowers of the night, Rosika and Bella go forth into a gay round of night-clubs and gambling joints. Eventually they locate Scarface and, after harsh adventures, maneuver him into Touchon's presence. Thereupon all the cookies fall off the tray, and Touchon, having been choked black, goes up the river to a quieter life.

The story really isn't full of sawmarks. But parts need a lot of lubrication to get down.

"The Butler's Ball" (June 28, 1930) is one of those Agatha Christie things in which one person, of a

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group sitting at a table, shot the victim. It doesn't help that all are in costume. Madame Storey and Bella are on the scene hunting for jewel thieves.

(During this story, Bella remarks that her legs look pretty nice in her costume; as, elsewhere, she has remarked that she has an attractive neck and arms, we may guess that her mordant self-image is beginning to change.)

The women find the jewel thieves, indeed they do. They end up fleeing for their lives through a deserted mansion, the gang all pistoled up and hot after them. They escape with the help of the fire department, and Bella has a fine case of hysterics when it is all over.

She really does not enjoy action.

But action is increasingly her lot, for the series has entered the 1930s.

In "Easy To Kill" (six parts, August 8 through September 12, 1931), Rosika is hired to deal with a Newport extortionist. He turns out to be a wealthy young genius. Gloves come off immediately. At various times, the women are (1) in jail; (2) tied hand and foot, waiting to be wrapped in sheet lead and dropped into the Atlantic; (3) locked into the upper story of an old wooden hotel set afire by fiends.

They escape and take refuge in the rat-hole of a room rented by two small-time street crooks. In a charming scene, Rosika and Bella, bedraggled in their ruined evening dresses, sit on an unmade bed and gobble ham and scrambled egg sandwiches, three inches thick. The stick-up boys eye them tentatively. But Rosika is too skillful a hand to let sex surface. How adroitly she converts their benefactors' half-awakened lust to friendship. How swiftly she dominates their minds and enrolls them in her cause.

Next day, helped by a rich old recluse, she sets a trap for the villain. And through the swirling mist he comes. Is trapped. But the local police fumble his capture. He flees to his yacht, on which he suicides, aided by half a ton of TNT.

So much violence, so many escapes, so many guns and gunmen, clear indication that the 1930s are well upon us.

No time, now, for formal mystery problems and psychological studies. The stories are bright red, rushing furiously forward amid a high metallic whine. Descriptions are pared to the quick. Bella's annoyances more rarely reach public print. Calculated suspense rises shimmering from the superheated narrative. Again physical danger threatens, and still again. Once more they are captured, tied up, helpless in the power of . . .

Now it is mid-1933, and Madame Storey makes a major sortie from *Argosy*. She bobs up in *Mystery* in a lightly inconsistent series of short stories.

Mystery was a fancy, over-sized, slick-paper publication which had begun life as *The Illustrated*

Detective Magazine. It was distributed through Woolworth's 5 and 10¢ stores and was aimed, with great precision, at a female audience. The magazine was lavishly bedecked with photographs of consummately 1930ish models posing rigidly in re-enactment of story scenes. Madame Storey is not successfully impersonated.

The series' premise is that Rosika has been retained by the Washburn Legislative Committee to investigate the police department, city not really stated. In performing this ambitious assignment, she spends much of her time handling problems that the Chief of Detectives, Inspector Barron, has fallen flat on. As is the case with so many other males in the series, Barron takes one long look at Rosika and his voice drops two octaves. While he regards her presence as a professional insult, yet he is smitten. He babbles. He is all ham-handed gallantry, dismal to see.

In "The Sealed House" (July 1933), Rosika pries open the so-called suicide of a "bad woman." Within the woman's home, sealed by court order until legal machinery moves, there are traces of repeated break-ins and searches. Madame Storey deftly locates a blackmailing document, and the whole case suddenly pops apart.

It pops in a matter of paragraphs, with a speed characteristic of the series. The stories are compressed as dried fruit bars, and the endings seems breathlessly rushed.

"Which Man's Eyes?" (December 1933) begins with Rosika and Bella being warned to drop their investigations of the local drug ring. When they don't, four gunmen invade the Storey premises one night and machine-gun Rosika's bedroom. But she isn't in the bed and nabs the scoundrel responsible, right in the heart of police headquarters.

Through all this action, Inspector Barron is making over-ripe sounds at Rosika. She finds him intensely repulsive. Somewhat later, she finds that he is connected with the drug ring and that his soul is blotched black.

At this point in the series, the drug ring decides to discredit our heroine, since she has made such a nuisance of herself. In "The Last Adventure with Madame Storey" (May 1934), she is framed for murder—how these themes do repeat—and for narcotics distribution from her own home. Detained by the police, she demands an immediate preliminary hearing and whisks her usual dazzle from the air. Suddenly the evil are confounded. Suddenly all is wonderful. Barron is bounced from the force and the series, with a final breathless lurch, stops as abruptly as an airplane flying into a cliff face.

Slightly before the *Mystery* series ended, Rosika returned to *Argosy*, her one true love. The women go off to summer in France in "Wolves of Monte Carlo" (August 5, 1933). Immediately they are abducted,

tied up, and nearly thrown from a cliff. And that's only a warning to keep their noses out of other people's business. They don't, with success.

Another month, another abduction. In "The Kidnapping of Madame Storey" (December 2, 1933), gangsters carry her off. And also Bella. As you may have anticipated, the crooks are suavely outwitted.

Another year, another vacation. "The Murders in the Hotel Cathay" (November 17, 1934) counterpoint a series of vast swindles. It all happens in China, in a twisting, fascinating story. Bella finds an interesting young man who gets murdered two hours after he meets her. Madame Storey deduced the circumstances from the evidence of a broken chair. Then she finds two bodies tucked into a flower bed within the hotel. From this point on, matters grow violent.

The final Madame Storey novel appeared in 1934. "The Hated Man" (six-part serial, July 14 through August 18, 1934) was later published under the title *Dangerous Cargo*. In this, Madame Storey is retained by a rich pain in the neck. He wants her to keep him from being killed during an extended cruise. She does not quite succeed. The murderer is caught after an extended game of thrust and counter-thrust. During these proceedings, Bella finds a body in the swimming pool; you can imagine what that does to her composure.

"The Cold Trail" (January 12, 1935) tells how a tricky lawyer decisively fools Rosika. His baleful touch leads her case wildly astray and only desperate measures retrieve the situation. It all comes back on the rascal, at last. But it is her worst setback of the series.

To cool her humiliation, she takes Bella on a cruise to France in "The Richest Widow" (August 31, 1935). Promptly up jumps a murderous young man who has found a swell way to vanish himself and wife from a ship in mid-ocean. Rosika finds him out. Whereupon he sets bloodthirsty French killers to catch both woman and murder them. After a motorboat chase, they escape back to the ship, if narrowly. And justice is, after all, done.

There the series ends, and there we leave them after stressful triumph. There, the darkly splendid Rosika, her mind shining, and Bella, plain, red-headed, aware. Around them lift the 1930s, a black and scarlet haze, no proper place for a practical psychologist specializing in the feminine. For this time, a coarser meat was carved.

Madame Storey had, however, made the transition to 1930s fiction more gracefully than you might imagine. She retained her intelligent audacity. And if her stories had thinned, they had remained literate and witty, generating pleasing excitement.

But Rosika's real place was in the 1920s, a less convulsed time. There, in a setting of her own choice,

she performed her gilded miracles; there, she slipped casually between the social classes, welcomed by Newport wealth, accepted by the underworld. It is the same social flexibility shared by all great detectives, from Nick Carter to Lew Archer.

Perhaps Rosika Storey was flexible, perhaps ambivalent, in her role as a goddess of detection. Hers seemed the world of wealth and taste, where the golden apples glimmered, quietly rich and discreetly arranged. But she required more. Some turmoil in the blood teased her. Taste, discrimination, perception, control, those laudable virtues, lacked a nourishment vital to her mind. That nourishment she sought in the underworld, plunging into it like an otter into a pool, swimming down among the dreadful shapes there, refreshed by their rude simplicities.

She is more complex than Footner bothered to tell us. But writers do not tell everything. Even if they know.

And so we end as we began, not quite understanding her. Which is entirely proper.

No woman of any sense reveals every last thing about herself. There must always remain a final question.

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Notes

1. Hulbert Footner, "Madame Storey's Way," *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, March 11, 1922, p. 220.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
4. A series of short stories featuring Miss Marple began in the June 2, 1928 *Detective Story Magazine*. These were later collected as *The Tuesday Club Murders*. No information is available concerning the initial English publication.
5. Michele B. Slung, "Introduction," *Crime On Her Mind* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), p. xvi. In this interesting essay, Slung discusses the first appearance of the female detective who seems to have stepped on stage in either 1861 or 1864. The exact date seems open to doubt. Slung remarks (p. xix) that between 1861 and 1901, "no fewer than twenty women detectives made their appearance."
6. *Ibid.*, p. xx. Several current collections include examples of these early stories. In addition to *Crime On Her Mind*, you may find Alan K. Russell's *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, Vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Castle, 1978 and 1979). Other stories are included in the Hugh Greene collections *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Further Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* (Penguin, 1970 and 1973). In spite of the title duplications, the books' contents are all different.
7. Unsigned article, "The Fiction of Hulbert Footner," *Argosy All-Story Weekly*, March 31, 1923, pp. 321-23. Additional biographical material on Footner also appeared in *Argosy*, September 5, 1931, p. 716.
8. Footner, "Madame Storey's Way," p. 216.
9. Footner, "The Pot of Pansies," *The Velvet Hand* (London: W. Collins, 1933), p. 84.
10. *New York Times*, July 28, 1929, p. 13.

MADAME STOREY CHECKLIST

NOTE: This listing is not complete, and further additions or corrections will be greatly appreciated.

In *Argosy All-Story Weekly*:

- 1922
March 11: "Madame Storey's Way"
- 1923
May 26: "Miss Deely's Diamond"
August 4: "The Scrap of Lace"
- 1924
March 1: "In the Round Room"
April 12: "The Viper"
June 28: "The Smoke Bandit"
August 2: "The Steerers"
- 1925
January 3-February 7: "The Under Dogs" (six-part novel)
August 29: "Madame Storey in the Toils"
November 7: "The Three Thirty-Twos"
- 1926
January 9: "The Handsome Young Man"
September 18: "The Legacy Hounds"
November 20: "Putting Crime Over"
- 1927
January 22: "The Blind Front"
April 30: "The Pot of Pansies"
- 1928
Date not known: "The Murder at Fernhurst"
March 24-31: "It Never Got into the Papers" (two-part novelette)
July 28: "The Perfect Blackguard"

1929

- January 12-February 16: "The Black Ace" (six-part novel; retitled for book publication: *The Doctor Who Held Hands*)
December 14: "Taken for a Ride"

In *Argosy*:

- 1930
June 28: "The Butler's Ball"
December 27: "The Death Notice"
- 1931
August 8-September 12: "Easy To Kill" (six-part novel)
- 1933
August 5: "Wolves of Monte Carlo"
December 2: "The Kidnapping of Madame Storey"
- 1934
March 3: "Pink Eye"
July 14-August 18: "The Hated Man" (six-part novel; retitled for book publication: *Dangerous Cargo*)
November 17: "The Murders in the Hotel Cathay"
- 1935
January 12: "The Cold Trail"
August 31: "The Richest Widow"

In *Mystery*:

- 1933
July: "The Sealed House"
November: "Murder in the Spotlight"
December: "Which Man's Eyes?"
- 1934
March: "The Girl Who Dropped from Earth"
May: "The Last Adventure with Madame Storey"

BOOK APPEARANCES OF MADAME STOREY

The Under Dogs (1925) Novel

Madame Storey (1926) Contains: "The Ashcombe Poor Case" (retitling of "Madame Storey's Way"), "The Scrap of Lace," "The Smoke Bandit," and "In the Round Room"

The Velvet Hand (1928) Includes: "The Pot of Pansies," "The Legacy Hounds," and "In the Round Room"

The Doctor Who Held Hands (1929) Novel: formerly titled "The Black Ace"

The Viper (1930) Contains: "The Viper," "The Steerers," and "The Handsome Young Men"

Easy To Kill (1931) Novel

The Casual Murder and Other Stories (1932) Contents not known

The Almost Perfect Murder (1933) Contains: "The Almost Perfect Murder" (retitling of "The Three Thirty-Twos"), "Murder in Masquerade" (retitling of "The Butler's Ball"), "The Death Notice," "Taken for a Ride," and "It Never Got into the Papers"

Dangerous Cargo (1934) Novel: formerly titled "The Hated Man"

The Kidnapping of Madame Storey and Other Stories (1936) Except for the title story, contents not known □

THE MYSTERIES OF MURRAY LEINSTER

By Frank D. McSherry, Jr.

His first love was science fiction. His best work, probably, was science fiction. Certainly it was in that field that the man who wrote as "Murray Leinster" made what is probably his most enduring reputation. In fact, the man who created that pen-name, Will F. Jenkins, is so identified with science fiction that it is a little surprising to most of us to learn that he ever wrote anything else. Yet science fiction was only a small part of his total output.

"I am a professional writer, and most of my writing is about quite other sorts of situations," Leinster said in 1950. "Probably less than five per cent of my published work is science fiction."¹ Critic and historian Sam Moskowitz estimates that, as of 1965, Leinster had published more than 1,300

stories of, says fellow author L. Sprague de Camp, "almost every kind of copy including westerns, detective stories, adventure stories, love stories, comic-book continuity, reports on scientific research, technical articles and radio and television scripts."² In addition, there are some seventy books, both hardcover and paperback. De Camp estimates that about ten percent of the stories are science fiction, higher than Leinster's estimate but made some years later.

In this respect, Leinster followed the pattern of other prolific pulpsters of the period, all of whom produced a tremendous volume of material in every possible field. They had to; the rate of payment was so low that it was hard to specialize and eat well at

the same time. Max Brand is thought of primarily as a Western writer; but he also wrote such fine spy stories as *Secret Agent No. 1*, *Spy Meets Spy*, and *The Bamboo Whistle*; created the character of likeable, modest but brilliant Dr. Kildare in a series of novels and films; and wrote science fiction like "The Smoking Land" and historical adventures such as *The Golden Knight* and the tales of Tizzo, *The Firebrand*. Arthur J. Burks, best known for science fiction novels such as "Survival" and "Jason Sows Again," also wrote air-war stories like "Salute For Sunny," one of the most popular stories *Sky Fighters* ever ran, and an earlier series of tales about The Guillotine—"in which a man, sentenced to death, is given another chance at life... known over the Western Front only as 'The Guillotine,' a name which he earns by his slashing, fearless method of attack in the air. 'The Guillotine' can live only if he kills—and if he fails to kill, he, himself, dies."³ Burks, one of the fabulous million-words-a-year men, also turned out a vast quantity of detective stories, adventure stories, Gothic horror tales, and supernatural stories. And H. Bedford-Jones, another million-words-a-year man, seemed to specialize in almost everything

(though he was best known for his historical adventures).

Often, these men became so popular in one field that their work in others was ignored and forgotten. Getting a fair picture of any writer's achievement, however, means examining more than, say, ten percent of his work. Let's look at Leinster's efforts, then, in the mystery. At least, at what's available of it.

Much of Leinster's mystery work appeared in obscure pulps of the early '30s, hard to find today, or in hardcover generally from small firms no one remembers—Brewer, Gateway, Hamilton. Even information about much of his early pulp detective work is scarce. He seems to have originated the character of The Black Bat, but all the information I have on this is two sentences from Weinberg and McKinstry's fine and useful *Hero Pulp Index*: "The Black Bat was originally a character featured in his own magazine in 1933-1934 by master pulp writer, Murray Leinster. Running from October 1933 to April 1934, the stories had titles like *The Body in the Taxi* to *The Maniac Murders*."⁴ There is no further information, no listing of Black Bat stories by Leinster, nor any title given for the magazine, though there is a listing of titles and dates for the later Black Bat novels appearing in *Black Book Detective*, from 1939 to 1953, by Norman A. Daniels (except for the last one, by Stewart Sterling) all under the G. Wayman Jones pen name. Was Leinster's character the same as the later one, with the same name, background, history, and assistants? Or did Daniels use only the name and create an otherwise totally different character? Who knows?

The Armchair Detective's authoritative Bibliography of Crime Fiction lists eight novels of his, six under the Leinster byline and the other two under his real name.⁵ I have only two of these (both also qualifying as science fiction) and have never even seen copies of any of the others.

Still, some are available, and not a negligible amount—almost twenty stories; and all vary so much in content, theme, quality, and length as to suggest that they were deliberately chosen to demonstrate how the author handles different kinds of stories (though they weren't); and, better, some of them can be included among Leinster's more memorable work.

Let's drive off the main road of his career and take a side road, one that goes, so to speak, sideways in crime, and make a first contact with some of the many murders of Murray Leinster.

Let's join young Mrs. Madge Haley for a "Night Ride" out of town, where the houses and street lights thin out and stop and the fields and dark thick woods began, down the Colchester Road where her neighbor, Mrs. Tabor, was found beaten to death a year ago, and, six months after that, another young



woman was found, killed in the same way. Tonight she has a rider; Mr. Tabor, the husband of the first woman murdered, has phoned and asked her to take his niece, Eunice, a masculine-seeming woman in a concealing hat, to the station. It was Mr. Tabor who phoned, wasn't it?

Madge drives, wondering suddenly how Mr. Tabor knew she was going to the station—she hadn't told him—and getting more and more nervous as her odd passenger tells her of a theory she has, about werewolves and killings:

"I don't know that the man who killed Mrs. Tabor and the girl... could be called human. . . . But—there used to be stories about werewolves."

"Oh, but that's nonsense! People can't turn into wolves," Madge said nervously.

"Some people turn into something," said the figure beside her. "Once in a year or once in six months they feel something stirring in their minds. Their eyes change. They glow—they're bright and restless. . . . They feel unbearable tension. . . . And they have to kill. . . . Oh, but people like that are cunning. . . . They don't let anybody notice their eyes. . . . The tinted spectacles regarded her. . . . "You see," Madge's passenger said confidentially, "I've studied about them. I wanted to understand. And it seems that there have always been such people. In old days they killed like wolves, and wolves were blamed. So the story of the werewolf began—the story of a person who got into a house in human form and then turned into a wild beast to kill and rend and tear his victim. It was wonderfully clever of the people who kill to start that story." The figure in the seat beside Madge seemed strangely amused. . . . "Oh, they're cunning. They have to be."⁶

When the car stops on a lonely stretch of road in the woods, Madge discovers the truth about the two murders in the past and a killing yet to come, with a climax all the more effective for being quiet, understated, and off-stage. Written for a woman's magazine, the slick *Today's Woman*, March 1950, this tense tale of gripping terror is not softened or sentimentalized. Smoothly and compactly told, this is one of the best written of all Leinster's stories, lacking the often irritating stylistic mannerisms found in much of his work. All in all, a superior story.

"Ah, *effendi*, Allah be with thee! It is I, Kallikrates, the honest trader—"You can trust me, I am not a crook"—bringing the blessings of civilization to the tiny town of Mersa on the Persian Gulf. For instance, I have here a most wondrous invention, a knife that grows—click!—out of nowhere; and behold, friends, in its handle is a glass window through which, if you will press your eye to it, you can see a plump and scantily clad lady beautiful as the houris of Allah's Paradise for the faithful!

"And, friends, I see that I am here just in time; for I note that in my audience are many fine young men whose beards, alas, have grown gray, leading thought-

less ladies to jeer at them, not realizing that some men's beards grow gray before their time. But do not say, it is the will of Allah, doubtless, and nothing can be done; for I, Kallikrates, have here a magic dye that will color them their deep black as glossy as before; and the women will never know! Cross my palm with silver and the bottles of dye are yours!"

Moneybelt loaded with silver, Kallikrates sails away in his rickety boat-and-warehouse combination; and it is several days before the villagers discover why the company that made the dye isn't selling it, and why Kallikrates got so much of it so cheap: after several days in the hot, salty air of the Gulf, the black dye turns an ineradicable green.

Many men of the village stay indoors with green-streaked beards, plotting what they will do to honest Kallikrates if he is ever fool enough to show his face around Mersa again, while the women of the village laugh outside. But Lt. Col. Crothers, British political advisor to the Sultan, isn't laughing at all. For the Sultan's rebellious, one-eyed cousin, Abu-l-Ghazi, has captured Kallikrate's ship and its illegal cargo—a large supply of modern, rapid-firing automatic

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pistols, incomparably superior to any weapon the Sultan has. Unless Crothers can do something about those guns and the piracy, a bloody revolution is on the way. The seizing of Kallikrates is popular: "[T]he haut ton of Mersa rejoiced. Kallikrates was in the hands of Abu-I-Ghazie and their beards would be avenged. Abu was good at avenging things. They even debated. . . sending a few suggestions to Abu on things to do to him, but felt that Abu's artistic sensibilities might be hurt."⁷ Beset by bureaucrats, regulations, and politics, Crothers tries desperately to prevent mass killings and revolt, in a wildly funny story with a surprising, but perfectly logical, ending. While not a masterpiece, this short story, "An Old Persian Customer," from *Argosy* for May 6, 1939, is excellent entertainment and deserves reprinting.

Leinster was basically a storyteller, and his style was planned to achieve that end as efficiently and painlessly as possible. He tried to use simple words familiar to every reader,⁸ for an audience that turns away to consult a dictionary has stopped reading the story. Characterization was usually shallow; breaking off the events of a story to analyze the characters' reactions to them stops the story too. He almost never tried stylistic experimentation of the avant-garde type, even when effective; prose calling the reader's attention to the way a story was told detracted from the story being told. It is a bit ironic that the closest he ever came to exotic prose and a colorful way of telling colorful events was one of his best and most popular stories, still remembered even though it first appeared in 1925 in the August issue of *Weird Tales*.

Listen while the man in Rangoon, who will not drink red drinks because "they were like rubies and in consequence abominable beyond the imagination. . . cursed for a hundred thousand years, he said, ever since the raja of Barowak laughed,"⁹ tells you "The Oldest Story in the World." It concerns a white man wanted for murder who flees to the Orient and hears of the Kingdom of Kosar. Once it was the splendor of the East, one of the wealthiest kingdoms of the world; today grass grows in its streets, vultures nest on its crumbling towers, and even the raja's bodyguard is half starved—because the raja has converted all the kingdom's wealth to rubies and wears them, an immense fortune, on his body in ceremonial parades. . . "priceless, precious rubies that glittered with a red fire that was neither of land nor sea."¹⁰

Disguised as a wandering priest of Khayandra, whose magic spells can insure that a woman's next child will be a son, the criminal finds Kosar and sees the ceremonial parade. A small child toddles toward the raja and is promptly shot to death by the arrows of his bodyguard. Getting the rubies will not be easy; the rajah's bodyguard has orders to kill instantly anyone coming within ten paces of the ruler.

What he does about it, and how he finally reaches the rubies, and what happens afterwards, is told in a tale of Oriental color, splendor, and cruelty straight out of the Arabian Nights. This is easily the most unusual crime story Murray Leinster ever wrote—he even appears in it himself—and it may well be just as easily the best.

Far more conventional in every way is his short novel of gang warfare during Prohibition, "The Big Mob," in *Double-Action Gang* for February 1937.

In January 1920, the Volstead Act became law—the worst major law enacted in this country since the Alien and Sedition Acts. Like all laws designed to legislate morality, Prohibition boomeranged. A wave of crime bigger and more violent than any before or since submerged the country. Not only did people drink more—historian Kenneth Allsop called Prohibition "the most alcoholic period in American history,"¹¹ and in 1925, "Chicago, with three million population, had sixteen thousand more arrests for drunkenness than un-Prohibited England and Wales with a population of forty millions"¹²—they murdered more. "The year 1928 saw London, with three times Chicago's population, report eighteen murders. . . Chicago rolled up a grand total of three-hundred-sixty-seven murders. . . New York City, with twice the population of Chicago, had two hundred murders. . ."¹³

The vast majority of Americans did not regard taking a drink during Prohibition as really wrong, only illegal; and since only criminals could, by definition, provide the illegal liquor, criminals began to gain a sort of Robin Hood kind of respectability, even, sometimes, a sort of glamor.

As Al Capone once said, "I'm a businessman. . . If I break the law my customers are as guilty as I am. When I sell liquor it's bootlegging. When my patrons serve it on silver trays on Lake Shore Drive it's hospitality. . . Why should I be called a public enemy? . . . All I do is to supply a public demand. . . When Prohibition came in there were 7,500 saloons in Chicago. . . Nobody wanted Prohibition. This town voted six to one against it. Somebody had to throw some liquor on that thirst. Why not me? My customers include some of the finest people in the city, or in the world, for that matter. . . I violate the Prohibition law. All right, so do they. . . Nobody's on the legit, when it comes down to cases."¹⁴

Many of the public agreed; and this attitude is faithfully reflected in Leinster's novel.

Young Major Jerry O'Madden, soldier of fortune, is home from the wars. Late major in the army of San Salvador, one-time captain in Costa Rica and former colonel in the army of some other banana republic, he lands in New York to find another war breaking out on his very doorstep.

Late at night, in a pounding rain, right below O'Madden's front window, a long black car overtakes a frantically speeding taxi heading for O'Madden's home and hoses it with a drumfire from sub-machine guns. The passenger is killed; the wounded driver, O'Madden's friend Buck Spiegel, escapes and asks O'Madden's help. Federal agents have succeeded in planting an informer high in the ranks of the Big Mob that runs heroin into New York and intends to run everything else. On the run and with a Mob bullet in him, the informer takes Buck's taxi and gives him the information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the Mob's leaders—and now the Mob wants Buck dead.

O'Madden drives off attacking gunmen with the aid of a tilted transom that gives him a periscope view of the hall outside his apartment and gets Buck an escort to the hospital, made up half of cops and half of hoods from the rival Lazzo mob. They've been gone only a minute when O'Madden hears a roar of guns; the long black car has re-appeared; and this time its gunners are on target.

Worse, the Mob mistakenly believes O'Madden's friend gave him the information that can destroy them; O'Madden is next on the death list. When

O'Madden asks the Lazzo gang for assistance, Pete Lazzo refuses:

"Buck was a good guy, an' all that, but I ain't in this business for my friends. Buck got mixed up in somethin' he'd ought to've stayed out of. . . . I'm sorry as hell, but I ain't foolin' with anybody that ain't foolin' with me. . . . I'm in the booze racket. . . an' if anybody else tries workin' my territory, I'm goin' to see about it. But I ain't lookin' for trouble. Buck's bumped off? That's his hard luck!"¹⁵

Alone and friendless, O'Madden faces the biggest, richest, and most powerful criminal organization in the biggest city in the world, with nothing to help him but his experience in South American warfare and politics. Is he worried? No—not even when he realizes that the Mob has put a twenty thousand price on his head and the Lazzo gang intends to collect it:

"When did the Big Mob offer you a fat price to bump us both off? This morning, or last night?"

Pete Lazzo made a sudden, startled movement. For an instant he looked frightened. . . . "How'd you'd know that?" he demanded.

"Oh, I learned that sort of thing," said Jerry cynically, "fighting for liberty in South America. You guys up here are amateurs at the double cross."¹⁶

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By tracing a clue found at the scene of the crime, O'Madden gets Lazzo's help and becomes Lazzo's general—literally his general, for O'Madden intends to use military tactics against gang warfare:

"It's the Big Mob or me... It's all very familiar, and I'm going to use standard South American tactics on it. If you were a student of such matters, Pete, you'd see how revolutions get started. This is how... I want four of your best men and the fastest car you've got."

"What you goin' to do?"

"I'll leave out the usual revolutionary manifesto," said Jerry cynically, "and the appeal to patriotism. I will also omit promises designed to win political support, and I shall not term these four men the Army of Liberation of the City of New York. But otherwise I'm going to conduct a revolution in the approved military manner."¹⁷

By dawn, in a whirlwind of raids, rides, kidnappings, and shoot-outs, the Big Mob has been destroyed.

Leinster points out that: "Gang warfare in New York is carried on by amateurs. It has progressed from mere piracy—hi-jacking—to armed raids in force, but nothing approaching strategy is used, and against the methods of tropical politics and revolutionary warfare, your gangster is helpless."¹⁸

One of the great and growing themes of American literature is the vast inherent advantage held by the professional over the amateur in any field; by stressing this, Leinster makes his hero's single-handed victory over an immense force of power, wealth, and corruption believable. He also avoids by this means a flaw found in much of his science fiction—his heroes solve giant problems of politics, empires, science, and business with incredible ease and speed; problems so complex in real life do not give in so easily. His attention to the contrast between military operations and gangster methods gives an interest to the story that this otherwise typical pulp melodrama would not have. The interest in theory demonstrated here probably did much to draw him to the science-fiction field in general, and to make him a welcome and frequent contributor to Campbell's *Astounding* in particular.

There is another touch of originality in a contest feature in the same issue, an unfinished short story, under his real name of Will F. Jenkins, "O'Leary Wants An Assistant"—in this case, you, Chief Investigator O'Leary, the best man in the department, tells the Chief he's going on strike because the cases he's been getting are so easy anyone can solve them, and he tells the Chief two examples, one of which he solves and the other—involving a jewelry salesman found dead with twenty bullets in his chest, all but the first fired after he was dead and at several minutes' intervals, and \$20,000 worth of gem samples missing—which he leaves for the Chief, and you, to solve. You must, the contest rules say, not only name the murderer, you must also write out the orders

O'Leary will give to his men to get the evidence that will prove who the murderer is and convict him in court—an angle unique for such contests.

For the best and most practical set of police orders, there will be an award of the front cover painting of this magazine which is a large oil painting 21 by 30 inches in size, painted by the nationally famous artist, Howard Sherman, as well as an official appointment as "Official Assistant to Chief Investigator O'Leary."¹⁹

The blurb for this story bills it as a "new feature"; how long the series went on, how many stories Leinster did for it, I don't know. (Internal evidence suggests that there is an earlier O'Madden tale, in which he meets danger when first arriving in New York because of his striking resemblance to a notorious Chicago gangster named Dizzy Calder.)

In the O'Madden gangland tale, no one bothers to consult the police about such minor matters as, say, kidnapping; nor are they trusted to guard a vital witness in the hospital; everyone recognizes that most of the police are in the pay and under the control of criminals. The short-short story "People Are Funny," done only seven years later for the December 1944 *Phantom Detective*, is only a filler but presents a strikingly different picture of public attitudes to police after the end of the Prohibition era. When a wealthy man is shot dead while crossing a golf course on his way home at night, Detective Sergeant Nolan discovers the killer's identity and motive by using an illegal wiretap on the phones of several suspects. Nolan explains that since people trust the police not to break the law, they believe their phones are safe and will say anything:

"Like I said... People are nuts. Everybody knows cops can't use telephone stuff in court, so they think a cop can't get to listen in, when any phone operator in the central office can tap any line she likes."²⁰

"Crime Wave," another short-short featuring Nolan, appeared in *Phantom Detective* for October 1944, and it is the weakest mystery by Leinster I've come across. A criminal clever enough to use another criminal's famous modus operandi—shooting up a clock—during a bank robbery in which a guard is killed, is dumb enough to have the gun on him two days later when he is picked up for routine questioning—fortunately for Nolan, whose "reasoning" would never stand up in court.

The clues in these two stories depend as much on human interest—how people usually behave—as on physical clues such as rifling marks on murder slugs. Some of his mysteries depend even more on human interest, such as "The Kidder," a contrived short-short in *Argosy* for June 24, 1938, in which a man who believes he has betrayed his practical-joking

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friend to the police and the electric chair visits his friend's sorrowing mother to beg forgiveness.

A better story is "The King of Halstead Street," a novelette in *Argosy* for November 5, 1938. The path of true love often has some jolting chuckholes in it, and such is the case for Antonina, daughter of Tony Brecchia, king of the tenement district in everything but name and crown. Tony will do anything for the lovely daughter he thinks of as a princess. And she's going to need some help, for, unknown to her, the young man she loves, Pete Standish, is a suspect in a murder.

Who killed crooked cop Hamlin in a gunfight in Halstead Street last night? The cops ask Tony Brecchia for help; the *paisanos* of the ghetto will tell them nothing. Tony won't either. For one thing, the cops haven't found the jewel collection someone stole from Tony last week; and for another, Tony knows that Hamlin has been arresting his people and torturing them into false confessions of burglaries Hamlin himself committed.

One mystery is easily solved when Tony gets a visit from the Dummy, an ex-convict whose mind hasn't worked right since the time, years ago, when he was tortured into a false confession and sent to prison by Hamlin, who wanted his girl.

"How's the head, Dummy? Clearin' up?"

"... Only sometimes. ... Sometimes I'm pretty near all right. Then I get all dumbed up again. ..."

"Your friend Hamlin got his last night," observed Tony.

The Dummy smiled. His...empty features looked pleased. "I did it, Tony... we shot it out. He didn't even touch me, Tony, and I got him good, an' he knew I was the one that done it. ... Y'know it was Hamlin's workin' on me that made me slap-happy, don't you, Tony? That first time he and his gang worked on me. Before I went up to the Big House... I'm slap-happy from the beatin' I got before I caved in. ... I won't never be much good because o' that. I hadda right to bump him, Tony!"²¹

And then the Dummy puts the murder gun on Tony's desk.

Tony can't bring himself to turn the pitiful Dummy in. But neither can he let the innocent Standish go to the chair for a crime he didn't commit. His problems increase when he recognizes a ring Standish gave his daughter—it's one of those stolen from his own jewelry collection. ...

Working under pressure, Tony Brecchia juggles a crooked ex-alderman, police frames, and stolen gems to bring happiness to his beloved daughter and justice—if not legality—to Halstead Street.

Given Leinster's love of science fiction—"I've always revelled in reading science fiction," he said once—it is not surprising that he would blend science-fictional themes into his mystery stories. And into the quiet, plodding, routine existence of Mr. Kettle, a bookkeeper who, walking to work one

morning after a rain, sees something utterly impossible—wet footprints walking right through a "Board Fence" (*Argosy*, July 23, 1938).

They walked right through the fence. ... The last of them—a sixth print—was a heelprint only. The foot to which it belonged—this was impossible, and Mr. Kettle knew it—the foot to which it belonged was inside the fence when that heelprint was made. Inside the material of the fence. Inside the wood... someone or something had walked straight through a board fence and left a footprint which could not have been made by any mortal human being.²²

Nervously, Mr. Kettle hurries away, sweat on his forehead. The next day, seeing that the prints are still there, he dares to touch the fence, and rapidly leaves when it—*quivers*—as he touches it, as if it were somehow *alive*.

But Mr. Kettle has read, in Sunday supplement articles, about the Fourth Dimension; about strange gates in time and space that open on some unknown elsewhere and otherwhen; and he comes back. How his search leads to the death of a notorious drug smuggler and cop killer called the Hoptoad, whom Mr. Kettle has never heard of and will never meet, provides a striking surprise ending for one of Leinster's best short crime stories.

His novel *Murder Madness* (Brewer and Warren 1931) is a straight pulp mystery-adventure, somewhat like the Spider novels, and a pretty fair example of its kind. It also qualifies as borderline science fiction, and thus was first published as a four-part serial in the old Clayton *Astounding Stories*, starting with the May 1930 issue.

Something's seriously wrong in South America. Several important government officials there have risked their lives to send a warning to Washington, and one, Brazil's Minister of War Canalejas, has succeeded in getting his daughter Paula to the capital to arrange a secret meeting between him and a U.S. Government representative.

Young Charley Bell of the State Department is assigned the case, for two reasons. No fewer than eight experienced Secret Service men have disappeared in South America within the last three months. Seven have never been seen again and the eighth is coming home in a straitjacket, victim of an unknown poison that causes brain damage and turns him into a homicidal maniac dangerous to all around him. Bell, as a State Department man whose disappearance would have political and international repercussions, might have more of a chance. Moreover, Bell is a secret agent of the Trade, a concealed branch of the Service whose very existence is unknown to all but a few of the government.

Bell sails with Paula for Rio. Aboard the fog-wrapped *Almirante Gomez*, he sees the deadly poison strike again, this time at Argentina's ex-Minister of

the Interior Ortiz. When a seaplane tries to drop the antidote and misses in the muffling fog, Ortiz dies screaming.

But, before he dies, he tells Bell of someone called the Master, whose deputies secretly give people the poison and in return for treason at the order of the Master will give them the antidote. With that vial of antidote, however, is mixed more of the poison, so the process is merely repeated and the victim becomes forever the slave of the Master. Most of the victims are army men and powerful politicians; the Master wants power, not wealth. Paraguay and Bolivia are his, body and soul; the rest of South America is almost so, and the United States is next on his list.

Bell visits Ribiera, the Master's deputy in Rio, whose name he has gotten from the dying Ortiz, and is nearly poisoned himself. He and Paula barely manage to escape, by stealing a plane from Ribiera's private flying field, and, in a continent filled with the slaves of the Master, set out to find his hidden factory, where the deadly poison is made, somewhere in the vast Amazon jungle.

Bell, with a talent for doing the unexpected, survives air fights, poisoning attempts, gunfights, and parachute drops to meet the Master and discover that he is a well-meaning, white-bearded man convinced that what he's doing is for the good of all. The drug has a more powerful effect, says the Master; given in heavy doses it increases the user's intelligence to genius level. After he has taken control of the world, he will increase that dosage so everyone—man, woman, and child—will become as gods; war and poverty will end, and the Golden Age begin:

"I win always . . . And you forget, *Señor*. You have seen the worst side of my rule. The revolutions, the rebellions, that have made men free, were they pretty things to watch? Always, *amigo*, the worst comes first. But when my rule is secure, then you will see."²⁴

Even the Master's capture does not worry him; he smashes the cup of victory from Bell's hands by telling Bell—quite truthfully, too—that he is the only one who knows the formula for the antidote to the murder drug; if Bell does not release him, now, this minute, in time for him to prepare and distribute it, millions of people in South America will go mad. Women will kill babies, parents and children kill each other, a vast red wave of mass murder will roll over South America, more horrible than anything else in all man's history, and it will be Bell's fault, all of it. For all of the scenes of fast-action battles in the air and on the ground, the novel's most tense moment is a brief, outwardly quiet battle of wits. It takes all of Bell's cleverness to find a way out, at the eleventh hour.

Two of Leinster's mysteries are also and at the same time straight science fiction in every respect. In 1940, Isaac Asimov began a series of stories about positronic robots, whose brains are so designed that it is physically impossible for them to disobey their built-in First Law: "A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm." Science-fiction authors found this so sensible an idea that, almost to a man, they have assumed that robots will be so built in the future: and ever since, with Asimov himself in the lead, they have written stories in which murderers have tried by hook or crook to find a loophole in that law.

In "The Case of the Homicidal Robots," Leinster points out such a loophole with cleverness and originality. Far in the future, when faster-than-light travel is common and spaceships crewed by intelligent robots, spaceships with highly valuable cargoes fail to arrive at their destinations. Piracy is hardly believable; it is impossible to locate a ship that has




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moved away from planetary masses and gone into overdrive, creating a small private universe around itself. It becomes even more unbelievable when a Patrol battleship, heavily armed and armored, disappears next. Finally there is a survivor, a junior officer named Kilmer, but his story is not believed. He was repairing the loose devices locking a lifeboat to the mother ship when suddenly, ahead of schedule, it snapped out of overdrive into normal space. Thrown free and safe, Kilmer watched while the robot crew made whip-lashing violent course changes at such high accelerations that no human being aboard could possibly have lived through them.

How could this be, when no robot has ever, in centuries, harmed anyone; when it is designed so it cannot? Kilmer has no answer; but he goes to a robot design school to get one. Months later, he returns, on a ship scheduled for a run in the area where the other ships have vanished. His investigation, helped by a pretty girl and her father, almost bankrupted when his two ships vanished, leads him to a lonely criminal who owns an entire world and guards it with stolen atomic missiles, and to a murder method that presents an entirely new way of getting around Asimov's first Law. Competent in its writing, the real appeal of this novelette lies in its concepts.

Done under his real name of Will F. Jenkins, Leinster's best known longer work has an original and spine-chilling central theme: the search for the person or persons unknown who committed a crime unique in human history—*The Murder of the U.S.A.* (Crown, 1946).

The world is at peace on a quiet, sleepy midsummer morning when, without warning, missiles with atomic warheads fall on the United States. Washington, D.C. is the first target to be obliterated, gone in a millionth of a second in a giant ball of flame hotter than the surface of the sun. Almost every large city—which means almost every large communications center capable of organizing and leading a nation in a counterattack—follows. In less than forty minutes, some seventy million people, a third of the United States, is dead.

Los Angeles disappeared between two seconds without even a radioed suspicion that the Gulf of Mexico was roaring in to fill a great chasm where New Orleans had stood, or that the site of Manhattan Island had become a bubbling, boiling bay.... All the normal means of transmitting news vanished with the cities.

With its cities gone, America fell apart.... No unit of government larger than a small municipality remained. No railroad ran. No power line functioned. No broadcasting station remained on the air. In forty minutes of bombing it became impossible to send a letter, a telegram or a loaf of bread from one place to another.... the radio amateurs remained—those who did not live in cities....

"Anybody on the West Coast please answer! My girl's visiting in Pasadena! Has it been hit?..." "For general

information, the cities in the New England area known to have been hit are Aroostook, Bangor, Boston..." "The amateur relay operators urgently request clearance of the additional bands just mentioned for messages between surviving towns. Please change your frequencies..." "Reporting to whatever authorities there may be, an atomic flare was seen over the Bookshelf Mountains half-an-hour ago. Sound-wave and concussion followed, indicating an atomic explosion twenty-five miles southeast of..."²³

Every military base, every missile complex, has been blasted to radioactive atoms. Only America's last line of defense remains, planned with just such a situation in mind—the Burrows. These are the hidden, top-secret bases of the Atomic Counter-Attack Force, over a hundred of them, buried missile complexes each of which can easily destroy any aggressor country in the world single-handed. But in the twenty-four hours since the attack started, not a single Burrow has launched a missile. For there is one slight problem—no one knows which country launched that killer attack, that criminal assault that assassinated the U.S.A. And until we know, not one of those atomic warheads can be launched.

In those desperate twenty-four hours, our hidden bases, the Burrows, are disappearing one after the other under direct hits by A-bombs, as the unknown enemy manages to locate them. If the killer's identity is not discovered soon, it will be too late.

This is the problem facing Lt. Sam Burton, acting adjutant of Burrow No. 89, buried deep beneath the ice and snow of Ranier Glacier in the Rocky Mountains. He has one, and only one, clue—all the missiles come from a southerly direction.

The design of the parts would be a dead giveaway to the nationality of the designers, but all that evidence has now become hot gases streaking toward the stratosphere.

Burton's problems increase when three people, two carrying a third, are seen on the snowfield by the glacier just outside the Burrow. One he recognizes, a lovely girl he met just a few weeks ago and fell in love with—and left when she began to ask too many questions about the location of the Burrow.

Is the girl he loves a spy, one of the cold-blooded killers of his country, trying to find the hidden Burrow to radio its location to the enemy? Sam lets them in... and a few hours later radar picks up a missile coming up from the south and heading directly for their Burrow...

The tension, political, military, and personal, grows as the countries of the world wait in terror, hoping desperately that when the missiles of the Counter-Attack Force fly, the Americans will not pick the wrong country....

The characterization and style are standard Leinster, nothing special, but the novel is worth reading because of its chilling central concept. It's

not so much the novel as the thinking behind it that makes it a memorable work.

Fortunately, the frightening events predicted in this novel cannot now happen, thanks to the orbiting within recent years of spy satellites capable of detecting the launching of missiles anywhere in the world. (Unless, of course, sunspots create an electrical interference, knocking out the satellites' communications; or sabotage of the satellites might. . . Ah, forget it. If you can.)

What can be said in conclusion about Leinster's work in the mystery field? With few and slight exceptions, it bears all the trademarks of his more famous and more prolific science-fiction work: the endlessly inventive and original mind, clever alike in such small things as the use of a hotel transom as a periscope, in large things such as the secret murder of an entire nation; the high school level writing, always clear but always simple; and finally the heroes who solve their immensely difficult problems with unbelievable ease.

The mystery story was not a major part, critically or numerically, of Leinster's output; but he enlarged and enriched both mystery and science fiction when he combined the themes of one field with the plots of the other.

Notes

1. Murray Leinster, *Sidewise in Time* (Shasta, 1950), p. 6.
2. L. Sprague de Camp, *Science-Fiction Handbook* (Hermitage House, 1953), p. 136.
3. Ad in *Contact*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (February 1934), p. 116.
4. Robert Weinberg and Lohr McKinstry, *The Hero Pulp Index* (Opat Press, 1971), p. 37.
5. Due to a lack of sufficient material, no attempt has been made at a bibliography of Murray Leinster's mysteries; but these are the mystery novels listed in *Bibliography of Crime Fiction* under the Leinster byline:

Murder in the Family, Hamilton, 1935
Murder Madness, Brewer and Warren, 1931
Murder Will Out, Hamilton, 1932
No Clues, Wright, 1935
Scalps, Brewer and Warren, 1930 (British title, *Wings of Chance*, Hamilton, 1935)
Wanted Dead Or Alive! Wright, 1950;

Under the Will F. Jenkins name:

The Man Who Feared, Gateway, 1942
The Murder of the U.S.A., Crown, 1946

Possibly too at least one of the four novelettes Leinster wrote about the efforts of Police Lieutenant Hines, Professor Schaaaf and lady reporter Kathryn Bush to stop a scientific genius named Preston, who has used his brilliant inventions to steal millions, should have been included. In "The Darkness of Fifth Avenue," (*Argosy*, November 30, 1929), Lt. Hines is strolling through Central Park on a romantic night and meets the lovely Miss Bush, who has gently kidded him in some newspaper stories of hers, when, without any warning, the moon goes out! Total darkness falls, and the voice Hines overhears claiming responsibility for it is one he recognizes—gangster Lefty Dunn, wanted for murder in Chicago. When the mysterious darkness vanishes as suddenly as it came, Hines pursues Dunn's speedy car—and sees beams of darkness, not light, pouring from its headlights!

Amid the traffic accidents that follow, Dunn escapes; and in the days that follow, a series of murders, thefts, and traffic jams and armored car robberies follow, all done when a strange darkness falls—a darkness in which the criminals can see and their victims and the police cannot. With the help of Professor Schaaaf, who knows the scientist responsible and is marked for death as a result—and with the aid of his own courage and ingenuity—Hines defeats Preston, who seems to have been killed in the bombing of a motor launch.

But Preston returns with his eerie device in three other novelettes, all of them with lessening detective work and more science-fiction adventure in the vein of the novels *Startling Stories* used to run: "The City of the Blind" (*Argosy*, December 28, 1929), in which Preston places the Darkness on New York City at unexpected intervals and says he won't stop until he is paid ten million dollars and Hines and Schaaaf are killed; "The Storm That Had To Be Stopped" (*Argosy*, March 1, 1930), in which Preston develops a side effect of the Darkness device, its ability to create large-scale storms, and uses this to gain wealth and power; and finally "The Man Who Put Out the Sun" (*Argosy*, June 14, 1930), in which Preston blocks out the sun's heat and holds the world itself to ransom with the threat of a freezing death.

I have read only the first three, reprinted in *Startling Mystery Stories for Summer 1967* (No. 5), Spring 1969 (No. 12), and March 1971 (No. 18); they're good pulp stories, full of fast action and ingenious concepts (though Professor Schaaaf's German is a little overdone at times).

6. Will F. Jenkins, "Night Ride," in *In the Grip of Terror* edited by Groff Conklin (PermaBooks, 1951), pp. 82-83.
7. Murray Leinster, "An Old Persian Customer," *Argosy*, Vol. 290, No. 2 (May 6, 1939), p. 44.
8. One of his often irritating mannerisms is the use of the same descriptive term again and again in a short space; as one reader complained (in the letters section of *Startling Mystery Stories*, Winter 1969), "the lack of imagination in choice of words distracted me constantly from full appreciation of the story. . . . In *The City of the Blind*, . . . Schaaaf was something 'placidly' about five times. It would have been so easy to substitute another word once in a while." Another word frequently overused in this way by Leinster is "desperately."
9. Murray Leinster, "The Oldest Story in the World," *Weird Tales*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (October 1939), p. 496.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 504.
11. Kenneth Allsop, *The Bootleggers* (Arlington House, 1968), p. 25.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
13. Avram Davidson, "The Furniture Man," in *Crimes and Chaos* by Avram Davidson (Regency, 1962), pp. 38-39.
14. Allsop, pp. 349-51.
15. Murray Leinster, "The Big Mob," *Double Action Gang*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (February 1934), p. 97.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
19. Will F. Jenkins, "O'Leary Wants an Assistant," *Double Action Gang*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (February 1934), p. 113.
20. Murray Leinster, "People Are Funny," *The Phantom Detective*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (December 1944), p. 76.
21. Murray Leinster, "The King of Halsted Street," *Argosy*, Vol. 285, No. 6 (November 5, 1938), pp. 27-28.
22. Leinster, *Sidewise in Time*, p. 6.
23. Murray Leinster, "Board Fence," *Argosy*, Vol. 283, No. 3 (July 23, 1938), pp. 106-7.
24. Murray Leinster, *Murder Madness* (Fantasy Publishing Company, 1949), pp. 238-89.
25. Will F. Jenkins, *The Murder of the U.S.A.* (Crown, 1946), pp. 11-12. □

OTHER NAMES SAME WORLD

THE PSEUDONYMOUS CRIME NOVELS OF WILLIAM ARD

By Francis M. Nevins, Jr.

In the ten years between his debut as a writer and his death of cancer at age 37, William Ard completed a prodigious amount of fiction: crime novels under his own byline, nine more under various pseudonyms, and six Westerns as Jonas Ward. After finishing an article ("The World of William Ard," TAD 15:2) in which I sketched the author's life and the world he created in the sixteen books published under his own name, I wanted to find out whether his nine pseudonymous mysteries were consistent with the portrait of Ard which I had drawn. Now that I've read them all, it's clear that they are. The books he signed as Thomas Wills, Mike Moran, and Ben Kerr

reflect just as vividly as the books he signed as Ard his struggle to balance the ambience of 1950s hard-boiled fiction with his own tendency to soaring romanticism, his desire to write in the tradition which Mickey Spillane then dominated without trapping himself in the Spillane sewer. These novels make use of the same elements one finds in Ard's novels under his own byline: Manhattan and Florida settings, gambling casinos, boxing, crap games, political corruption, the sudden birth of sweet love in the back alleys of the big city. They tend to have more action and sex than Ard's orthonymous books without ever descending to sadism or smut. With one early excep-



tion, they are marvels of storytelling economy, compressing a multitude of events into approximately the number of pages in a Simenon. They are swift-paced, written in an uncluttered style, filled with casual references to the Marine Corps in which Ard briefly served and to the movies and other popular culture of the '50s which he loved. They are well worth the attention of the Ard fan and of anyone who admires pure unputdownable readability.

Ard's most frequently used crime novel alias was Ben Kerr, which appeared on six books beginning with his earliest pseudonymous mystery and the only one to be published in hardcover, *Shakedown* (1952). Manhattan PI Johnny Stevens boards the train for Miami on assignment to protect the vicious son-in-law of a food tycoon from a blackmailing doctor. On the streamliner he meets and quickly beds a bosomy blonde exotic dancer who happens to know the son-in-law. The next morning in Florida he happens to meet an office receptionist who turns out to be the son-in-law's estranged wife. The apartment that is rented for him chances to be in the same building where his blonde trainmate lives. Ard keeps piling up

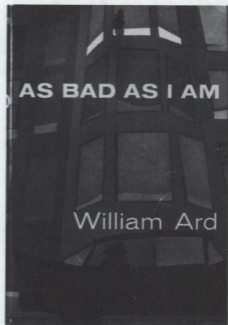
coincidences like Harry Stephen Keeler as the routine plot unfolds, but he takes pains to sabotage his hero's credibility as a Mike Hammer stand-in by surrounding his pubcrawling, crap-shooting, lovemaking, and liquor-guzzling with a halo of sweet romanticism. This Johnny Stevens is a lame excuse for a detective: he can't identify dried blood smears when he sees them, and he catches his man by resorting to the old bait-a-trap-and-see-who-falls-into-it gambit of the worst Charlie Chan movies. The paper-thin plot is hopelessly and needlessly unfair to the reader, the style is infinitely more verbose than Ard's spare best, the Florida background is only barely sketched in. What makes it all acceptable is that at bottom it's not a mystery but a Hollywood sex comedy, marked by swift pace, light tone, and a gallery of likable oddballs such as the gangster-fixated old jail guard and the honest nightclub proprietor with a private army of ex-Marine buddies. Even under an alias, Ard shows remarkable skill at avoiding the Spillane sleaze that was *de rigueur* in the early '50s and at remaining true to his romantic nature. No other writer would have had his detective blurt out for no reason at all that his favorite name is Eileen—which happened to be the name of Ard's wife.

Ard's next pseudonymous novel and his first paperback original under any name was *You'll Get Yours* (1952), published as by Thomas Wills. Our viewpoint character and first-person narrator is another Manhattan PI, this one going by the name of Barney Glines and distinguished (if that's the right word) by the fact that he really does come across as something of a Mike Hammer stand-in. The storyline is irredeemably conventional: Glines is named go-between by the thieves who stole budding movie star Kyle Shannon's jewelry, falls hard for the lovely lady, and quickly finds himself eyeballs-deep in pornographic pix, heroin, lechery, and murder. As a reasoner, Glines belongs in the subcellar with Hammer and Ed Noon, as witness his brilliant deduction that if two female names in a certain Little Black Book have the same initials they must be the same woman. Ard foolishly telegraphs the king toad's guilt in the first chapter, never explains why the leading lady didn't burn the nude photos long before Page One as any sensible person would, and reaches his climax only by having Glines let the chief villain go free in an earlier confrontation. (The genuine Hammer would have pumped six slugs into the louse's gut and ended the book twenty pages sooner.) But it's fascinating to watch Ard walk the tightrope, trying to recreate the Spillane milieu of sleaze and *noir* without sickening the reader or ridiculing his hero's romantic side. Ard must have loved the name Barney Glines with a passion, for he used it again for Timothy Dane's murdered ex-partner in *Cry Scandal* (1956) and a third time for the

shrewd and distinctly un-Hammer-like little Broadway detective in *As Bad As I Am* (1959) and *When She Was Bad* (1960).

Ard's next pseudonym was Mike Moran, and his next Manhattan PI was named Tom Doran, who in *Double Cross* (1953) is hired to visit an upstate New York farm turned training camp and protect a sadistic young heavyweight from the mobsters who are determined to take over his management. A bomb is planted under the hood of Doran's car in Chapter One, and from there on he encounters sabotage, seduction, murder, mayhem, and True Love in a setting more reminiscent of Woody Allen's *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* than of hardboiled fiction. Doran seems to have an infinite capacity both for taking and dishing out physical punishment, being beaten to a pulp by four gangsters one evening and serving as sparring partner in a fight ring the next afternoon. But in most other respects, including naiveté, romanticism, and a tendency to act like a Boy Scout, he might have been a clone of Ard's better known PI with the same monogram, Timothy Dane. (The final sequence in which Doran is taken to a flooded Tuckahoe marble quarry to be killed is reprised in Ard's 1956 novel *Cry Scandal*, wherein Dane is the intended victim.) It's hard to believe in a protagonist who's presented as a Mike Hammer lookalike in one scene and a dewy-eyed innocent in the next. But there's plenty of sweet sex, a convincingly evoked 1950s boxing milieu, at least one memorable character (the cocky and pathetic little fight manager Blinky Miller), and a pace so swift that the pages seem to be turning themselves.

The first of Ard's paper originals to appear under the Ben Kerr byline was *Down I Go* (1955), which was published a few months before the finest of all the Timothy Dane novels, *Hell Is a City* (1955), and shares the initial premise with that book. The city—not New York this time but the prototypical Bay City, three hours by plane from Miami—has been taken over by crooked politicians and crooked cops. Lou Bantle, a former officer who was framed by corrupt colleagues and sent to prison, is out on parole, working as bouncer in a sleazy night spot and thirsting for revenge. Then he discovers that the club's lovely new hat-check girl is none other than Rita Largo, sister of a reporter who had been railroaded to the pen in the same way, and the coincidence helps him find not only vengeance but lawful justice and even love. Eventually, just as in *Hell Is a City*, the police hierarchy get worried that the protagonist knows too much and put out orders that he's a mad-dog killer to be shot on sight. This rough sketch lacks *Hell's* raw power, and the sinister nightclub sequences are only minimally related to the rest of the book. But it's a swift and action-crammed little number, authentically tough without ever



sliding over into Spillanery, and Ard keeps the romance element carefully muted as befits the situation. A few years later, by joining the first name of his male lead and the last name of his female, Ard produced the signature of his last PI character, Lou Largo.

If you were an adolescent during the golden age of B Western films as Ard was, you could hardly avoid seeing, not just at one Saturday matinee shoot-em-up but again and again, the old reliable plot about the Texas Ranger or deputy marshal who pretends to go bad so he can join the outlaws and break them up from within. (One of the best movies of this sort that came out when Ard was at the right age to catch it was *Borderland*, a 1937 picture starring William Boyd as Hopalong Cassidy.) In his next pseudonymous paperback, *Mine To Avenge* (1955), Ard used his Thomas Wills byline for the second and last time for an update of this storyline, with big Joe Derek, vice squad sergeant in the city of Bayside, playing the part of cop-on-the-take so that he'll be invited into the mob, based in the evil city of Kingston across the bay, that murdered the squad's commander in cold blood. Complications arise when the commander's daughter comes to Bayside for the funeral and falls in love with Derek, making it harder than ever for him to maintain his pose of corruption.

It's a competent and fast-moving but undistinguished thriller in which Ard touches all the usual bases: sinister nightclubs, dope, the exact same porno photography gimmick he'd used a few months earlier in *Down I Go*, prostitution, and, as Anthony Boucher put it, "almost every cliché and corny improbability you choose to name." Ard once again demonstrates his cinemania when he gratuitously tells us that Big Joe is the son of one John Derek.

The next Ben Kerr paperback, *I Fear You Not* (1956), is best described as a rewrite of Hammett's *The Glass Key* by a man who was in the process of creating a huge, indestructible hero for a series of Western novels and wanted to use the same sort of character under another name in a contemporary mean-streets book. Ard's stand-in for Ned Beaumont is ex-Marine pilot and Korean combat vet Paul Crystal, who is "built along the generous lines of a John Wayne" and currently runs an illegal gambling casino in a nameless city and state. Paul Madvig and Senator Henry from *The Glass Key* are combined by Ard into Crystal's mentor Frank Marsh, the city's patrician political boss, who is cursed with a nymphomaniac wife and a morphine-addicted daughter by an earlier marriage. The leitmotif of this novel, as of *The Glass Key*, is the war for control over the city between the viewpoint faction and a

rival group. But unlike Hammett, who with cynical honesty portrayed each side as no better than the other, Ard struggles to make Marsh and Crystal and their allies look like angels next to the opposition, a gaggle of black-hearted scoundrels including a mulatto hit man with a penchant for raping blonde white women. The storyline is pretty conventional but moves like a tornado, with Ard jumping backward and forward in time from scene to scene but keeping the plot under control every step of the way. The last third of the book consists of one action sequence after another, in which Crystal begins the night by getting beaten to a pulp with blackjacks, has sex in the wee hours with a lovely undercover I.R.S. agent, spends the next day shooting up underworld dives, takes a slug in the ribs himself, escapes from the hospital, dodges bullets all the way across town, fights a duel to the death with the sadistic mulatto, and ends the night in bed with the Fed gal again. Accept all that and you'll enjoy not only this book but the adventures of the equally indestructible gunfighter Buchanan, which began appearing in mid-1956 under Ard's Jonas Ward byline. Note: *I Fear You Not* was the third Ard novel in two years with a corrupt cop named Bull Hinman and the second with an honest cop named Ben Driver (both names were used in *Mine To Avenge* as by Thomas Wills, and

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Hinman was also in *Hell Is a City* under Ard's own name), but it's clear from the context that these are five different characters.

The name Driver surfaces once again in the next Ben Kerr paperback, *Damned If He Does* (1956), but this time its owner's first name is Frank and he's the protagonist of a minimally credible quickie about the reformation of a racketeer. Driver has come to Spring City, Florida as undercover advance man for a gambling czar. But his assignment to soften up the town for mob takeover is blown to smithereens when he meets and falls for lovely Ann MacLean, the daughter of the retired Marine general who's the community's leading citizen. Instantly this ten-year veteran of the underworld starts dreaming of orange blossoms, owning his own little business and the paradise of middle-class respectability. Among the obstacles on his path to 1950s-style salvation are his boss Al Stanton's refusal to let him leave the rackets, Stanton's sister's refusal to let him leave her embraces, a vicious rival mob, a local cop with his own designs on Ann, and the weight of Driver's past. This is one of Ard's least convincing and least socially critical novels, in which we're asked to believe not only in a split-second reformation and a morally perfect Establishment but in a hero who can enjoy sex after a brutal beating, keep a woman successfully hidden in his hotel suite all through the police investigation of a murder in his living room, and escape from the city jail virtually by snapping his fingers. As if to confirm that Ard dashed off the book without much thought, the first name of one character shifts from James to John in midcareer, and there's a reference to yet another in the small army of Ard gangsters named Stix Larsen. But it's fast and momentarily diverting reading, and the flashback to the origins of de-ethnicized hit man Joey Constant is as skillful as the similar vignettes in Ard's Timothy Dane novels.

The next Ben Kerr, *Club 17* (1957), was not only Ard's best book under any pseudonym but one of his finest ever. Undercover New York cop Mike Riordan, on assignment to pose as a rich john and crack a top-bracket call girl ring operating out of the titular nightclub, falls in love with starving actress Joan Knight, who's just been recruited into the stable. Meanwhile, his police superiors are frantically trying to protect the department from attacks in the media by a hypocritical anti-vice crusader—whose wife happens to be both a hooker for and a full partner in the vice ring. Riordan, unlike many Ben Kerr protagonists, is convincing both as a romantic and a roughneck, and the amount of physical punishment he's called on to administer and consume remains within the bounds of credibility. Even his one truly dumb move—hiding out the novice call girl in the apartment where he keeps photos of himself in

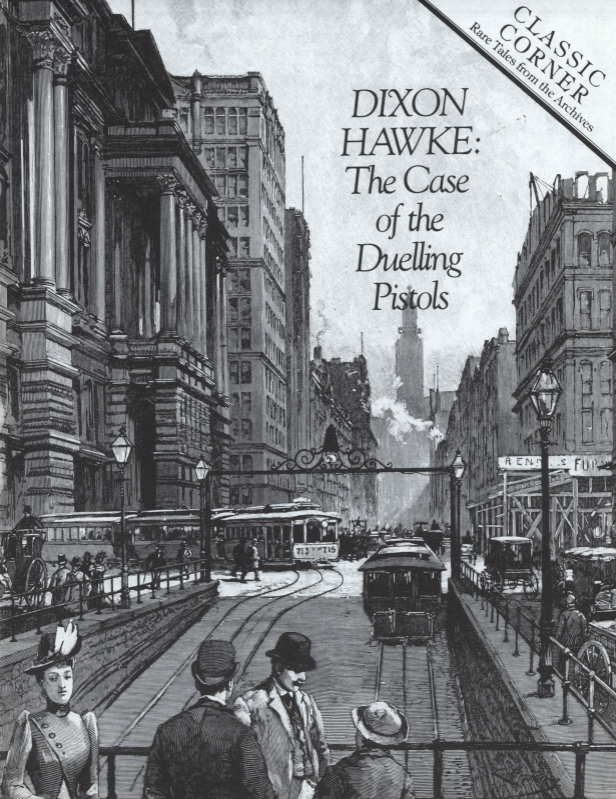
uniform—somehow seems in character. For a single moment Ard slips, committing a priceless Brooklyn-accented malapropism when he describes “the cluster of buildings that adjoined” a highrise. But that's the only weak spot in a furiously readable novel where fast action, characterization, Manhattan-after-dark atmosphere, and eroticism perfectly balance one another. Ard achieves marvels of cinematic cross-cutting between scenes and makes room for two of those John O'Hara-inspired flashbacks to the social origins of a louse which are found abundantly in the Timothy Dane adventures. With its events compressed into well under 24 hours and less than 130 pages, *Club 17* is a superb blend of seaminess and romanticism in the uniquely Ard manner and a book that's impossible to lay aside until the last breathless page.

The next and final Ben Kerr, *The Blonde and Johnny Malloy* (1958), begins with rare promise as Ard introduces Malloy, his fellow convicts, and their brutal overseers on a rural Florida road gang. Johnny has served five years for a hit-and-run killing actually committed by his gangster brother-in-law Frank Trask, who is about to divorce his wife, Johnny's sister, so he can marry Nelli Rivera, a hostess at his gambling casino. Trask arranges parole for Johnny, welcomes him back to Gulfside, lavishes money and gifts on him as thanks for taking the prison rap, and sets him up for another fall, but things come unstuck when Johnny and Nelli fall for each other. The long-memoried reader will notice a cornucopia of borrowings from earlier pseudonymous Ard novels—several character names from *I Fear You Not* and *Damned If He Does*, the unfixing-the-championship-bout routine from *Double Cross*—and, about three-quarters of the way through the book, will catch Ard repeating his gaffe in *You'll Get Yours* when Johnny has Trask at his mercy and countless reasons to kill him but lets him go so the novel can continue for another 25 or 30 pages. But it's a swift and eminently readable piece of storytelling as usual, and one who reads it today may feel a special sadness on reaching the last line—“‘That's the end of it,’ he said”—and knowing it was true in a way Ard didn't anticipate. For it was his last crime novel under any byline besides his own, and two years after its publication he was dead.

Ard's pseudonymous books tended to be less ambitious than the books under his own name, and except for the superb *Club 17* there's a certain routineness about them which led Anthony Boucher to remark that they read “like William Ard on an off day.” But even on his off days, Ard was one of the finest storytellers of his time, and most of his nine crime novels as Ben Kerr, Thomas Wills, or Mike Moran are as breathlessly readable today as they were twenty-five to thirty years ago. □

CLASSIC
CORNER
Rare Tales from the Archives

DIXON
HAWKE:
The Case
of the
Duelling
Pistols



A series of twenty volumes entitled *Dixon Hawke's Case Book* (nos. 1 through 20) was published in England by D. C. Thompson & Co., Ltd. The volumes are oversized paperbacks and were produced on cheap, pulp-like paper. While they are undated, the best guess is that they were published in the 1920s. In none of the books is an author given credit (or blame, depending upon one's view of the contents), and even Allen Hubin, in his exemplary *Bibliography*, does not identify any authors of this long series. Each volume is a short-story collection of even quality, suggesting a single writer or a well-trained stable of hacks who produced work to order.

Dixon Hawke is the hero of all the stories, and a sampling of more than twenty from assorted volumes in the series has failed to discover just what it is

exactly that Hawke *does*. He is identified often as working "in conjunction with Scotland Yard," and he instantly assumes a position of authority over every rank of police officer with whom he comes into contact. He does not seem at any time to have an official standing, however, nor does he ever appear to have any other job or method of earning a living.

He is an extraordinary detective, able to spot a bullet hole in a tapestry on a wall forty feet away. His deductions rival his observations, with no explanation of how his brilliant conclusions are achieved. The average Dixon Hawke volume contains 25-40 stories, and there are twenty volumes. Rest assured that, when you have finished reading "The Case of the Duelling Pistols," you have read them all.

—OTTO PENZLER

THE CASE
OF THE
DUELLING
PISTOLS

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"I DIDN'T KILL HIM, Mr. Hawke! I swear I didn't kill him!"

Foxy Lee's rattish face was grey with fright. It was quiet in the interview room at Wands-worth Jail, and the little crook's voice roused strange echoes.

"He was dead when I broke in!" Foxy went on, beads of perspiration gathering on his forehead. "I told the truth to the inspector. I didn't kill Michael Martin!"

"Take it easy," Dixon Hawke said. "I'll help you if I can, but the evidence against you is pretty black."

The famous criminologist had been called to the jail by the personal appeal of the prisoner, who was well known to him. Foxy was a crook, but a second-rater. He had carried out small robberies, but had never committed any crime of much magnitude. And now he was charged with murder—charged with the death of Michael Martin, and with enough evidence against him to hang a dozen men. They had found his fingerprints on the pistol by the side of the body. They had found his jemmy and other tools scattered on the floor. And Foxy had made a confession of breaking in with intent to rob.

"But I didn't kill the cove!" he whimpered. "I tell you what happened, Mr. Hawke. I lifted a window and went in. There was just one light in the room, and that was shaded. I saw a pistol on the floor, and picked it up. Then I saw the—the body! I dropped the pistol and done a bolt!"

"Sure, Foxy?"

"Every word's true. They'll 'ang me if you don't do something! I didn't kill him! I didn't!"

The criminologist looked at the little man. If Foxy was acting the part of an innocent man, he was certainly doing it cleverly.

"You're as crooked as they're made," the criminologist said, "but I don't think you'd do murder. I'll try my best to get you out of this mess."

"Bless you, Mr. 'Awke. You're a real gent—straight! Not like that inspector, who don't care nothing so long as he gets the rope round my neck!"

"That's enough!" growled Inspector Meadows, the C.I.D. officer responsible for the arrest. "I don't want to see an innocent man hanged, but I think we've got the right chap in you!"

The warder came to take Foxy away.

Dixon Hawke and the inspector left the jail. The latter was half-defiant as they entered the car which had brought them to Wandsworth.

"They don't call him Foxy without reason," he suggested.

"Oh, he's clever, Meadows, but there are some queer facts in this case to be studied."

"Meaning?"

"The weapon that killed Martin, for example."

"It was a duelling pistol. Martin had many queer things in his house. His real name, by the way, was Micha Martinez. He came originally from Moravia, and was naturalised as a British subject five years ago."

"A curious character, I believe. I'd very much like to see the room where he was killed."

"I have the keys to the house in my pocket. We've removed the body for the inquest, but everything else is as the housekeeper found it."

"She was away the night of the crime?"

"Her master had sent her away over the week-end, and he was alone in the place."

THE CASE
OF THE
DUELLING
PISTOLS

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THE BULLET IN THE WALL

THE HOUSE was midway between Hampstead and Golders Green, standing at the edge of the wide heath. Inspector Meadows unlocked the doors and showed the way to the room where Martin had been killed.

It was an enormous room, dating back to the spacious days of the Victorians. The length was over fifty feet, and it was a good twenty wide. A thick carpet was underfoot, and the walls were hung with rich tapestries. The furniture was somewhat disarranged and moved back from the centre of the room.

"We found it like this," Meadows said. "I don't quite understand what Martin had been up to."

"Where was he lying?"

"Over there by the window. The curtains were drawn, and the lamp near the fireplace turned on. The bullet had caught him above the heart."

"A duelling pistol, you say?"

"He has a collection of them. I think he must have been loading the weapon when Foxy came in. Possibly there was a struggle. The weapon was fired from a good forty feet, so I think Foxy had taken it from him and was making for the door when he lost his nerve and pulled the trigger."

"But you found the pistol near the body!"

"Our man probably put it there in the hope the thing would look like suicide —"

"In that case why did he leave his housebreaking tools scattered on the floor?"

Inspector Meadows grunted, but did not answer. Hawke turned away, and began a careful search of the room. First, he examined the case containing the collection of pistols. They were all there except the one that had been found with the body. One by one he picked them up. The pistols smelt of oil and were in excellent condition. A number of bullets were in

the collection. The bullets were round and cast with all the care of the old-time gunsmith. For a long time the criminologist stood examining the case.

"There are spaces for twelve bullets," he said at last. "Did you notice that two were missing?"

"We found one in Martin."

"And the other?"

"It was probably lost long ago."

Hawke took one of the pistols. Slowly he moved to the chalk marks on the floor which showed the position in which the dead man had been found. He turned and faced the length of the room, raising his arm with the pistol extended. He eye was keen as he looked along the barrel. The weapon poised with exquisite balance. Hawke could see the tapestry-hung wall beyond the fore-sight. The design of the hanging represented a pastoral scene. A goatherd played his pipes and a young kid skipped in the background. There was a tree with birds flying in and out of the foliage. Something queer about one of those birds, the investigator noticed.

And then a cry of astonishment burst from Hawke's lips.

"The other bullet!" he said.

Hurrying across the room he put a chair against the wall and climbed on to it. Carefully he moved the tapestry, and a shower of fine plaster fell from behind it. He began to dig with the blade of a knife, and presently a rounded lump of lead was in his hand.

"How do you explain it?" he asked Meadows. "Did Martin have two pistols loaded and fire one at Foxy?"

"I'm blessed if I know!" The C.I.D. officer was mortified at the discovery of the bullet. "I searched thoroughly," he added, "but I didn't think of looking in that wall."

"The angle of the shot was upward. Even if Martin had been lying on the floor he couldn't have put the ball where I found it. Something deflected it."

"What?"

"You can see faint stains on the lead. I notice spots on the carpet redder than the dye. If you have a test made, I am sure you will find traces of human blood!"

"But there's no mark on Foxy!"

"Quite—and I'm ready to bet that the little crook is innocent!"

A VISITOR FROM MORAVIA

THE SECOND BULLET was a valuable clue, but at that the new line of investigation was halted. It had already been established that nobody had heard the firing of the shots. The house stood alone at the edge of the heath and it was easy to enter or leave the place without being seen.

Standing in front of a cabinet, the criminologist looked at some photographs in silver frames. He picked up one which showed a group of officers in the smart uniforms of the Moravian Army. Meadows crossed to Hawke's side and looked over his shoulder at the photograph.

"Martin is the one on the left," he volunteered. "Before he came to this country he was an officer in the Royal Guard."

"And the man whose arm is linked in his is General Riccardo Pablo," supplemented Hawke. "I saw his photograph in the papers a few days ago when he came here with a military mission. I wonder what caused Martinez to give up such a fine career and change his nationality?"

"I don't know, Hawke—and it will be almost impossible to find out," said Inspector Meadows.

"I'll look into that myself. I'll be glad, by the way, if you will have the two bullets and the collection of duelling pistols examined by an expert. You can get that done quickly!" rapped Hawke.

"Certainly. What do you expect to find out?" asked the inspector, feeling more curious than ever.

"That the bullets were fired from different pistols! That one of the weapons in the case has been recently cleaned and oiled!" announced Hawke, his eyes glittering with excitement.

Inspector Meadows blinked in astonishment. He was bewildered by the rapid developments in what had appeared to be a simple case. The officer shook his head as he went to the telephone and called Scotland Yard. Hawke's strange requests were to be satisfied.

Leaving the scene of the tragedy, the criminologist returned to his Dover Street chambers. He ordered his assistant, Tommy Burke, to bring him the files of newspapers for the past three days. The journals came from all parts of Europe, those of Paris and Berlin arriving at Dover Street on the day of publication. Hawke knew several languages, and gleaned valuable information from his study of the foreign press.

An English paper reported the arrival of the Moravian military mission, headed by General Pablo. Its business had been quickly accomplished, but the officers had stayed for various entertainments arranged for them.

"Moravia was represented at Aldershot by Colonel Battisti," Hawke said. "General Pablo flew to Paris unexpectedly this morning. No explanation has been given for his sudden departure, but he is not expected to return."

The date of the paper was the previous day, an early evening edition. The criminologist then turned to the French file and worked through the columns of the *Paris Soir*, the popular newspaper of that city. He found what he was looking for on an inside page.

"General Pablo, of Moravia, who had been in England, arrived by air at Le Bourget this afternoon. His visit was unexpected, and there was no reception. He left in a closed car for the Hotel du Roi."

In the *Matin* of that morning's date there was another brief paragraph.

"General Pablo is confined to his apartment at the Hotel du Roi by a bad chill. He is being attended by a doctor from the Moravian Embassy."

Hawke cut out the paragraphs and put them in his wallet. He spent some time walking up and down the room, his usually pale cheeks flushed with excitement. When the telephone rang in the other room he reached the instrument before Tommy Burke could lift the receiver.

Inspector Meadows was on the wire. The C.I.D. man was excited. He could hardly control himself as he reported the findings of the firearms expert at Scotland Yard.

"You must be a wizard, Hawke! The bullet you found in the wall was fired from one of the guns in the collection. It was carefully cleaned and oiled before being put back in the case."

"Excellent! And do you think Foxy would have thought of that?" asked Hawke.

"I'm blessed if I know! The evidence was all against him a few hours ago, but now he's got a good defence," said the inspector.

"What about the stains on the carpet?"

"It's human blood all right. Somebody was hurt, but it wasn't Foxy. The thing that puzzles me is this. If two guns were fired, why was the one that killed Martin found by his body and the one he apparently used cleaned and put away?"

"I think the killer planned to clean both guns, but his wound made it necessary for him to leave. Either that, or he was forced to clear off when Foxy arrived," Hawke suggested.

Then the detective hesitated a moment. Meadows called his name several times before he replied, and then it was with a request as surprising as any he had made.

"Can I have the gun and bullet packed and sent to meet me at Croydon?"

"Croydon? What's the idea, Hawke?" gasped Inspector Meadows, becoming more and more puzzled.

"I'm taking the plane for Paris," the criminologist answered. "I need the gun as—as a visiting-card, Meadows. As a visiting-card!"

AT THE HOTEL DU ROI

To Dixon Hawke the French capital was as familiar as London. When the bus from Le Bourget dropped him at the air terminus on the Rue George V, he strolled slowly along the

A FULL CONFESSION

boulevard to the great Place du Concorde. Under his arm was a small package which he had passed unopened through the Customs with the aid of his Scotland Yard credentials.

For once the criminologist had no intention of asking for the aid of his French friends in the Sûreté. What he had come to do was entirely unofficial. He hesitated before entering the Hotel du Roi, but finally approached the desk and made an inquiry concerning General Pablo.

"I regret," said the clerk, "the General does not receive visitors. He is ill."

"So I read in the papers," Hawke said. "But it is important that I see him."

The clerk spoke on the telephone. Shortly afterwards a swarthy man of military appearance stepped from the lift. He introduced himself as the Moravian's aide-de-camp.

"It is quite impossible," he said. "The General is confined to his bed with a bad chill. If you will leave your card, perhaps an interview can be arranged later."

"This is my card," Hawke said, holding out the flat case under his arm. "If you will give it to the General I'll wait for his reply. I think he will see me at once."

The young officer bowed and went away. Hawke paced the lobby, his hands gripped behind his back. Several minutes passed and then the clerk called him. He was requested to go up to the General's apartment. Following the dapper page, he walked down a broad corridor and was admitted to a suite of rooms by the same swarthy aide-de-camp he had met a few minutes previously. There was a look of alarm on the man's face.

"If you please," he said, opening the door of an inner room.

It was a fine room, lighted by the bright evening sky. In a chair near the windows sat a tall and dignified man. He wore a dressing-gown over his pyjamas, and the detective noticed that his left arm was in a sling. As Hawke entered, he gazed at him intently.

"I am General Pablo," he said. "You wish to see me? I understand that I am talking to Mr. Dixon Hawke."

"I regret troubling you, General, but the matter is of some importance," said Hawke grimly.

"So I understand from your — er — visiting-card."

The Moravian tapped the open case lying on the table. The pistol and misshapen bullet were open to view.

"Your 'cards' are dangerous," he said reflectively.

"In some hands, General. Such a 'card' as this killed Micha Martinez, with whom I believe you were acquainted," said Hawke.

The detective looked at the man's haggard face. It was with difficulty that he forced the next words from his lips.

"Did he shoot first?" he asked the General.

"Before the clock struck for the signal. He was treacherous to the last! You know all, Mr. Hawke?"

"Most of it. You went to Martinez and challenged him to a duel. The pistols were loaded and you fired from opposite ends of the room. His shot, I gather, struck your shoulder and was deflected upwards to the wall, where I found it. Yours, fired a second later, found his heart."

"Correct!"

"You started to clean the guns, hoping thereby to bewilder the police, but were interrupted by the arrival of a thief. You dropped the gun you had not cleaned near the body of Martinez, and hid. Afterwards you went away and left for Paris as quickly as possible. And an innocent man is accused of murder!"

A troubled look showed in the Moravian's eyes for a moment, and then he pushed a thick envelope towards the accuser. It was addressed to Scotland Yard.

"Full confession," he said. "I could do nothing else. The reason for the duel I cannot

explain in detail. It concerns a lady—five years ago, when Martinez was my brother officer. He was a rat, Mr. Hawke! Is there any need for me to explain? I challenged him, but he ran from Moravia. When I came to London I sought him out and begged him to return to meet me in the proper manner. He refused, and then I saw the pistols. I repeat, he was more than a rat! I have no regrets—except for the man who was blamed for my action!"

The words were spoken with considerable force, and the General sank back weakly in the chair when he had finished. Hawke stood before him, the envelope containing the confession between his fingers. It was a difficult moment. He had no reason to doubt the Moravian. The man's tale of what had happened was perfectly true. Doubtless, too, Martinez had deserved to die. But taking the law into one's hands was a crime in England. General Pablo would be charged with manslaughter, perhaps murder, if the confession was put in the hands of Scotland Yard.

A PRESENT FROM FOXY

"I WILL come with you to England if you wish," the General said.

"Not yet," Hawke said. He had made up his mind. "I want your word as a soldier that you will not leave this hotel until I wire you permission. I am returning alone. If nothing else can save Foxy Lee, I must give the police your confession."

"I am at your orders, Mr. Hawke!"

The General rose to his feet. He stood at attention while the criminologist went to the door. It was a rare moment for Dixon Hawke, who actually regretted that he had succeeded in unravelling the mystery of the second bullet.

On his return to England, Hawke called Inspector Meadows at the Yard. The C.I.D. officer was in a cheerful mood, and asked him to come round at once.

"Well," he said, rubbing his hands, "while you've been making mysteries I've been solving 'em!"

"Solving them, Inspector?"

"You played a big part in it, Hawke. Foxy Lee has been released. It is quite obvious that Martinez shot himself!"

"Eh?"

"I have discovered he used to practise shooting with his pistols. On the night in question he fired one weapon, and you found the bullet in the wall. He cleaned the gun and put it away. The second weapon went off accidentally and killed him. What do you think of the theory?"

Dixon Hawke thrust his hands into his pockets. He felt the thick envelope containing the confession. It was a long time before he spoke.

"Congratulations, Meadows," he said.

"So you agree? We're not so stupid at the Yard, after all, eh? And what about your crazy trip to Paris?"

"It was just a crazy trip!" Dixon Hawke said quietly.

* * * * *

Some days later a small package arrived at Dover Street. The criminologist opened it at the breakfast table, and whistled as he took out a valuable tiepin. A scrap of paper, containing a message pencilled in an uneducated hand, was wrapped around it.

"You're a gent!" he read. "You got me off having my neck stretched. Here's something to show you my thanks!"

The signature was that of Foxy Lee, and Hawke laughed as he examined the pin and then passed it over to his assistant.

"Thanks from the criminal world!" he said. "Will you please check this up with the list of stolen property, Tommy? I'm very interested to know whom I must thank for Foxy's gift!" □



Dame Agatha Christie

By Marty S. Knepper

To a greater or lesser degree, detective fiction writers Dorothy L. Sayers, Josephine Tey, P.D. James, Amanda Cross, and Anna Katherine Green can be considered feminist writers.¹ But what about the "Mistress of Mystery," Agatha Christie, whose books, written between the years 1920 and 1973, have sold over five hundred million copies and have been translated into dozens of languages?² Is Christie a feminist or anti-feminist writer, or do her works fall somewhere in between, in some middle ground?

Obviously, evaluating an author as feminist or anti-feminist involves making subjective judgments that are influenced by a particular reader's conception of feminism and interpretation of a work. The character of Mrs. Boynton in Christie's *Appointment with Death*, for example, provides a real dilemma for the critic. On one hand, Mrs. Boynton is the epitome of the dominating, castrating mother stereotype. Christie makes us sympathize with her victimized family and view Mrs. Boynton as

Agatha

a personification of evil power, as a particularly malignant female Machiavelli (much like Big Nurse in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*). Yet at the end of this novel, Christie, unlike Kesey in his novel, intimates that perhaps Mrs. Boynton is a tragic figure, herself a victim of a patriarchal society that provides few outlets for strong-minded, power-hungry women other than domestic tyranny. Is this characterization feminist or anti-feminist? Certainly there is support for either judgment. The final decision, a subjective one, will depend on whether the reader/critic chooses to see Mrs. Boynton as evil by nature or a pathetic victim of society.

Recognizing, then, that any assessment of a writer's sexual politics will be subjective, it is nevertheless possible to legitimately argue that a writer is more or less feminist or more or less anti-feminist, especially if the crucial terms are clearly defined and if the author's works are analyzed closely. In the case of Agatha Christie, an

Christie— Feminist

examination of her sixty-six detective novels reveals that although there are anti-feminist elements in her writings, Christie obviously respects women and has feminist sympathies.

Before considering Christie's novels, it is first necessary to answer two questions: What are the characteristics of a feminist writer? What are the characteristics of an anti-feminist writer? For the purposes of this discussion, a feminist writer will be defined as a writer, female or male, who shows, as a norm and not as freaks, women capable of intelligence, moral responsibility, competence, and independent action; who presents women as central characters, as the heroes, not just as "the other sex" (in other words, as the wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, lovers, and servants of men); who reveals the economic, social, political and psychological problems women face as part of a patriarchal society; who explores female consciousness and female perceptions of the world; who creates women who

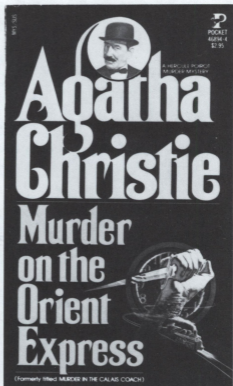
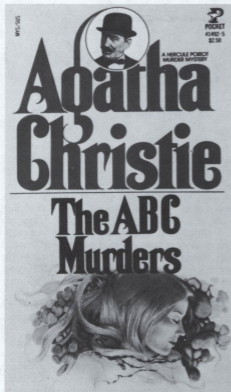
have psychological complexity and transcend the sexist stereotypes that are as old as Eve and as limited as the lives of most fictional spinster schoolmarms. In contrast, the anti-feminist writer is a man or woman who depicts women as naturally inferior to men in areas such as intelligence, morality, assertiveness, and self-control; who dismisses strong women as ridiculous or evil anomalies of nature; who presents only males as heroes and only a male view of the world; who characterizes women exclusively in terms of their relationships to men and in narrowly stereotyped ways; who is concerned not so much with reality (women as victims of a sexist society) but with fantasy (men as "victims" of powerful, predatory women).

In what respect are Christie's detective novels anti-feminist? Critics Margot Peters and Agate Nesaule Krouse—who, in an article entitled "Women and Crime: Sexism in Allingham, Sayers, and Christie," detect sexism in Christie's writings, while conceding

that she is less anti-feminist than Allingham and Sayers—argue that Christie's female characters reflect her prejudice against women:

Her [Christie's] women are garrulous, talking inconsequentially and at length about irrelevancies. If young, they are often stupid, blonde, red-fingernailed gold diggers without a thought in their heads except men and money. Her servant girls are even more stupid, with slack mouths, "boiled gooseberry eyes," and a vocabulary limited to "yes'm" and "no'm" unless, of course, they're being garrulous. Dark-haired women are apt to be ruthless or clever, redheads naïve and bouncy. Competent women, like Poirot's secretary Miss Lemon, are single, skinny, and sexless. A depressing cast of thousands.³

Although, Peters and Krouse admit, Christie does portray women making it on their own in society through their brains, skills, and energies, too many of these women, they claim, are shown to be deadly and destructive.⁴ Peters and Krouse point out, furthermore, that in contrast to Hercule Poirot, who



uses reason, knowledge, and method to conduct his investigations, Miss Marple relies on intuition and nosiness, and Ariadne Oliver usually fails to uncover the truth because of her untidy mind.

While the arguments of Peters and Krouse are inadequately supported in the article and much too overstated (Christie does *not* make all her independent, competent women characters either deadly and destructive or skinny and sexless), there is truth to their claims that Christie's books display sexism. Certainly some of her most popular detective novels (*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, *And Then There Were None*, *The A.B.C. Murders*, *Murder on the Orient Express*) present women in totally stereotypical ways: as empty-headed ingenuess, for example, or as gossipy old ladies. Other less famous novels are just as anti-feminist. In *Evil Under the Sun*, for example, dress designer Rosamund Darnley gladly gives up her successful business enterprise when the man she loves proposes and insists she live

in the country and devote herself full-time to marriage and stepmotherhood. Lynn Marchmont, in *There Is a Tide*, is only really attracted to her dull fiancé, Rowley Cloade, after he tries to kill her. The main character in *Sad Cypress*, Elinor Carlisle, is a truly romantic heroine, sentimental and helpless: She is obsessed with love for her cousin Roddy, and when she is accused of murdering Roddy's new girlfriend, Elinor, a classic damsel in distress, she must be saved by Dr. Lord and Hercule Poirot. The women in *Endless Night* are an unattractive lot, all representing negative stereotypes of women: Ellie, an over-protected rich girl, is perfect prey for the two unscrupulous murderers she is too stupid to recognize as threats; Gerta is a criminal accomplice whose hypocrisy is only matched by her disloyalty and cold heart; Aunt Cora is only interested in money and what money can buy; Mrs. Rogers knows her son is a psychopath but is too weak and ineffectual to stop him from murdering his wife. The women in *Funerals Are Fatal* whom Christie seems to admire devote themselves, like good martyrs, to the men in their lives, either husbands or sons. A final example of Christie's anti-feminism is the arch-villain Charlotte Zerkowski in *Passenger to Frankfurt*. This fat, fascist, fantastically rich and powerful woman is presented as an unnatural, ludicrous monster, an example of what can happen, according to some misogynist minds, when women wield power.

Christie, it is clear, often uses sexist stereotypes of women, sometimes shows women as inferior to and dependent on men, occasionally idealizes self-abnegating women and monsterizes strong women, and frequently implies that woman's true vocation is marriage and motherhood. Yet Christie should not be so easily dismissed as an anti-feminist writer. Perhaps because readers and critics usually concentrate on Christie's major works, they fail, like Peters and Krouse, to consider carefully some of Christie's lesser-known works, such as *The Secret Adversary*, *Murder After Hours*, *A Murder Is Announced*, *The Moving Finger*, and *Cat Among the Pigeons*, all of which illustrate that Christie is capable of presenting a wide range of female characters that go beyond anti-feminist stereotypes, creating some very admirable female heroes, and exploring many problems women face as a result of the sexism that pervades our society.

Only a writer with a healthy respect for women's abilities and a knowledge of real women could create the diversity of female characters Christie does. Her women characters display competence in many fields, are not all defined solely in relation to men, and often are direct contradictions to certain sexist "truisms" about the female sex.

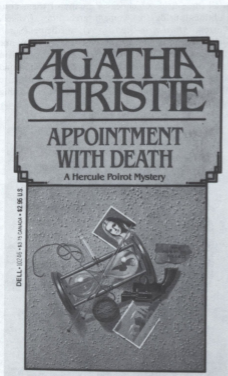
Christie, for instance, shows women who are happy and competent (sometimes super-competent)

in all these fields of endeavor, many of them non-traditional fields for women: archeology (Angela Warren, *Murder in Retrospect*); medicine (Sarah King, *Appointment with Death*); science (Madame Oliver, *The Big Four*); high finance (Letitia Blacklock, *A Murder Is Announced*); and Anna Schelle, *They Came to Baghdad*); sculpture (Henrietta Savernake, *Murder After Hours*); nursing



(Amy Leatheran, *Murder in Mesopotamia*); politics (Lady Westholme, M.P., *Appointment with Death*); business management (Katherine Martindale, *The Clocks*); espionage (Mrs. Upjohn, *Cat Among the Pigeons*); acrobatics (Dulcie Duveen, *Murder on the Links*); school administration (Honoria Bulstrode, *Cat Among the Pigeons*); acting (Genevra Boynton, *Appointment with Death*); and writing (Ariadne Oliver). Of these fourteen examples of competent women in Christie's novels (and there are many more), only three are criminals and none fits the Miss Lemon skinny and sexless category.

Christie also presents, in a positive way, a category



of women who are generally ignored or ridiculed in literature because their lives are independent of men's lives: the single women. Besides unmarried older women such as Jane Marple, this category also includes lesbians (for example, Hinch and Murgatroyd in *A Murder Is Announced* and Clotilde Bradbury-Scott in *Nemesis*), feminists (Cecilia Williams in *Murder in Retrospect*, for instance), children (Geraldine in *The Clocks*, Josephine in *Crooked House*, Joyce and Miranda in *Hallowe'en*, Julia and Jennifer in *Cat Among the Pigeons*), and handicapped women (such as Millicent Pebmarsh in *The Clocks*).⁶

Christie's women, furthermore, often defy sexist "traditional wisdom" about the female sex. For instance, young women married to older men are supposed to be mercenary and adulterous, but Christie's Griselda Clement (in *The Murder at the Vicarage*) is totally devoted to her scholarly older husband, a poor vicar. Women, it is also commonly believed, prefer to use their brains to ensnare a mate or run a household rather than to contemplate

philosophy and politics. Yet beautiful young Renisenb (in *Death Comes As the End*) is interested in learning about life and death and the politics of ancient Egypt. Another popular idea is that there is something unnatural and unhealthy in a close relationship between a mother and her grown son. From Freud in his writings on the Oedipus Complex to Roth in *Portnoy's Complaint*, modern writers have harshly criticized the overprotective mother. In *Death on the Nile*, however, the characters of Mrs. Allerton and Tim Allerton contradict this idea: This mother and son respect and enjoy each other; they are not devouring, smothering mother and pathetically dependent son, though they have a very close relationship.

Besides writing about all types of female characters, many unsterotypical, Christie also creates some appealing female heroes with whom women readers can identify. This is significant because one of the great weaknesses of literature over the centuries is the paucity of heroic women characters: women who display qualities such as intelligence, imagination, bravery, independence, knowledge, vision, fortitude, determination; women who triumph; women who are not ridiculed, condemned as evil, or killed off by their authors. Examples of Christie's spunky female heroes are Victoria Jones (in *They Came to Baghdad*), Hilary Cravens (in *So Many Steps to Death*), "Bundle" Brent (in *The Seven Dials Mystery*), Lady Frances Derwent (in *The Boomerang Clue*), and Emily Trefusis (in *Murder at Hazelmoor*). These women not only have heroic qualities, but they also achieve their goals, often when men have failed to do so.

The best example of Christie's female heroes, however, is Tuppence Cowley, who appears first in *The Secret Adversary*. Tuppence is much like the other female heroes in the Christie detective novels, but her character is drawn in much more detail. She is a very entertaining and engaging feminist character.

Tuppence, inappropriately christened "Prudence," grew up as the black sheep in an archdeacon's family, her short skirts and smoking a worry to her Victorian father. Escaping her family at an early age, Tuppence went to work in an army hospital during World War I, where she was assigned the glamourless tasks of washing dishes and sweeping, later leaving for the more congenial war work of driving first a van and a lorry and later a general's car.

Tuppence is not a typical romantic heroine. She is not beautiful, she eats voraciously at every opportunity, she speaks in slangy phrases (many of which, she fears, would shock her poor father), she is unsentimental and practical and businesslike, she resents any suggestion that she needs taking care of, and she insists on paying her own way when she goes



places with her old friend Tommy Beresford. Tuppence is, in short, the New Woman of the 1920s.

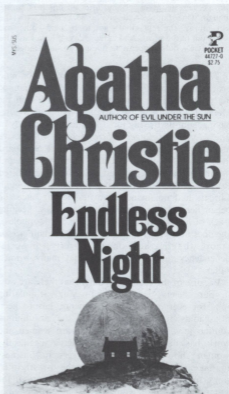
In an effort to fight poverty, Tuppence joins forces with Tommy, a likeable chap more down-to-earth and plodding than imaginative and quick-witted Tuppence, and they form The Young Adventurers, Ltd. Naturally, they get involved in adventures, and these adventures lead finally to their recovering secret papers that will save Britain and to their exposing a respected solicitor as a criminal mastermind.

The Young Adventurers, Ltd. proves to be, in fact as well as in theory, an equal partnership. Tuppence is no Nora Charles to Tommy's Nick; she is a clever detective and displays brains, courage, and daring. At one point she wrests a gun away from a criminal determined to exterminate her.

The personal relationship that develops between Tuppence and Tommy also proves to be an equal partnership, more so than the relationship between Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane in the Dorothy Sayers novels. Whereas Peter Wimsey outranks Harriet Vane in wealth, class, intelligence, charm,

and detective ability, Tommy and Tuppence are equally poor and respectable and equally skilled at detection, though each has his or her own special strengths. While the Wimsey-Vane affair is more characterized by romance (Wimsey falls in love with Harriet at first sight as she stands trial for the murder of her former lover), Tommy and Tuppence drift from a solid friendship into a solid marriage. More than Sayers does, Christie shows how the marriage between her two detective heroes develops over the years. In the novels *N or M?*, *By the Pricking of My Thumbs*, and *Postern of Fate*, Tuppence and Tommy age to grandparenthood. In all their adventures over the years, the two detectives share the work as equal partners, and as a grandmother Tuppence is still independent, daring, and intrepid. Marriage for these two proves to be, as Tuppence describes it at the end of *The Secret Adversary*, "damn good sport."

Few detective writers have created the female heroes Christie has, all of them more or less like Tuppence. It is true that these women almost always



marry at the end of their adventuring, but during the course of the stories, these women, like less affluent, less perfect, more human Nancy Drews, prove themselves to be, as heroes, every bit the equal of any man in the stories.

As well as in the diversity of her women characters and in her delightful female heroes, Christie's feminist sympathies are revealed in the way she points out problems women face living in a patriarchy, problems that have not changed much over the centuries. One such problem is the economic oppression of women, as much a reality today as ever. In *A Murder Is Announced*, Dora Bunner, a single woman with no family to support her financially, describes the ignominy of her poverty:

"I've heard people say so often, 'I'd rather have flowers on the table, than a meal without them.' But how many meals have those people ever missed? They don't know what it is—nobody does who hasn't been through it—to be really hungry. Bread, you know, and a jar of meat paste, and a scrape of margarine. Day after day and how one longs for a good plate of meat and two vegetables. And the shabbiness. Darning one's clothes and hoping it won't show. And applying for jobs and always being told you're too old. And then perhaps getting a job and after all one isn't strong enough. One faints. And you're back again. It's the rent—always the rent—that's got to be paid—otherwise you're out in the street. And in these days it leaves so little over. One's old-age pension doesn't go far—indeed it doesn't."

In *The Hollow* we see more instances of the economic problems women have: Lucy Angkatell cannot inherit her family's estate because she is a woman; Midge Hardcastle must earn her living at a low-paying, soul-destroying job. Christie shows clearly in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* how women are financially dependent on men. Caroline Sheppard lives with her brother, a doctor; Flora Ackroyd and her mother must depend on doles from tight-fisted Roger Ackroyd for even small purchases. Although Christie had no financial worries herself once she began her writing career (except, perhaps, keeping track of her wealth and looking for tax loopholes), she does not, in her detective novels, romanticize or ignore the degradation of poverty, financial dependency, and menial labor that many women suffer.

Because of the economic reality that there are not, in our society, enough high-paying, stimulating jobs for everyone and that someone has to keep households functioning and do the unfulfilling, routine jobs, a sexist attitude toward women and work has developed in our society: specifically, women should not pursue careers in business management, government, in the prestigious, powerful professions; rather, they should work in the home or in the "womanly" (i.e., low-paying,

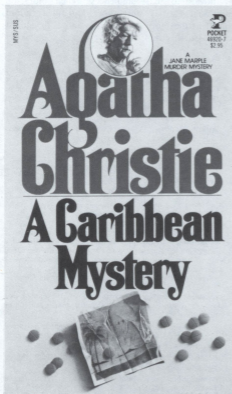
powerless) occupations. This attitude may be changing some, but women with "unwomanly" career ambitions still encounter plenty of problems with occupational discrimination, a fact Christie acknowledges in some of her detective novels. In *The Moving Finger*, for example, Christie shows, through the character of Aimée Griffith, how the double standard works to keep many women from entering the professions. At one point, Aimée declares angrily:

"You're like all men—you dislike the idea of women competing. It is incredible to you that women should want a career. It was incredible to my parents. I was anxious to study for a doctor. They would not hear of paying the fees. But they paid them readily for Owen. Yet I should have made a better doctor than my brother. . . . Oh, I've got over it now. . . . But I go up in arms against the silly old-fashioned prejudice that woman's place is always the home."¹⁰

The character Henrietta Savernake, a sculptor in Christie's *Murder After Hours*, has a common conflict many contemporary career women must resolve: She is torn between love for a man, who wants all her attention, and love for a profession, which demands all her energies. Christie also shows in her novels that many of the common "careers" for women in the earlier twentieth century (such as being a maid or a typist or a governess) were as depressing to the soul as they were unrewarding to the pocket-book. (The tragedy of Miss Gilchrist, a character in *Funerals Are Fatal*, dramatically illustrates this fact.) Yet Christie sometimes emphasizes the positive rather than the negative by showing clever, enterprising young women, such as Lucy Eylesbarrow in *What Mrs. McGillicuddy Saw*, triumphing over economic adversity.

Women's chief functions in earlier patriarchal societies was to marry and have legitimate children to whom, if male, property could be bequeathed. Even today, there is a terrific social pressure on women to marry, have children, and be sexually monogamous wives. It is ironic that although Christie, a romantic, almost always marries off at least one couple at the end of each novel and implies that they will, no matter how mismatched, live happily ever after, Christie, also a realist, presents relatively few happy marriages in her novels (Tommy and Tuppence are exceptions). Undoubtedly influenced by her own unhappy first marriage, which ended when her husband, Archibald Christie, divorced her to marry another woman, Christie tends to sympathize with the women in her novels who are victims of unhappy marriages. Christie sympathizes, for instance, with Gerda Christow of *Murder After Hours*, a stupid woman married to a brilliant doctor who despises and criticizes her incompetence while encouraging

her abject worship of him. Christie also sympathizes with the wives of drunks (Mrs. Ferrars, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*), scoundrels (Pat Fortescue, *A Pocket Full of Rye*), adulterers (Evelyn Hillingdon, *A Caribbean Mystery*), brutes (Jane Wilkinson,



Thirteen at Dinner), hypochondriacs (Maude Abernethie, *Funerals Are Fatal*), and charming men eager to murder their rich wives for profit (Ellie, *Endless Night*; Linnet Ridgeway, *Death on the Nile*). Always a shrewd psychologist, Christie even shows how a man who stays with his wife when he loves another woman puts his wife in an intolerable position (Richard and Janet Erskine, *Sleeping Murder*). Marriage, Christie recognizes, is fraught with psychological and economic problems for women; yet unmarried women, she also acknowledges, are pressured to feel unfulfilled, to feel like failures as women.

Similarly, many women, even though married, feel, because of social pressure, like failures as women if they cannot have children. Rachel Argyle in *Ordeal by Innocence* and Marina Gregg in *The Mirror Crack'd* are so distressed at their infertility that they adopt children in an effort to compensate. In both cases, the results are disastrous. Rachel Argyle overindulges her adopted children (to satisfy her own perceived maternal needs and to alleviate her guilt), causing several of the children to grow up with psychological problems and her husband to become alienated. Marina ignores her adopted children after the initial thrill subsides because they are not her own and cannot, she feels, satisfy her cravings for real motherhood. In these two cases, Christie does not argue that a maternal instinct is natural in all women and must be satisfied for a woman to be happy; rather, she implicitly criticizes a society that pressures women to feel guilty, selfish, and unnatural if they are married and childless.

Christie also reveals to her readers the problems women have who get pregnant out of wedlock because society, even in the twentieth century, ostracizes the illegitimate child and the unmarried mother and because it is difficult to earn a living and raise a child at the same time. Eileen Rich, a teacher in *Cat Among the Pigeons*, for example, takes a sabbatical and has her illegitimate baby in secret in a foreign country for fear of losing her job. Millicent Pebmarsh in *The Clocks* gives up her baby rather than face the trials of raising a child as a single woman. In *By the Pricking of My Thumbs*, Tuppence tracks down a pathetic and pathological child murderer who, many years ago, killed her own baby because she didn't feel she could raise the child herself.

Another problem women face in our society is the pressure to make themselves beautiful sex objects to allure men. Because beauty is often the measure of a woman's value (consider, for example, beauty pageants and magazine advertising), plain women often suffer tremendous feelings of self-hatred, jealousy, and rejection. Christie presents sympathetically in her novels the unbeautiful women, the changelings, women such as Mildred Strete in *Murder with Mirrors* and Josephine Leonides in *Crooked House*. She shows how plainness or physical anomalousness can lead women to feel hatred of the men who reject them and jealousy of more beautiful women (Henet in *Death Comes As the End*), how it can lead a woman longing for love to be taken in by a scoundrel with a smooth line (Gladys Martin in *A Pocket Full of Rye*, Kirsten Lindstrom in *Ordeal by Innocence*), or how it can make a woman feel life owes her some recompense for her physical shortcomings (Charlotte Blacklock in *A Murder Is Announced*). But Christie recognizes

that the problem of beauty is not all one-sided. She also shows women who have dedicated themselves to achieving their own physical perfection caught in the beauty trap: Linda Marshall, a gorgeous woman in *Evil Under the Sun*, can attract any man's attention, but she has never been able to hold a man's interest because her positive qualities are only skin deep.

Christie's depiction of the various problems women face in their lives reveals her astuteness as a psychologist and an observer of human nature and her awareness of how society discriminates against women. While Christie is, by no means, a radical feminist (her novels are not a sustained critique of the institutions and ideas that bolster male dominance), she does display feminist attitudes in those of her novels which show problems women have living in a patriarchal society. In presenting various difficulties facing women, Christie sometimes shows women, such as Aimée Griffith and Emily Barton in *The Moving Finger*, stoically enduring injustices and making full lives for themselves, despite limiting circumstances. Other times Christie creates characters, like Charlotte Blacklock in *A Murder Is Announced*, Gerda Christow in *Murder After Hours*, and Marina Gregg in *The Mirror Crack'd*, whose suffering, whose failure to cope with the problems and conflicts in their lives, makes them tragic figures, comparable, to some extent, to George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke and Maggie Tulliver or Thomas Hardy's Sue Bridehead.

When all her sixty-six detective novels and hundreds of women characters are considered, should Christie, finally, be characterized as a feminist or anti-feminist writer? As Peters and Krouse point out in their essay, Christie's writings do display sexism, mainly in the form of anti-feminist stereotyping. Disorganized, intuitive, imaginative Ariadne Oliver does not compare as a detective to orderly, competent, knowledgeable Hercule Poirot. Christie's more famous novels, especially the ones written in the 1930s, perpetrate a number of anti-feminist ideas about women. Yet it is distorting the case for Peters and Krouse to dismiss Christie's women characters as "a depressing cast of thousands."¹¹ In many of her lesser-known novels (written mainly in the 1920s, 1940s, late 1950s, and early 1960s) Christie creates very positive women characters who are competent in many fields (including the detection of crime), who are psychologically complex, who are heroic in stature, who are not inferior to nor dependent on men, women such as Tuppence Cowley, Lucy Eylesbarrow, and Honoria Bulstrode. In these novels Christie also explores, with compassion and sympathy and from a woman's point of view, various problems women in sexist society must cope with, problems ranging from poverty and job discrimination to social pressure to be attractive.

The only fair conclusion seems to be that Christie, while not an avowed feminist, let her admiration for strong women, her sympathy for victimized women, and her recognition of society's discrimination against women emerge in the novels written during the decades of the twentieth century more receptive to feminist ideas (such as the 1920s and World War II years), while Christie, always concerned with selling her novels to mass audiences, relied more on traditional (sexist) stereotypes and ideas about women in the more conservative and anti-feminist decades (such as the 1930s).

Notes

1. For an interesting discussion of Anna Katherine Green's Violet Strange as a feminist heroine, see John Cornillon, "A Case for Violet Strange," in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973), pp. 206-15.
2. William Borders, "Agatha Christie Ltd. Yields Profits Unltd.," *New York Times*, 9 Sept. 1980, p. C9.
3. Margot Peters and Agate Nesaule Krouse, "Women and Crime: Sexism in Allingham, Sayers, and Christie," *Southwest Review* (Spring 1974), pp. 149-50.
4. Peters and Krouse, p. 151.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 151-52.
6. In their article on Christie, Allingham, and Sayers, Peters and Krouse do commend Christie for her portrayal of independent single women as detectives:
"Yet Christie is not as sexist as Sayers and Allingham in one respect. Both suspect (Jane Marple) and widow (Ariadne Oliver) are self-sufficient, possessing a zest for life depending in no way on a man's support and approval. Neither manifests insecurity at being a single woman; both have interests that absorb them creatively. Neither succumbs to romance or marriage: Christie takes it for granted that without youth, beauty, or a husband a woman can still be fulfilled" (p. 152).
7. Peter Wimsey's relationship with Harriet Vane is developed in these Sayers works: *Strong Poison*, *Have His Carcase*, *Gaudy Night*, *Busman's Honeymoon*, and "Talboys."
8. Agatha Christie, *The Secret Adversary* (1922; reprint Bantam, 1967), p. 215.
9. Agatha Christie, *A Murder Is Announced* (1950; reprint Pocket Books, 1951), p. 103.
10. Agatha Christie, *The Moving Finger* (1942; reprint Dell, 1968), p. 53.
11. Peters and Krouse, p. 150.

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TRAVIS McGEE

THE FEMINISTS' FRIEND

By Carol Cleveland

It is well known to its readers that the Travis McGee series is characterized by tight plots, a vigorous and flexible style, pointed social commentary, moral seriousness, and human warmth. Because the series is also full of violence, sex, and sadism, some reviewers have felt that it was not aiming at a realistic account of modern American life. They have been misled into thinking that Travis McGee wallows in machismo, and that John D. MacDonald indulges in "light hearted sadism."¹ Even so perceptive a reader as John Leonard pauses in his praise of *Condominium* to note the McGee series's "wounded women and macho rubbish."² It is surely time to examine these charges—to look at McGee's record with women and at any tendency toward sadism he may have. His attitudes in these areas will render him distinguishable, or not, from Mike Hammer.

The series has, of course, a number of genuinely sadistic characters, and MacDonald's treatment of them is never lighthearted. The Paul Dissats, the Freddy Van Harns, and the Boone Waxwells all serve several purposes. On the symbolic level, they are the dragons McGee must hunt, until they turn on him. On the thematic level, they typify the group of qualities MacDonald finds most distasteful, not to say frightening, in this civilization: power, expertise, nerve, surface charm and facility divorced from any sort of imaginative or moral connection with the rest of society. Finally, of course, they serve as moral warnings to McGee, whose methods of cracking open

people whose guilty knowledge he needs are sometimes brutal. With male characters like George Brell, Tom Collier, and Carl Abelle, he tends to start with a show of force, and then increase the pressure with other threats. With women, like Almah Hichin, Lisa Dissat, and Del Whitney, the physical damage is kept to a minimum, and he depends on the psychological brutality of painting vivid pictures of what will happen to them if they don't open up. While McGee rarely leaves a victim with a serious physical injury, he usually rearranges their dignity considerably. His methods are controlled by a fundamental knightly principle: it is wrong to hurt women. Even in *The Green Ripper*, when he has decided to leave all his old scruples behind, it will be noted that he kills one of the woman terrorists accidentally and the other kills herself accidentally. What clears McGee of the charge of sadism, at least in his own mind, is that he never enjoys the methods he uses, or the pain they produce. After each episode of violent interrogation, he feels a degree of guilt and revulsion calibrated to the amount of blame he assigns to the person he has broken open. He feels nothing but satisfaction after reducing Tom Collier to a quivering mess, but doing the same to Almah Hichin makes him go on a roaring drunk. He sometimes feels a certain amount of moral satisfaction in watching facades crumble, but this is a far cry from true sadism.

Nor does Travis McGee exhibit the classic symptoms of machismo: arrogance, brittle pride in skill or toughness or strength, a view of women as

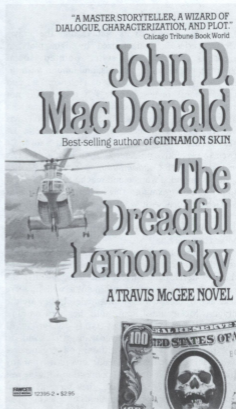


John D. MacDonald

handmaidens to, or sexual vessels for, the male ego. Like any intelligent hero, he fights only when necessary. And the really tough villains usually half kill him before, with a measure of luck, he manages to win, or at least survive. He is proud of the unexpected speed that goes with his size and relies upon his instinct for imminent danger, as when he saves himself and Meyer from Nicky Noyes. But he is essentially too lazy and self-mocking to make a fetish of muscles; he keeps in shape because his work may demand it and finds it increasingly difficult to do so as he grows older. In *The Dreadful Lemon Sky*,³ he finishes Harry Hascomb off by shooting him in the ankles. Near the end of *Nightmare in Pink*, befuddled by drugs, he charges naked into a breakfront desk and hits himself in the mouth with the poker he has armed himself with. These, and other scenes like them, are not high-quality machismo. Basically, McGee is loathe to dull his perceptions of the world by immersion in any ideology at all, especially the half-baked.

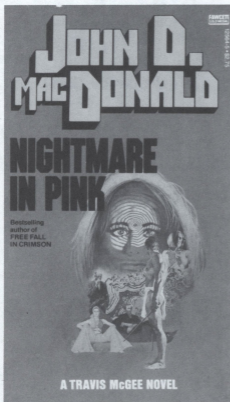
As for the "wounded women" syndrome, it certainly exists. There are several episodes in which

McGee administers extensive therapy to the suffering and the broken-spirited. A brief look at these episodes will reveal that what McGee usually offers first is attention and practical help, including nursing. Only when he is dealing with a person nearly restored to mental and physical health does a physical affair begin. Lois Atkinson in *The Deep Blue Good-By*, who has just survived the ministrations of Junior Allen, literally needs her life and sanity saved. These things accomplished, she makes the first advance to McGee. Glory Geis is in the same desperate condition when McGee finds her on the beach, having been reduced to it by the middle-class equivalent of Junior Allen. She is the victim of an emotional cripple who would rather kill his two children and an innocent bystander than admit it. The physical part of their affair starts casually, and, when McGee sees her developing an emotional dependency on him, he pushes her back into the real world, where she promptly falls in love with someone else. Mary Broll,



in *A Tan and Sandy Silence*, is suffering from the emotional after-effects of divorce, death, and her own thwarted idealism. She insists on splitting the chores and expenses with McGee, and, when ready, offers the first sexual invitation. Given the circumstances in all these cases: women either numbed or half destroyed by crazy or immature men, and who have been befriended by someone as understanding and undemanding as McGee, it would only be startling if they did not find themselves attracted to him.

In two cases, McGee administers sexual therapy. Isobel Webb in *A Purple Place for Dying* is a case of intellectual compensation for emotional neglect. When her brother is murdered, and her only emotional prop is removed, she collapses completely. But she hesitantly begins to find her feet in a world in which she can value herself for something besides her intelligence and being her brother's keeper. McGee's sexual therapy in this case consists of restraining his own desire, at some cost to his nerves, until Isobel is



confident enough to make the first move and mean it. This accomplished, she sets out, completely in character, to do some good in the world. Heidi Geis Trumbull is a case of traumatic sexual frigidity. Aside from the emotional bias this handicap gives her, she is in good physical and mental shape. She refuses to contemplate the traditional McGee cure until she has made him admit that simple lust is part of his motive in offering to try to salvage her sexuality. He offers friendship with an option for further treatment only if friendship develops. On these terms, and with her cure already half accomplished, she takes one of McGee's vacations from ordinary life. What begins to be clear is that McGee's formula for healing women does not rely on creeping up on wounded women while their defenses are down, or on overpowering sexual magnetism, but on sensitivity and responsibility.

What should also be noted here is that, corresponding to the "wounded bird" syndrome, is an even more pronounced "wounded hero" syndrome. For

every woman McGee helps and heals, almost two do the same for him. McGee is in need of a great deal of healing, of course, because of the extraordinary amount of punishment his adventures subject him to. He has his life saved twice by Cathy Kerr, that sweet, rather dumb woman whose resources of dignity and courage are inexhaustible. At the end of *The Deep Blue Good-By*, when Lois Atkinson is dead through McGee's miscalculation, Cathy offers her company, her body, and her home as simple solace. At the end of *The Scarlet Ruse*, she does the same: nurses him through a long recuperation and helps him exorcise the ghosts from his home and his head. At the end of *The Long Lavender Look*, when McGee has been half killed by King Sturneván, Heidi Geis Trumbill shows up to act as nurse, repay her debt, and to promise a nice reward for a rapid recovery. Weeping a little, McGee accepts her offer. In *Nightmare in Pink*, after McGee and Nina Gibson have buried her brother, and McGee's emotions are still scrambled from his encounter with hallucinogens, he and Nina heal each other. Cindy Birdsong moves him in next to her while he recovers from concussion in *The Dreadful Lemon Sky*, and they engage in some mutual healing. Connie Melgar, who hunts big game and is tired of small men, gets him out of Los Angeles after he is shot in *A Deadly Shade of Gold* and nurses him back to health. At the end of *Dress Her in Indigo*, McGee has suffered no physical wounds, but his look at the perverse fringes of American family life has left him in an extremely bleak mood. The Mexican secretary Elena drops by to restore his sense of the goodness of life. At the end of *A Tan and Sandy Silence*, McGee is in the same mood, turned inward: he is sick of the sound of his own sanctimonious voice. In a scene that has a flavor, rare in MacDonald, of tired invention, Jeannie Dolan shows up, suitcase in hand. After Meyer checks her out to be sure she is in no way wounded, he leaves for what he describes as a two-week excursion to Seneca Falls, New York, the birthplace of twentieth century feminism. And finally, Gretel Howard saves him from his worst identity crisis to date.

The pattern that emerges here is one of friends who become lovers, cease to be lovers and remain friends, offer help generously when help is needed. This pattern is perhaps obscured by the violence and casual sex of the greedy, careless, brutal society that MacDonald shows us. In Travis McGee, he gives us a hero who is capable of friendship with women as well as men, and who, since the introduction of the series, has been a proponent of the basic tenet of feminism. In *Pink*, he admits that he has "a strange thing about women: 'I happen to think they are people. Not cute objects'" (p. 47).

Not only are they people, but they are for the most part extremely capable people. The list of women in



these novels who are good at their work, emotionally stable and non-destructive human beings is long. Dana Holtzer is in the business of selling a "package of skill" with great efficiency. Nora Guardino started out modeling her legs and owns her own business. Connie Alvarez learned how to manage 300,000 orange trees in the year following her husband's death, continues to do so while raising her children, and has energy left to take in a friend. Chookie McCall dances, choreographs, and scares McGee with her wholeness and health. Jane Lawson, Carrie Milligan, and Betty Borlika are capable businesswomen. Heidi Trumbill, Skeeter Keith, Biddy Pearson, and Jenny Thurston paint or illustrate. Nina Gibson designs. Janice Stanyard is an OR nurse; Noreen Walker is a housemaid and regional director of CORE; Miss Moojah, whose main irritation in retirement is the "seven dolts" who are holding back her Spanish class, is called out of retirement as a replacement for two younger women. Cindy Birdsong runs a marina and needs the work for her own sense of independence and security. And Gretel

Howard has been doing all the work her husband has been taking credit for doing since she married. All these women work, as the saying goes, outside the home. The women who have been primarily wives and mothers are an equally impressive lot. Helena Pearson, Janine Bannon, Julie Lawless, and Glory Geis are as fully committed to their marriages as McGee is to independence and indignation. Puss Killian is also a woman of some moral stature, who takes a vacation from a good marriage for understandable reasons and returns to it for the home stretch. When life puts small and large moral questions to these women, they shoulder their responsibilities and carry them, and usually have a good measure of life and humor left over.

In fact, women who are morally responsible, physically attractive, and generally capable drive the plots of most of the Travis McGee novels. Women serve as centers of value and moral authority, and they are symbolically indispensable to McGee's way of life. The palpable presence of the shoddy, over-adjusted society that McGee's soul rebels against is

all around him. Instead of galvanizing him to action, it has a tendency to depress him into immobility. In order to be a knight in a world without a god, a salvage expert, there has to be something in the world worth salvaging, worth fighting monsters for. In McGee's world, the people who draw out his best efforts are good women. Lois Atkinson is the sort of human being the race ought to be breeding for, and Cathy Kerr's courage puts strong men to shame—both must be avenged. Lysa Dean is not worth fighting for, but the job is worth taking if it will give McGee a chance to get closer to Dana Holtzer. Nora Guardino needs some grief therapy. Helena Pearson's wish is McGee's command, even from beyond the grave. Her imprisoned daughters must be freed, and Penny Woertz's death avenged. Carrie Milligan and Mary Broil's ghosts must be laid. Glory Geis, Heidi Trumbill, and Susan Kemmer must have the shadows of false accusation, illusion and delusion removed from their lives—they are much too good to waste. The mystery of Bix Bowie's life and death must be solved. McGee may begin a salvage operation out of guilt over the fate of Tush Bannon or indignation over Van Harder's. But his heart isn't in it until a woman is in real trouble.

McGee and MacDonald are up to the rare practice of rendering poetic justice, or at least crying out for it. All the sadistic or sociopathic villains die picturesquely nasty and symbolically just deaths. And there is a corresponding impulse to do justice to the good women he runs across. McGee fights for them, appreciates them, provides an environment in which they can be healed, and sometimes loves them. When the expediencies of writing for a series hero demand their deaths, they are fully and personally avenged, and they are mourned.

The gallery of good women in the series includes some who would not be out of place in a Dickens novel, except, of course, that they all have legs. Puss Killian, who turns out to have been using McGee to take a vacation from dying, returns to her duty in the end, plotting remarriage for her husband and Janine Bannon as she goes. Cathy Kerr, Dana Holtzer, and Janice Stanyard are all using the best years of their lives to support helpless dependents. Glory Geis, who has seen her entire family die violently, marries a man who is dying slowly, and makes a success of it. Susan Kemmer, as foster mother to her half-brothers and -sisters, has raised a nice family, with no particular adult guidance. Cookie McCall, Cindy Birdsong, Penny Woertz, and Gretel Howard all demonstrate a post-Dickensian, thoroughly feminist set of virtues. They are capable of recognizing that they are married to or involved with worthless men, and, with help, they can extricate themselves from emotional suicide and regain their self-respect. These women are not required to be absolutely pure, or



perfect—in fact, they are shown to be frequently in conflict over the claims of their duties, their desires, and the realities of their lives.

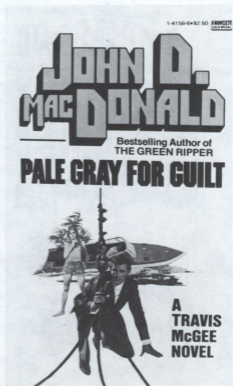
And McGee is certainly not possessive. On four occasions, he feels ready for a permanent relationship with a woman. Heidi Trumbill gives him the choice between watching her begin to live her life through him and helping her pack. He helps her pack. Pidge Lewellen falls in love with her psychiatrist. McGee retires gracefully. Cindy Birdsong says that if she can't take her marina with her, she can't go. Gretel Howard says that they can have a permanent relationship, but without marriage, and on her terms. McGee accepts them. For practical reasons, of course, these lovely women have to be gotten rid of—the knight in rusty armor must ride again, and, one suspects, it must be painful to kill off very many women of the caliber of Nora Guardino and Lois Atkinson. When McGee has to accept a parting, he does so for reasons a feminist can only applaud.

The women in the series are especially impressive when they are contrasted with many of the men they marry. In Travis McGee's world, the average American man, when posed with large or small moral questions, takes the easy way out. In fact, he usually collapses, taking some innocent bystanders with him. There are some very hollow pillars of the community in these books. Jass Yeoman is a business baron and law unto himself who takes possession of one too many pieces of human property. In *One Fearful Yellow Eye*, MacDonald gives us Karl Doyle, all-American family killer, and Gadge Trumbill, who gives up on Heidi Trumbill in favor of easier gratification. In *Bright Orange for the Shroud*, Vivian Watt's husband retreats into a bottle and leaves his wife to Boone Waxwell. In *The Turquoise Lament*, there are two matched pairs. The first is Lawton Hisp and Tom Collier, who conspire to rob Pidge Lewellen of her inheritance and set her up to marry Howie Brindle, homicidal time bomb. The incident that put McGee into Ted Lewellen's debt was an encounter in a Mexican cafe with Don Benjamin, "junior ass kisser" (p. 40), and his boss Bunny Mills, good old boy and latent maniac. In *Lemon*, we have Carrie Milligan's "child bride" husband and Cal Birdsong, who responds to crisis by heavy drinking and indiscriminate punching. In *Tan*, after Mary Dillon has been restored to health and equilibrium, she goes off to find happiness with Harry Broll, another hollow womanizer. In *Indigo*, as Peggy Moran's astute paper has noted,⁴ there is a trio of lethal fathers—T. Harlan Bowie, Wally McLeen, and Nancy Abbott's father. Bowie and Abbott have raised daughters so damaged that recovery is a very long shot. Wally McLeen's daughter turned out tougher, but it is clear that, like Bix, she went to

Mexico to escape the vacuity of Life with Father. Both Janice Holton and Penny Woertz run afoul of Rich Holton, who compulsively destroys any intimate relationship he finds himself in. The good men, the ones McGee's wounded birds are healed for, and who represent a normal life with a normal chance for happiness, are very few. Forner Geis, Tush Bannon, Ted Lewellen, and Mitch Pearson are about the complete list. Hub Lawless started out to be one, but he got chained to a crap table, and, when faced with the prospect of disappointing the town that depends on him, he takes the classically sleazy way out.

McGee observes something of the imbalance between the general worth of the women and the general worth of the men when he reflects on Carrie Milligan's fate:

There are too many of them in the world lately, the hopeful ladies who married grown-up boy children and soon lost all hope. . . . They are not ardent libbers, yet at the same time they are not looking for some man to "take care." God



knows they are expert in taking care of themselves. . . . But there are one hell of a lot more grown-up ladies than grown-up men." (*Lemon*, pp. 26-27)

There is a class of women in the McGee series that comes in for very harsh treatment, just as harsh as the men who are undeserving of the good women. These are the women who don't live up to the ideal set by the good women—the prostitutes like Del Whitney and Vangie Bellemer, and their sisters in business, Mary Smith, Debra Brown, Almah Hichin, Wilma Fermer, and Bonita Hersch. As Peggy Moran notes, McGee reserves his "particular contempt for the Girl Friday Night. . . who sleeps her way out of the secretarial pool into the Big Deal or Con."⁵ McGee displays his usual grasp of affairs in seeing the economic roots of the plight of high school graduates in a technician's world (*Blue*, pp. 141-42). And he is aware of the role of prejudice in the peculiar functioning of the criminal justice system where blacks and the rich are concerned. But he comes rather late to an admission that perhaps all prostitution is not explained by greed, vanity, and indifference. In the midst of the exceptionally good women in *Yellow*, there is a digression of several pages which imagines a prostitute taking a client for almost every penny to which he has ready access. The prostitute is seen as venality personified, a member of a class of people who "spring out at you every chance they get" (*Yellow*, p. 76). The victim is described as being "bright, good, decent, and in his first and last wild out, gullible as the youngest sailor in the Navy" (p. 77). A similar reflection on prostitution in *Lavender* compares hookers to mercenary soldiers and concludes that there is "no evil in either hooker or mercenary" (p. 175). The fact that the mercenary earns his pay by slitting sentries' throats, and that prostitutes are usually less lethal, makes this one of the few inapt comparisons in eighteen novels. Not until *A Tan and Sandy Silence*, in 1972, does McGee run into a girl who is considering a job as a prostitute before she gets into it. Although it will be a healthy, well-regulated life aboard the improbable *Hell's Belle*, it will not be her first choice. Captain Laneer tells McGee that she will decide that "every other choice she has is worse" (p. 207). It is in this book also that we have the brisk episode of bank teller Kathy Marcus telling her boss that he cannot grab her ass in the elevator while calling her Kathy and also expect her to take "some kind of accusatory shit" (p. 218) in public as Miss Marcus.

MacDonald is, of course, a highly conscious writer, and extremely well informed. One of his most dependable virtues has always been his sense of fair play. The horror that is Mary Alice McDermitt and the total waste that is Vangie Bellemer are supplied with fearsome childhoods. It is certainly significant

here that the backgrounds of his most destructive villains are not accounted for as thoroughly. The exaggerated contempt for prostitutes is mitigated, if not retracted, in *Tan*. As for the Girls Friday Night, it is very hard for a man in the McGee series to be in big business and not turn into a moral rhinoceros. The "good businesswomen" in the series are all in small business, like Jane Lawson and Carrie Milligan, or own their own, like Cindy Birdsong and Nora Guardino. Women who get close to big money, like Betty Borlika, begin to behave like their bosses.

Finally, MacDonald's conservatism principles apply to the characters he creates as well as the natural world around him. Chookie McCall has "the awareness of self, undistorted, a virtue growing ever more rare in our times" (*Orange*, p. 27). Women in these novels are preeminently the human raw material that stands the best chance of being preserved in its natural beauty and human power. As McGee puts it at the end of *Indigo*, "Bless all the sisters, wherever they are" (p. 253).

Notes

1. John Skow, "Tasty No-Qual," *Time*, December 3, 1973, pp. 108-9.
2. John Leonard, rev. of *Condominium*, *New York Times*, 5 April 1977, p. 31.
3. The editions of MacDonald's works used for this paper are listed below, preceded by the original date of publication. All quotations will be cited in the text using, where necessary for clarity, the abbreviations given after each entry:
1964 *The Deep Blue Good-By* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1975). (*Blue*)
1964 *Nightmare in Pink* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1976). (*Pink*)
1964 *A Purple Place for Dying* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1976). (*Purple*)
1964 *The Quick Red Fox* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1974). (*Red*)
1965 *A Deadly Shade of Gold* (N.Y.: Lippincott). (*Gold*)
1965 *Bright Orange for the Shroud* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1972). (*Orange*)
1966 *Darker than Amber* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1970). (*Amber*)
1966 *One Fearful Yellow Eye* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett, 1966). (*Yellow*)
1968 *Pale Grey for Gullit* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1971). (*Grey*)
1968 *The Girl in the Plain Brown Wrapper* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1973). (*Brown*)
1969 *Dress Her in Indigo* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1971). (*Indigo*)
1970 *The Long Lavender Look* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1972). (*Lavender*)
1972 *A Tan and Sandy Silence* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1979). (*Tan*)
1973 *The Scarlet Ruse* (N.Y.: Lippincott & Crowell, 1980). (*Scarlet*)
1973 *The Turquoise Lament* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1973). (*Turquoise*)
1975 *The Dreadful Lemon Sky* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1975). (*Lemon*)
1978 *The Empty Copper Sea* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1978). (*Copper*)
1979 *The Green Ripper* (N.Y.: Lippincott, 1979). (*Green*)
4. Peggy Moran, "McGee's Girls," *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, Spring 1980, p. 86.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 84. □

CURRENT REVIEWS

Dead Knock by Peter Turnbull. St. Martin's, 1982

Turnbull's second novel about the Glasgow police is fascinating yet, on reflection, rather depressing. The problem is one of drugs. A vague Oriental organization known as the Triad is in the process of setting up Glasgow as the entry point for heroin. The drugs are mostly forwarded to England, but the Glasgow connection goes awry when one of the monthly shipments is delivered to the wrong people.

At first, Turnbull's cast of policemen is interesting. One, Ray Suscock, is aging, in the process of divorce, and a general loser. Dick Kink is appealing for an unexplainable reason. Montgomerie, usually a playboy, cannot untwine himself from the charms of Fiona. Inspector Donoghue rules over them with a cold impersonality which lets him return home to Edinburgh every night. As engaging as all this sounds (and is) at first, by the finale they all merge into one bland figure of "policeman."

That apparent lack of care in writing the last third of the book applies equally well to the plot. Turnbull sets up a complex situation with multiple murders but then falls back on luck and coincidence to let the police solve it. Even the word "solve" is too strong. They know what happened, but the resolution of the situation is unsatisfying and leaves the reader both disturbed and feeling let down.

—Fred Dueren

Thus Was Adonis Murdered by Sarah Caudwell. Penguin, 1982. \$2.95

In 1720, Jonathan Swift wrote that "Proper words in proper places, make the true definition of style." If this is so, then Sarah Caudwell's engaging mystery *Thus Was Adonis Murdered* is the archetype of style. There has never been a narrator more attached to the proper place of words than Caudwell's Professor Hillary Tamar.

Words are one kind of thing and behavior is another. Like most armchair detectives, Tamar is not so much concerned with social propriety because he operates from the unshakable conviction that whatever he does is perfectly acceptable. He assumes, for example, that his companions will recognize his exquisite good manners in allowing them to have the unalloyed pleasure of picking up the bar tab for one who has served so valiantly in the lists of Scholarship.

It is Scholarship, Tamar maintains, that enables him to solve a murder in Venice from the cozy environs of a London coffee house. It is there that he refreshes himself in the company of his former pupil, Timothy Shepard, and Timothy's colleagues in the practice of law: Selena Jardine, Michael Cantrip, and Desmond Ragwort. It is over

this communal coffee that Selena begins reading the epistolary reports from Julia Larwood, who is participating in an Art Lovers' Tour of Venice in order to distract herself from escalating unpleasantness with Her Majesty's tax agents. Hillary explains Julia's unfortunate position with great sympathy and discretion:

"Julia's unhappy relationship with the Inland Revenue was due to her omission, during her four years of modestly successful practice at the Bar, to pay any income taxes. The truth is, I think, that she did not, in her heart of hearts, really believe in income tax. It was a subject which she had studied for examinations and on which she advised a number of clients: she naturally did not suppose, in these circumstances, that it had anything to do with real life."

Julia is a kind of King Midas in reverse: everything she touches turns to Silly Putty. On the first day of the tour, she misplaces her passport (thus postponing the departure of the other Art Lovers), plunges headlong into the boat that is to take them to their hotel

marred by the accusation that she has murdered the divine Ned. (Julia's London friends do not for a moment entertain the idea that she might be guilty, knowing that Julia would not be capable of executing even a crime of passion without inflicting grievous bodily injury to herself.)

Julia's account of her misadventures among the Art Lovers (an extraordinary cabal of financially motivated misanthropes and *nouveau riche* naifs) is relayed by a series of increasingly pie-eyed letters to Selena and company. On the basis of these remarkable documents, Professor Tamar amasses and assembles the information he needs to identify the real murderer and secure Julia's release from the Italian authorities.

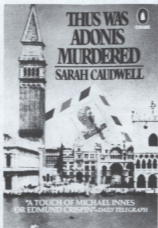
There are enough red herrings in *Thus Was Adonis Murdered* to provide a hearty breakfast buffet of kippers for all the principals involved. American readers unfamiliar with the intricacies of the British judicial system may be somewhat intimidated by Caudwell's references to that hierarchy, but anyone who is deterred from reading this excellent first novel merely because of Yankee confusion about the difference between a barrister and a solicitor ought to be sentenced to three volumes of Mickey Spillane. Proper words in proper places, indeed!

—Patrice K. Loose

Bad Company by Liza Cody. New York: Scribner, 1982. \$11.95

Bad Company uses the interlace technique to recount the kidnapping and rescue of London private detective Anna Lee, so that Anna's narrative alternates with that of those worried co-workers and friends who search for her for days. Anna's adventure starts out innocently enough in the repetitive boredom which characterizes most private investigative work (she's been hired by an almost pathologically fastidious British gentleman to see if his daughter, Claire, who is wild enough on her own, is being subjected to "bad influences" by his separated wife, and Anna's work is routine, textbook surveillance, pure and simple) and escalates suddenly into a situation that later rates among the "bottom ten disasters." While tailing Claire Fourie and a friend, gawky Verity Hewitt, to an afternoon at a swimming pool, Anna impulsively intervenes in a bit of street violence which subsequently turns into Verity's kidnapping and imprisonment by what first appear to be ragtag members of a motorcycle gang (they routinely wear helmets even for indoor intimidation) but actually turn out to be bullying punk youths associated with London's crime underworld, underlings who ultimately botch their attempt at ransom, but not before giving Anna a good number of physical scars and psychic scars.

Bad Company is a promising crime novel



(thus strewing the myriad contents of her purse among her tour mates and bloodying her nose), and ultimately fails, she supposes, "to make a favourable impression." This auspicious beginning hardly prepares the reader for the catastrophe that befalls the hapless Julia. She sets out to seduce one of her fellow Art Lovers, the ravishingly beautiful Ned, only to discover that he is also engaged in the practice of Law—in the service of the Inland Revenue. Despite her suspicions of conspiracy, perfidy, and persecution, Julia proceeds with the seduction of her would-be nemesis. Her amatory success is, however,

for several reasons. First, it convincingly establishes character and mood. Second, motive and opportunity are equally well worked out. Finally, though, it is Cody's concern for the moral values that most underlie every good piece of detective fiction that sticks with the reader. The real issues in *Bad Company* are parents' responsibility, or lack of it, for their children, and these manifest themselves in multiple scenes: Verity's mother's desperate need for an adult to share responsibility, rather than for a sneaking, rebellious daughter; the mothering Anna receives from her neighbors, the Selwyns, and her fellow workers; the gang members' relatives' laconic unconcern for their sons' whereabouts and activities; and, ultimately, the powerful juxtaposition of Anna's irritation at having to mother adolescent Verity during their uncomfortable and humiliating imprisonment and her brief dream about an imaginary baby that died. Add to these strong points a sense of gritty dialogue, an overpowering sense of the dreary side of London which Anna must investigate, and the result is that this is a well-created second novel. Anna Lee takes very much after P. D. James's Cordelia Gray (her sidekick, Bernie, is even closer to Cordelia's dead partner, Bertie Pryde!), and that too should appeal to a certain readership.

—Susan L. Clark

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦
Deadly Reunion: A Swedish Mystery by Jan Ekström. Scribner's, 1983. \$12.95

Simply because its author and setting are Swedish, *Deadly Reunion* invites comparison to the more famous Martin Beck series written by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlbom, yet Ekström's aim is to play a five-finger exercise on the classic "locked room" detection formula rather than to cast crime against ever-changing Swedish cultural mores and the personal growth of a detective in a degenerating society. The similarities, though, between *Deadly Reunion* and the ten Martin Beck novels do draw from the everpresent sense of brooding landscape and personality, and this novel's opening, set as it is at a family reunion whose matriarch seems determined to cast a pall over the proceedings, deliberately establishes a somber mood.

Ninety-year-old Charlotte Lethander is earmarked for death at the outset, and it is merely a matter of time before the murder takes place and the reader can begin to sort out the guilty party from the assembled extended family: the Svenssons, Bernhems, and Corns. Ekström employs the technique of shifting narrative perspectives, so that the murder and its subsequent police-procedural investigation are recounted, in turn, by sycophantic, greedy Ulla, sensible Veronica, stolid Ellen, and alcoholic Fredrik, among others. Others such as socialist Vera, beautiful but vapid Gittan, and inarticulate Sergej Roseff (a Yugoslav who married Malin Lethander) come into focus through the eyes of local police officer Melander and Inspector Bertil Durrell. *Deadly Reunion* accordingly provides a well-plotted, detailed view of

tortuous family relations spanning generations, as well as an intriguing variation on the familiar "locked room" detection puzzle.

—Susan L. Clark



Murder at the Academy Awards by Joe Hyams. New York: St. Martin's, 1983. \$11.95

Fast-paced Hollywood murder-mystery *Murder at the Academy Awards* treats the many reasons perhaps a dozen Los Angeles inhabitants had to kill Eva Johnson in front of millions of TV viewers, just as she

unexpectedly receives the award for producing the year's "Best Picture." *The Reckoning*. Most of the motives aren't very pretty, for Eva, in addition to exhibiting an unusual amount of talent, has slept, manipulated, and blackmailed her way to the top. The reader can choose, among others, among Eva's cast-off boyfriend, her one-time producer lover, her gay ex-husband who wants custody of their child, a washed-up actor whose wife has been sleeping with Eva, her embezzling accountant, or the man whose script idea Eva has stolen. Oh, yes, Eva's stolid Norwegian mother is also a suspect, as is a hoodlum named Mickey Levy.

Homicide captain Punch Roberts, with the aid of detective Bonny Cutler, with whom he is romantically involved, and forensic, ballistic, and computer experts, work to track down the murderer, who soon strikes again, and the novel, which begins with a star-studded cast viewing a slaying, ends at a funeral where the criminal and the L.A. police department vie for best performance. Author Hyams has an adept ear for dialogue, and there's very little extra fat on this quick-moving, engrossing mystery.

—Susan L. Clark

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦
Jack on the Gallows Tree by Leo Bruce. Academy, 1960; reprinted 1983

Bruce's Sergeant Beef novels were obviously successful enough that Academy has now begun to reprint his later (and much more numerous) series about Carolus Deene. In this installment, Deene is recovering from

Solve the crime. Claim the \$10,000 reward!

William Morrow is offering \$10,000 to the reader who most correctly answers: *Who* killed the Robins family? and *Where* and *When* and *How* and *Why* did they die? The book itself is a taut murder mystery in the classic tradition—except you are the detective! Red herrings abound. So do real clues. First clue: you'll find contest rules in the front of the book. Second clue: this is "a puzzle that intrigues, delights, and makes every mystery fan an instant Sherlock Holmes."—Mary Higgins Clark, author of *A Stranger Is Watching* and *Where Are the Children?*

"Readers are going to have loads of fun... a humdinger of an idea."—*Publishers Weekly*

WHO KILLED THE ROBINS FAMILY?

A NOVEL CREATED BY BILL ADLER WRITTEN BY THOMAS CHASTAIN

A Main Selection of the Mystery Guild \$9.95
 An Alternate Selection of the Literary Guild
 William Morrow

jaundice at Buddington, a mineral springs resort town. Shortly after his arrival, two elderly ladies, with no known connection, are strangled and each left with a tily in her hands. Reluctantly at first, Deene patters around asking a few esoteric questions;

LEO BRUCE

A CAROLINE DEENE MYSTERY



Jack on the Gallows Tree

eventually the case truly catches his interest, and he tracks down the killer. A final explanation to the gathered suspects reveals a few things not previously exposed.

Jack is very much a formula work. Characterizations run to stereotypes and broad strokes rather than to individualization. Deene himself does not come alive in this book, but I am sure that over the long haul of his twenty-three cases he is as endearing and enchanting as any long-run detective. It's the old story of enjoying watching the old friend run through his paces, checking what new gimmicks and obstacles are thrown in his path.

Plot and puzzle are the stars of this traditionally English novel. Bruce includes a fair number of in-jokes about crime fiction and how characters are supposed to act. Although those comments are faintly amusing, they cannot replace the broader humor of the Beef novels. In short, analysis of the book leaves it sounding rather dull and poor. In truth, it is a good book, worth reading. It is easily forgotten, yet enjoyable. A perfect example of the book to read for light distraction from the harshness of reality.

—Fred Dueren

* * * * *

A Little Local Murder by Robert Barnard. Scribner's, originally 1976. 1st U.S. edition, 1983

In what is apparently Barnard's first book, we find the humorous, caustic social com-

mentary so typical of his early works which were published in the U.S. in the late '70s. This time the target is a small English village and its numerous odious, self-centered, hypocritical people. Characterization may be done with a tendency to caricature, but in no way does that lessen the reality and universality of the types.

Greed and pride come to the surface of Twytching when it is announced that a radio program about the village is to be made and sent to the town's sister city, Twytchling, Wisconsin. (The portrait of the media people is no more flattering than that of the townsfolk. Particularly vicious and enjoyable is the depiction of Harold Thring, an outrageously quackish assistant to the producer.) Deborah Withens, dominating snob, quickly attempts to assume control of who will and will not represent the town. Favours, hints, and advice are generously poured on her.

But things are not that simple. Her archival for control of the town, Alison Mailer, is soon tête-à-tête with the producer himself. So when a body is discovered after a town meeting, the suspects fairly trip over each other on the way to Inspector Parrish's door.

No more need be said. Barnard may not here have reached the polished barbs he was to perfect later, but the raw force and enjoyment are clearly evident. Barnard has not written a bad book. No student of crime fiction should lack ownership of all his works.

—Fred Dueren

RETRO REVIEWS

Elmore Leonard. *Fifty-Two Pickup*. Delacorte, 1974. 254 pp. *Unknown Man No. 89*. Delacorte, 1977. 264 pp. *City Primeval: High Noon in Detroit*. Delacorte, 1980. 275 pp.

Elmore Leonard's early books were Westerns, and several of them were made into movies, most notably *Hombre* and *Valdez Is Coming*. When he graduated from Westerns—if "graduated" is the word—several of his non-Westerns also made it to the big screen, including *The Big Bounce* and *Mr. Majestyk*—although, in the case of the former, I'm not quite sure what came first, the chicken or the egg.

I discovered Elmore Leonard in 1975, when I picked up a second printing of his novel *Fifty-Two Pickup*, and what a discovery he was for me. He writes hardboiled, street-wise books as if he were sitting right on the street with a typewriter. I've read many of his novels since then, including some of his Westerns, and I admit that I did not like all of them. When I think of Elmore Leonard, however, three particular novels come to mind, all of which I L-O-V-E-D.

The first is, as I said, the first I read, *Fifty-Two Pickup*. The story centers around Harry

Mitchell, a self-made man with a wife, kids ... and a young mistress. When Mitchell finds out that some films of him and the girl were taken, with her cooperation, it is from her two friends who attempt to blackmail him. Naturally, they expect him to back off and pay up, but that is not Harry Mitchell's style. No, even when the game escalates to murder, Mitchell doesn't fall apart, he "takes" apart. Beautifully written, wonderfully hardboiled, Harry Mitchell, businessmen, is as tough as any of the hardboiled private eyes.

Unknown Man No. 89 deals with a professional rather than a tough amateur. Jack Ryan is known as the best process server in Detroit, but in this particular case he is hired simply to find a man, a missing stockholder who turns up dead, tagged in the morgue as "Unknown Man No. 89." The relationship that develops between Ryan and Lee, a young woman on the skids, is a major factor in the book being as enjoyable as it is. Again, the style is hard as you can boil, the pace lively, and the dialogue is straight from the street. Detroit comes alive in the typewriter of Elmore Leonard.

City Primeval, with the subtitle *High Noon*

in Detroit, is just that. Raymond Cruz, a police lieutenant, is a modern-day Wyatt Earp, even down to the way he dresses and looks. Clement Mansell is a killer, as he's proved time and time again... at least to Lt. Cruz. Legally, however, Cruz hasn't been able to pin anything on Clement, partially due to his lovely female attorney, with whom Cruz ultimately becomes involved. This is a fencing match between Cruz and Clement, and Cruz finally decides to take matters into his own hands.

An authentic police procedural, *City Primeval* is a prime example of Elmore Leonard at his best. Fast, hard, real, the characters and the city leaping off the pages with extraordinary impact, these are elements of all of Elmore Leonard's books. He seems to switch, however, from lighthearted books such as *Swag* and *The Switch* to the cool, hard style of *The Hunted*, *Fifty-Two Pickup*, and *Unknown Man No. 89*. Whatever the mood, they are all well-written and enjoyable ... but I like my Leonard hard.

—Robert J. Randisi

THE PAPERBACK REVOLUTION

MARIAN BABSON

This prolific and popular author was born in Salem, Mass., currently resides in London, and is secretary of the Crime Writers Association. Her ninth novel, the tense and exciting **The Lord Mayor of Death** (1977) (Walker), was the first to be published in America and concerns the kidnapping of a small girl as an integral part of an Irish terrorist's bomb plot set in the midst of a crowded London street pageant.

ROBERT BARNARD

Blood Brotherhood (1977) (Penguin) is set in the Community of St. Botolph's in Yorkshire, where an international conference of clergymen (and clergywomen!) of diverse views is to discuss problems facing the modern Church. The discovery of the murder of a local priest causes a major upheaval, and there is the very devil to pay. (Note: this columnist has sampled the first half-dozen of Barnard's novels to be published here and finds *Blood Brotherhood* the best, and best plotted, work of this group.)

LAWRENCE BLOCK

A/K/A Chip Harrison (Foul Play Press) includes *Make Out With Murder* (1974) and *The Topless Tulip Murder* (1975). These detective novels star ichthyologist Leo Haig and his assistant the aforementioned Harrison — whose name appeared as author on original publication.

Relatively few mystery writers have attempted more than one full-length pastiche of a famous series detective (excluding Sherlock Holmes), and any resemblance to the Wolfe-Goodwin team is far from coincidental. (Note: I've read half a dozen other Block works, but these are the best and most entertaining.)

W. J. BURLEY

A British country estate at Christmastime is the setting for a series of poison pen letters that correlate the recent ambiguous disappearances of two village girls to similar events of 140 years ago perpetrated by the then lord of the manor in **Death in Willow Pattern** (1969) (Walker). Series detective Dr. Henry Pym, busily engaged in cataloguing the estate's vast collection of books and manuscripts, decides to investigate this problem.

WILLIAM L. DIANDREA

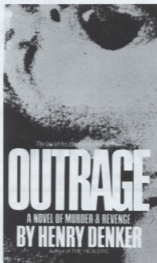
Five O'Clock Lightning (1982) (St. Martin's) is set against the background of the 1953 baseball season. It's slightly uneven stylistically, but it is a fast-moving, complex, tricky, and always readable thriller — peopled with several agreeable characters — that improves as it gathers momentum for an exciting climactic chase in Yankee Stadium.

HENRY DENKER

A struggling young lawyer is assigned to defend a self-confessed murderer — who is

By Charles Shibuk

unequivocally guilty — and the task seems utterly hopeless. The courtroom is the arena for this devastating attack on our criminal justice system, and **Outrage** (1982) (Avon) is as timely and hard-hitting as tomorrow's newspaper headlines.



MICHAEL GILBERT

The veteran author of many superb novels in several genres turns his attention to the short form in **Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens** (1982) (Penguin). These twelve spy stories, formerly published in EQMM, once again display Gilbert's mastery of the form. This volume's predecessor, *Game Without Rules* (1967) (which featured the same protagonists), was hailed as the second best volume of spy stories ever written by many critics, including Anthony Boucher, and was also included in *Queen's Quorum*. Curiously, this columnist prefers the more recent volume.

WILLIAM HAGGARD

Series character Colonel Charles Russell, ex-head of the Security Executive, is drawn out of mandatory retirement in order to forestall a madman's revenge scheme that involves atomic holocaust in **Yesterday's Enemy** (1976) (Walker). The urbane and often witty Haggard, who is more subtle than sensational, and usually stresses characterization, is this columnist's favorite contemporary British spy series novelist, and *Yesterday's Enemy* is a fairly good example of his work.

ELIZABETH LEMARCHAND

The body in the library is young and female

and lies at the foot of a spiral staircase in **Step in the Dark** (1976) (Walker). There is no evidence of foul play, but what about the valuable collection of missing books? This well-written and structured procedural stars Detective-Superintendent Tom Pollard and Detective-Inspector Gregory Toye in an investigation involving several surprises and a totally unexpected miscreant.

Unhappy Returns (1977) (Walker) is another procedural with the same protagonists, and starts with a missing medieval chalice and a murdered vicarage caretaker. It also contains its quota of unexpected developments but is slightly less effective than its predecessor.

HAROLD Q. MASUR

The Broker (1981) (St. Martin's) concerns Mike Ryan, the head of a Wall Street investment banking company, whose efforts to help a client gain control of Arcadia Films leads to a proxy fight and multiple homicide. This is the third non-series effort from the creator of attorney Scott Jordan, and it's his very best work to date. It's a well-constructed novel, very involving, and breathlessly readable.



FRANK PARRISH

I don't know the real identity of this previously published author, but I do know that his three novels are uniformly excellent. **Fire in the Barley** (1977), **Sting of the Honeybee** (1978), and **Snare in the Dark** (1981) have been reprinted by Perennial and feature Dan Mallett, a British dropout who has turned poacher in order to support himself and his ailing mother. These suspense novels usually feature a chase and are as exciting as they are readable.

JOHN SLADEK

This author, an American science-fiction writer living in England, has, by some unknown alchemy, mastered the classic form to such an extent that he is, in this columnist's opinion, the leading contemporary practitioner of the art of the detective story. His second and best essay into the bizarre and impossible, *Invisible Green* (1977) (Walker), starring Thackeray Phin, will remind you, in its ingenuity, of John Dickson Carr.

JONATHAN VALIN

Day of Wrath (1982) (Avon) is narrated by Cincinnati private eye Harry Stoner and deals with the detective's quest to find a beautiful fourteen-year-old runaway girl for her unlikely but deeply concerned mother. Glimpses of Chandler and Ross Macdonald abound, but there is little of the expected hardboiled quality until the violent climax in this very well-written and compassionate tale.

JONATHAN VALIN



CHARLES WILLIAMS

The Sailcloth Shroud (1960) and *Dead Calm* (1963) (both from Perennial) are two extravagant tales of suspense and high adventure at sea. The first is a story of murder, detection, gangsters, and an undiscovered secret. The latter starts with a honeymoon voyage in the Pacific that evolves into perilous situations of life and death for two small boats. Several incidents may strain credulity, but most readers will be too busy biting their nails to worry about logic.

DAVID WILTSE

When the Shah of Iran is forced to leave his native land, a disgraced former president, hoping to reap financial benefits, plots to have him given asylum in America and thereby unleashes a chain of violent reactions that starts with the accidental assassination of *The Wedding Guest* (1982) (Dell). This is a coherently written, edge-of-the-chair spy thriller set in Manhattan and is more original than most of its brethren. □

Minor Offenses

By Edward D. Hoch

Despite the fact that the last pulp magazine was published more than twenty-five years ago (probably the July 1957 issue of Columbia's *Crack Detective and Mystery Stories*), there remains a strong reader interest in pulp detective fiction. A few anthologies of pulp mysteries have been published over the years—Joseph T. Shaw's *The Hard-Boiled Omnibus* (1946), Ron Goulart's *The Harboiled Dicks* (1965), and Herbert Ruhm's *The Hard-Boiled Detective* (1977)—and lately there seems to be renewed interest among readers and publishers. Last year we had E. R. Hagemann's *A Comprehensive Index to Black Mask, 1920-1951* from Bowling Green University Popular Press, and now there are two new mystery anthologies drawn entirely from the pulps.

Bill Pronzini's *The Arbor House Treasury of Detective & Mystery Stories from the Great Pulps* (Arbor House, \$16.95) is a major anthology in every respect. *Black Mask* is well represented among its fifteen selections, but so are such magazines as *Dime Detective*, *The Shadow*, *Detective Tales*, *New Detective*, and *Thrilling Detective*. The choice of material, even by such big names as Hammett and Woolrich, is excellent, and many of the stories have never been reprinted since their first pulp appearances. Carroll John Daly, Frederick Nebel, and Norbert Davis are all present—as is Paul Cain, with a sizzling short-short called "Parlor Trick."

The anthology spans the years 1923-53, and later writers include John D. MacDonald, William Campbell Gault, and even John

Jakes. Other high points include a little-known Fredric Brown story, "Blue Murder," with an ingenious murder-alibi gimmick involving paint, and a clever and original locked-room tale, D. L. Champion's "The Day Nobody Died." Pronzini contributes extensive biographical-critical introductions to each story and an overall introduction which summarizes the history of the pulps in a succinct five pages.

An interesting, if less successful, pulp anthology is *The Defective Detective in the Pulps* edited by Gary Hoppenstand and Ray R. Browne (Bowling Green University Popular Press, \$7.95 paper, \$15.95 cloth). Five of the six stories are from *Dime Mystery*, and the other is from *Strange Detective Mysteries*—all in the 1937-43 period. Paul Ernst is probably the most familiar name among the authors, who also include Nat Kobler, Warren Lucas, Grendon Alzee, Nat Schachner, and Edith and Ejler Jacobson.

The idea of an anthology devoted to deformed and freakish sleuths is a bizarre one, and it might have worked if the stories themselves had been better. As the editors point out, the tradition continues to the present day in Michael Collins's one-armed Dan Fortune and George C. Chesbro's dwarf professor Mongo. But one has only to look at Pronzini's anthology to see what the editors missed. D. L. Champion's legless Inspector Alhoff is a well-developed character who would have fit perfectly into a "defective detective" collection.

Still, the original pulp illustrations and ads

give a nice flavor to this anthology, and perhaps it's a reminder that not all pulp writing was on the level of Hammett, Woolrich, and Fredric Brown.

Garland has at last completed publication of its second fifty-volume series of *Classics of Crime Fiction* edited by Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor. This series covers roughly the period 1950-75, although the anthology volume, *Classic Short Stories of Crime and Detection*, includes seventeen stories from 1945 to 1978. All the stories are good, and a few, such as Harry Kemelman's "The Nine Mile Walk," really are classics. The stories have been reproduced from magazine and anthology appearances, with a different typeface for each one, and the quality of the selections—by Carr, Asimov, Charlotte Armstrong, Roy Vickers, Barry Perowne, Christianna Brand, Lillian de la Torre, Edmund Crispin, and others—makes up for the patchwork appearance.

Turning to magazines, I especially enjoyed Lawrence Block's "Like a Thief in the Night" in the May issue of *Cosmopolitan*. It's a Bernie Rhodenbarr story, though told from the viewpoint of a charming female character. The same story can also be found in Block's new Arbor House collection, *Sometimes They Bite* (\$14.50).

The July issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* was the best so far this year, featuring strong entries from LaVonne Sims, Brian Garfield, Browning Norton, James Powell, Peter Lovejoy, and Clark Howard. □

An Open Letter to

DEAN & TEET

**or, "Look out, Pronzini's got a
rebuttal in his girdle."**

Mssrs. Dean M. Dorn
& C. E. "Teet" Carle
c/o The Armchair Detective
129 W. 56th Street
New York, N.Y. 10019

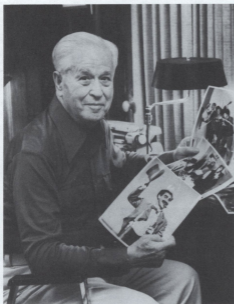
Dear Dean and Teet:

Gentlemen, you have me at something of a loss. I have just finished reading "Let's Call It 'Gun in Girdle,'" a copy of which TAD's editor kindly forwarded to me, and I confess to an odd mixture of pleasure, hurt, and consternation.

Let's begin with my feeling of pleasure. I was delighted to hear from you, even indirectly and even though you're miffed at me; I was delighted to learn more about you both, in particular the circumstances that led you to create Bill Ryan and *Decoy*. You gentlemen are two of my all-time favorite

writers, and I'm happy to be able to tell you so at long last. I mean this with all sincerity; ask anyone who knows me how I feel about you and your work. No mystery novel—no book, period—has given me more continuous pleasure than *Decoy*. I have read it at least ten times, each time with a sense of deepening awe at your talents, each time with utter joy and whoops of laughter. It is a wonderful piece of fiction. My world would be a sorrier place if you hadn't written it.

Thus, my consternation that you're upset with me.



C. E. (Teet) Carle



Dean M. Dorn

You seem to think that I ridiculed you and your masterwork unfairly; that I did so with malicious intent rather than affection. This is not so. I have, as I said above, great admiration for your literary abilities. When I said you, Teet, were “a poet laureate of the absurd” and that you both are “blessed with genius” I meant every word to be complimentary. (I was quite pleased, you know, to note that you quoted this lavish praise of mine in your advertisement in *The Hollywood Reporter*. I experienced a warm glow of pride, for I believed at the time that you had taken my lighthearted comments in the spirit in which they were intended.)

But I digress. The point is, *Decoy* is a truly magnificent novel. However, gentlemen—and I’m sorry if this offends you—it is a magnificent *bad* novel. It is bad not only by my standards, but by the standards of everyone who has read it and loved it and become as vocal a Michael Morgan fan as I am.

Now please don’t get upset again; I do not here and did not in *Gun in Cheek* mean “bad” in a derogatory sense. There are many levels of badness, just as there are many levels of goodness—in fiction as in all other aspects of life. The truly bad achieves a kind of nirvana of badness, if I may stretch a metaphor, and thus becomes good. Your bad is good. Your bad, in fact, is better than good because it is in a class by

itself—it is the best of the bad, it is that by which all other bad must be judged and found wanting, it is *the greatest bad mystery novel ever written!*

Don’t you realize what this means, gentlemen? Don’t you realize what you’ve done? To have written the greatest bad mystery novel of all time. . . well, that is a remarkable, a staggering accomplishment in my book. (I said so in my book, too, if you’ll remember.) How can you scold me for resurrecting *Decoy* from obscurity, elevating it into the limelight, and telling the world of your genius? I should think that instead of angry words of ridicule, you might want to offer me at least a small thank-you.

That you did scold me, that you did choose to ridicule me in your article, is why *I* feel hurt.

You say, “My God, what an awful legacy,” to be hailed for your unparalleled feat. I fail to understand how you can feel this way. I, personally, would consider it a singular honor; I would be damned proud (and damned humble, too) to have done what no other man or woman could ever do. As it is, I have never written a great book, bad or good; of my thirty-plus novels to date, nearly all are unknown, unread, and out of print, and if I write another thirty or another hundred, all of those will doubtless suffer the same fate. (*Gun in Cheek* will soon be out of print, too, if this fact will cheer you.) I am not

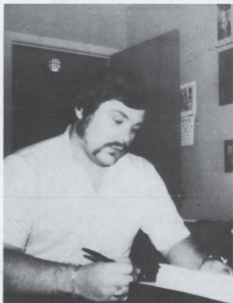
blessed with genius. I am not Michael Morgan. I am not Dean M. Dorn or C. E. "Teet" Carle.

Damn it, gentlemen, what I'm saying is that I wish I had written *Decoy*. And what higher compliment can one writer pay another?

So you see, it doesn't matter how or why you concocted your *magnum opus*; invented Bill Ryan or came, in the white heat of creativity, to produce such inspired lines as "Don't tell me you carry a heater in your girdle, madam!" and "She laid a hand on my arm and I knew I really had her in the palm of my hand because her face was contorted." You don't need to justify your *chef-d'oeuvre*. If every glittering facet of your great book was intentionally polished, then I stand even more in awe of you than I have since I first read *Decoy* fifteen years ago. But intentional or otherwise, *it doesn't matter*. All that matters is that you did it. That is the bottom line. You did it!

I hope you won't stay angry with me. But even if you do, that doesn't matter either. I am not sorry I profiled (not ridiculed, not denounced) *Decoy* in my book; I would do it again and again, in order that you and your achievement be given your rightful places of honor in the mystery field.

If you should ever write another collaborative novel—and I very much hope you do—I will be the first in line to purchase it. And I will give it an honored spot in my mystery collection, next to *Decoy* and *Nine More Lives*. (Teet, one of the high points of the past year for me was discovering a copy of your sexy 1965 mystery novel from Anchor Publications, *The Brass Butterfly*. I knew I was going to love it when I read the back cover blurb: "Men were drawn to her as the butterfly is enticed to kiss a lovely blossom. . . and like a butterfly, she flitted from one torrid affair to another, leaving human wreckage in her wake." I must confess to being somewhat



Bill Pronzini

disappointed when I read it, though, since it doesn't quite measure up to *Decoy*. But then, *two* masterpieces is just too much to expect from one writer in a lifetime.)

In any event, my very best personal regards to you both. And I thank you again, from the bottom of my heart, for having given me and so many others the wonders of *Decoy*.

Affectionately yours,

BILL PRONZINI

(a. k. a. "Willie," "Billy," "Billy Boy,"
"Bill-the-Critic," "Sweet William,"
"Youthful William," "Young Billy")

P.S.: Teet, I apologize for having had some fun with your nickname in *Gun in Cheek*. But I meant no offense on that score, either. It was just that "Teet" struck me as a comical sort of name. Especially in view of your copious and lyrical descriptions of the

female anatomy, among them that electrifying simile which ends with "made a low-bridge criss-cross right above where the meat on a chicken is the whitest." I mean, Teet, would *you* have passed up such an obvious analogy? □

REX STOUT

Newsletter

By John McAleer

Terry Teachout's review of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s *Marco Polo, If You Can* (*National Review*, 22 January 1982, pp. 56-58), contains an observation that caught the alert eye of Peter Blau, our man in Washington-on-the-Potomac: "The light touch has been pretty much verboten when it comes to narrating the exploits of private eyes and burnt-out spies. Fortunately, there are a few worthy exceptions to this drab rule: the domestic comedy of Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe books comes to mind."

Nor does the *National Review's* interest in Nero Wolfe stop there. In Svend Petersen's "Trans-O-Gram," in the 19 March 1982 issue (p. 322), a puzzle diagram for intellectuals, one of the definitions reads: "A description of Nero Wolfe's creator."

The May 1983 issue of *Games* magazine has two puzzle pages, assembled by Lisa Feder and Mary Ellen Slate, under the heading "Elementary, My Dear Sherlock!" Of the fourteen puzzles given, Archie and/or Nero turn up in five.

What's happening? We can guess what Wolfe thinks of video games. Are we to suppose that he has decided to combat this latest evil singlehanded?

My thanks to Linda Toole, no mean sleuth herself when it comes to ferreting out Stout materials.

According to the language of the flowers, by which people in the nineteenth century set store, orchids mean "I await your favors."

I once asked Rex Stout if Orrie Cather's given name is Orrin. Rex replied, "Probably." Since I knew that his near neighbor and sometime helper was a fellow named Orrin

Salmon, I congratulated myself on a good piece of detective work. Now, Michael P. Reynolds of Willingboro, New Jersey invites me to consult Chapter Three of *If Death Ever Slept*. Orrie, standing in for Archie, answers Wolfe's phone: "'Nero Wolfe's office.'" he says, "'Orville Cather speaking.'" Okay, so I'm not a genius.

Louis P. Becker, of Bismarck, North Dakota, recently inventoried his detective fiction collection and came up with a list of books on which jacket essays by Rex Stout appear. It's impressive: *No Lost Love* by Margery Allingham (Doubleday, n.d.); *The Man Who Laughed at Murder* by Gordon Ashe (Doubleday, 1960); *The Man Who Disappeared* by Edgar Bohle (Random House, 1958); *Too Many Cousins* by Douglas G. Browne (Macmillan, n.d.); *One Way Out* by George Harmon Cox (Knopf, 1959); *The Face of the Tiger* by Ursula Curtiss (Dodd, Mead, 1958); *Widow's Web* by Ursula Curtiss (Dodd, Mead, 1956); *Hours to Kill* by Ursula Curtiss (Dodd, Mead, 1961); *Every Bet's a Sure Thing* by Thomas B. Dewey (Simon & Schuster, 1953); *Mrs. Meeker's Money* by Doris Miles Disney (Doubleday, 1960); *The Exploits of Tommy Hambleton* by Manning Coles (Doubleday, 1952); *The Davidian Report* by Dorothy B. Hughes (Little, Brown, 1952); *A Hero for Leanda* by Andrew Garve (Harper, 1958); *Gideon's High* by J. J. Marris (Harper, 1957); *Gideon's Fire* by J. J. Marris (Harper, 1960); *But the Patient Died* by Fiona Sinclair (Doubleday, 1961); *The Evil of the Day* by Thomas Sterling (Simon & Schuster, 1955); *Stand Up and Die* by Richard and Frances Lockridge (Lippincott, 1953); *Murder! Murder! Murder!* by Richard and Frances Lockridge (Lippincott, 1956); *Show Red for Danger* by Richard and Francis Lockridge (Lippincott, 1960); *Drill Is Death* by Richard and Frances Lockridge (Lippincott, 1961); *Four, Five and Six* by Josephine Tev (Macmillan, 1951); *M'Lord I Am Not*

Guiltily by Frances Shelly Wees (Doubleday, 1954); and *Unseen Enemy* by Christopher Landon (Doubleday, 1956). All are book club editions and in each instance the jacket essay is the one entitled "Reading and Writing Detective Stories." If it appeared earlier than 1952, I am not aware of it. Let's hear from you if you have information to the contrary.

And how about this? Louis Becker has also turned up a Stout blurb on the back of the jacket of Donald E. Westlake's *The Spy in the Ointment* (Random House, 1966): "Donald Westlake keeps showing me people I would like to meet—for instance, Aloysius Engel, the gangster hero of this fine story, I'll buy him a drink any day."

Never having encountered a Stout blurb before, Louis Becker was nonplussed when he ran across the above. It was my turn to be stunned, however, when the Reverend Frederick G. Gotwald, assistant to the Lutheran bishop of Syracuse, New York, sent me a full-page advertisement from the January 1943 issue of *The American Magazine*. Rex Stout never was reluctant to own that he sneered at movies and movie makers. But there it was, an essay by Rex Stout, "When the Parades Are Over"—a boost for a Hollywood movie. It's worth producing in its entirety:

"I have just been privileged to see a motion picture—a great motion picture—which tells the story of a man and a woman and the love they found when 'the war drum throbbed no longer and the battle flags were furled.' It's called 'Random Harvest.'

"Don't stay away from 'Random Harvest' because it's about the last war. It's about every war, including the biggest and toughest of all which we are fighting now. Men will come back from this war, too, with their nerve-ends horribly bruised, and girls will restore them to sanity and strength.

"Not many of the men will be as handsome as Ronald Colman, and not many of the girls as lovely and desirable as Greer Garson; and few of them indeed will unfold a tale of suspense, mounting excitement, dramatic episodes and heart-warming climax as 'Random Harvest' does. But each of those romances to come will have its own moments, precious and unforgettable, like no other before or after. This one, on the screen, from James Hilton's story, is in a way a composite picture of all of them—the man and the girl in the jungle of the post-war world, and their founding the road to lead them on to the new world of love and work and peace.

"Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer may well be proud to bring Greer Garson back to the audiences which admired her in 'Mrs. Miniver' in a role equally brilliant and equally unforgettable. Ronald Colman, Susan Peters—in fact, all the players in the exceptional cast—combine to make 'Random Harvest' a tremendously rewarding experience for all who see it."

To this accolade, MGM felt obliged to add a postscript: "Praise such as this from Rex Stout prompts Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to term 'Random Harvest,' starring Ronald Colman and Greer Garson, the Hall of Fame Picture."

Shocked? Well, don't forget, Rex was then chairman of the Writers' War Board. He would have walked the plank if it meant helping Hitler one day sooner.

Take a look at Thomas L. Bonn's *Under Cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass Market Paperbacks* (Penguin, 1982). There, on p. 131, Bonn says that Nero Wolfe, along with Philo Vance and Hercule Poirot, are the most interesting detectives to collect in softcover art.

In 1921, Rex Stout attended the Dempsey-Carpentier bout for the heavyweight championship of the world at Boyle's Thirty Acres in Jersey City, the contest that introduced the term "million-dollar gate." In those days, Dempsey was known as the Manassa Mauler, Georges Carpentier, the French challenger, was known as "the Orchid man."

Among those interviewed in John C. Carr's excellent new book *The Craft of Crime* (Houghton Mifflin, 1983) is Robert B. Parker. Ace, as Bob is known to his friends, has never disguised his fondness for Wolfe and Archie, and in this interview he makes his admiration a matter of public record. Just one thing, though—he expresses mild regret that Wolfe and Archie remained the same ages throughout the series. If Shakespeare could create an "eternal summer" for the dark lady of the sonnets, we find ourselves inclined to give Rex the same license. After all, look at the

mess Agatha Christie created for herself when she said Poirot retired in 1904. And even Ace admits that he cannot visualize a 67-year-old Spenser still kicking down doors and jumping through windows.

George Wolk's *The Leopard Contract* (Random House, 1969) is dedicated, in this order, to "J. Le Carré; Hemingway; Jean Paul Belmondo; Harry Palmer; Rex Stout; Bogart; Hammett; & Susan Who Is Also Tough." Surely not Spenser's Susan Silverman? Hm. 1969. Now let me see, if she was a nubile 21 then, she would now be 35. Better say, "Thirty-five and holding." Right, Ace?

Marie R. Reno's *Final Proof* (Harper, 1976) features a detective, Karen Lindstrom, steeped in Nero Wolfe.

The classical scholar Gilbert Highet (husband of Helen McInnes), in *People, Places, and Books* (Oxford, 1953), praises the development of the characters in the Nero Wolfe series and also, somewhat surprisingly, Nero Wolfe's meting out justice.

Ramona M. Weeks, Phoenix, Arizona, writes: "On the back jacket panel for Peter Dickinson's *The Last Houseparty* (Pantheon, 1982) are blurbs for an earlier Dickinson novel, *The Poison Oracle*. Quoted is Rex Stout's: 'It's marvelous. A good story.' *The Last Houseparty* features a Lord Snailwood who babies a rose garden—and arranges flowers from a 'rose-trolley.' He's not particularly Wolfelike, however, and is not a detective."

J. L. Weiner, Chicago, Illinois, perusing a copy of Elspeth Huxley's *Murder on Safari* (Perennial, c. 1938), encountered the following passage on p. 234: "I've been pushing cars through the mud ever since noon, trying to find you. If this is modern detective work, give me Sherlock Holmes in the quiet of his Baker Street flat, or that American fellow who drinks iced beer—Nero Wolfe."

There's a long article in the April 1983 issue of *Stamp World* entitled "Four Greatest Detectives." It was written by Edward R. Walsh, who alludes to the various fictional detectives who have had their likenesses appear on postage stamps, but he chooses to focus on Spade, Queen, Holmes, and Wolfe, in that order, building up, one assumes, to the most illustrious. The article is accompanied with two likenesses of Wolfe. "From 1934 to 1975, Stout's oversized buddah dazzles contemporaries with his deductive brilliance," says Walsh in one of many

friendly phrases. He seems to know Wolfe well, especially since he warns readers that the stories are addictive. Curiously, however, he does not seem to realize that Wolfe's likeness appeared not only on a Nicaraguan Interpol issue in 1972 but also on a more recent stamp issued by the Republic of San Marino. Cursed that Wolfe should be honored by two countries that now have left-wing governments. Again, thanks to Peter Blau.

Incidentally, when the Nicaraguan stamp appeared, Rex sent a check to the American ambassador to order some, telling the ambassador that, if it was not convenient, he could use the money to pay his bar bill. The letter reached its destination okay, and was duly noted by the ambassador, but next day the embassy was destroyed in an earthquake and Rex's letter disappeared in the rubble. Six months later the ambassador remembered it and sent the stamps with apologies.

Herbert H. Hatfield, Cayuta, New York had the good fortune to summer in Montana in the same period when Rex Stout took his vacations there. Herbert writes me: "I spent the summer of 1924 in the Flathead National Forest in Montana, from 15 June to 15 September. Fished South Fork of Flathead River and its tributary, Clark Creek, average of four evenings per week. Full of cutthroat trout and a few Dolly Vardon. Saw two only of latter and caught both. Never saw any rainbows. Beaver ponds had some white fish. Never caught any. Fed trail gang of eight or nine. No meat. Fed them from government cans of jellies and jams left over from WW I. Plenty of pancake flour, tea, coffee. Made clay oven and smoked trout with balm of gilead wood (P. Candicans). I was twenty—an undergraduate at Cornell."

Rex, you will recall, relied on his experiences in Montana for details used in several tales, including *Fired Fire*, *The Rubber Band*, "The Rodeo Murders," and *Death of a Dude*.

The *New York Times* on 21 January 1983 gave *The Thornydyke File* a friendly writup. It brought in another twenty subscriptions. This year's issues promise to be the best yet. Subscription fee is still \$5.00 U.S. and \$6.50 other. And that fee includes membership, with membership card, in the R. Austin Freeman Society.

I still have on hand some copies of the limited, signed edition of *Royal Decree: Conversations with Rex Stout* at \$6.50, postpaid.

Keep your letters coming to John McAleer, Mount Independence, 121 Follen Road, Lexington, Mass. 02173. My generous readers make this newsletter possible, and through them a lot of information is being preserved which otherwise might disappear into limbo.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS Newsletter

Acrostic Sonnets: a prize-winning entry in our competition, by Lucille Shores:

Darkness and silence, even the echoes hushed:
Orisons whispered in cells sealed by night
Round which the serpent lies, bleeding and crushed.
Only the sightless bask in holy light.
The beauty of holiness shines brightest when
Homely and ugly thoughts reflect its glow.
Yearnings for piety stir the hearts of men.
Lonely are we, and lost in sin and woe.
Saved nonetheless despite our stubborn pride
And caught unawares by the angels, we
Yield to glory, and with no place to hide
Enter a kingdom we'd no hope to see.
Ruined lives are the seedlings of God's land,
Saints will preserve us. Saints can understand.

Here is the lovely runner-up from Margareta Rydbeck:

Death could not conquer her, 'twas she who won
Oh yes, on death she made a pretty pile,
Rightly condemning crime in perfect style,
Old-fashioned, knew what was and was not done.
Tempered with humour were her stories spun,
Yet her unpopular opinions rile.
Lord knows she did not always write for fun.
She was a scholar, poet, dramatist,
A lady versed in every liberal art;
Yea, even with translation could delight.
Essays, Inferno, all I would have missed
Rather than never taking to my heart
Source of pure joy, the glorious Gaudy Night.

The Lewis Carroll Society

The chairman, Ms. Lindsay Fulcher, of 30 Vincent Terrace, London N1, has asked us to say that 1982 is the 150th anniversary of the birth of our foremost children's writer, author of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Through the Looking Glass*, and *The Hunting of the Snark*. It is a fitting time to commemorate him with an engraved stone in Westminster Abbey, and this has been kindly agreed to by the Dean and Chapter. The cost will be about £3,000, and some members might feel that they would like to contribute. Sterling cheques should be made payable to the Lewis Carroll Memorial Appeal and sent to the Hon. Treasurer, 47 Summerville Gardens,

Cheam, Surrey SM1 2BU. Dollar checks should be made out to the DLS Society for the Lewis Carroll Appeal and sent here so we can pass them through our account and change them into sterling.

Like Great-Grandfather...

We are indebted to DLS genealogist Dr. Geoffrey Lee for this description of DLS's ancestor, the Rev. Andrew Breakey (1795-1882). It is taken from a book by Alexander McCreery called *The Presbyterian Ministers of Killeleagh* (Belfast: Wm. Mullin, 1875):

"Mr. Breakey's appearance is striking. His form is round and full. Though weighty in structure, there is no ungainliness in his

figure, nor irregularity in his features. Apparently indifferent to dress and manner, he is not wanting in gentility and graceful accomplishments. . . . Certainly he is strong-willed, yet he is emotional and easily affected. He is shrewd and far-sighted, sagacious and politic; an acute observer and accurate judge of men and things . . . His writings are clear and succinct, frequently pointed and pithy, the sentences being mostly short and occasionally somewhat abrupt, and the style terse and epigrammatical."

Mr. Breakey's eldest child Anna married the Rev. Robert Sayers and became the formidable and erudite old lady who tended her days in DLS's childhood home, Bluntingsham Rectory.

DLS and the Colchester Repertory Theatre

DLS was always a theatre fan. Canon Arthur Payton remembers how in the early '30s she used to go regularly once a week. She was a heavy smoker and could hardly bear to restrain herself in the auditorium where smoking was not allowed. She and the young Arthur were always out into the lobby first at the interval, and she said to him, "Thank heaven, I could hardly hold out." She was very particular about stage details and could see how wrong it looked when an actor carried a light doll to simulate a ten-pound baby. So when it came during *The Emperor Constantine* to carrying in a human head stuck on the end of a pole, she was very careful to check with her GP, Dr. Jim Denholm, on exactly how much it had to be weighted up to be like the real thing. She wrote an article on how to make stage jewelry and costumes cheaply and effectively, which was published in *Norah Lambourne's book Dressing the Play* (Studio, How-to-do-it Series, 1953; No. 11.19 in the Society archives). *Norah Lambourne* was a personal friend who used to stay at Sunnyside and the



The Winner out of us.

producer of *The Emperor Constantine* in Colchester for the 1951 Festival.

To join the Dorothy L. Sayers Society, send a check for £3.00 (\$7.00 U.S. or \$8.00 Canadian) to Roslyn House, Witham, Essex CM8 2AQ. This covers the entrance fee and membership to the end of the current calendar year. □

THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE

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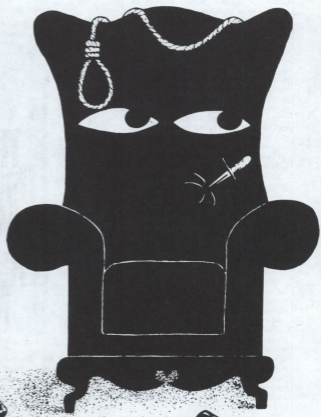
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THE PERSONAL I

By Thomas Chastain

Elsewhere I have written that I believe the introduction of the private eye is probably the most important contribution that America has made to mystery fiction. (After—it goes without saying—the genius of Edgar Allan Poe's creations.)

If what I believe is true, much of the credit for securing a permanent place for the private eye in fiction must go to Ross Macdonald's now-completed body of work.

In time to come, there will be countless evaluations and re-evaluations made of his books, just as there have been over the 25 years that he was writing and publishing his Lew Archer series of novels.

His admirers already have made extravagant claims for him. There have been those who have hailed his books as "the first series of detective novels ever written by an American." Others have felt that his novels transcended the mystery genre. Still others have proclaimed that he transformed the detective story into literature.

His detractors have complained that he broke no new ground in the mystery field and that he tended to write the same story over and over again.

I have been in one camp or the other from time to time over the years.

Certainly when there were no more new Hammett and Chandler books, it was good—and important for the continuation of the private eye tradition—to have Ross Macdonald writing and publishing. To be sure, there were many other writers working in the same vein at the same time, yet only he became and remained the pre-eminent private eye novelist of the past quarter of a century. He was perceived as a serious artist—as, indeed, he was.

Re-reading his books chronologically, one can appreciate his constant refining of his art, his striving for greater clarity through simplification of language and writing. This is nowhere more evident than in his use of similes. For example, in *The Way Some People Die* (1951), there's this: "The white African buildings lay in the air like something seen through rose-colored glasses in memory..." (?), while in *The Underground Man* (1971) there is: "It was a bright September morning. The edges of the sky had a yellowish tinge like cheap paper darkening in the sunlight..."

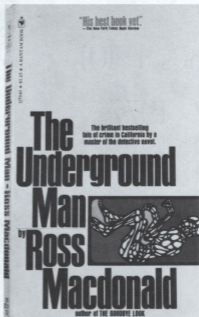
The same striving for simplification is true, as well, for the plotting of his books. Reviewers may have tried to compliment his over-elaboration of plots in the earlier novels by calling them "Byzantine," but he seems not to have been taken in by them. Because the fact is that in his later novels his plots moved

in a clear, clean, direct line from opening chapter to dénouement. And if, as he himself acknowledged, his earlier books owed much to Raymond Chandler's influence, in the later books Ross Macdonald was telling his particular stories in his particular way.

He once said of his own writing that "Raymond Chandler was and remains a hard

"the first series of detective novels ever written by an American." Even if we all realize that such an opinion is wholly subjective, if it is repeated often enough—without questioning—it takes on the quality of irrefutable truth.

I have sometimes speculated that rather than try to chart the influence and importance of a writer's existing book or works, a truer test would be to imagine the absence of a



man to follow." He might have added that the same could be said of Dashiell Hammett, Hammett and Chandler were and remain hard men to follow—for not only for Ross Macdonald but for every writer of every private eye novel from their day to this. This is the accomplishment by which all others must be judged, and not only because they came first.

Comparisons really should have no place in judging the importance and excellence of a writer's work. But such comparisons are implied when a writer's books are hailed as

certain book or of a writer's body of work—as if they hadn't been written or published.

Imagine, then, in the private eye field, if there had never been *The Maltese Falcon*.

Consider, alone and separately, its absence.

Consider, further, if there were no other, and had never been any other, Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler works. What, then, would the private eye genre be like? That I cannot even imagine.

Another thing I cannot imagine is what

ROSS MACDONALD
WINNER OF THE MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA GRAND MASTER AWARD

TROUBLE
FOLLOWS
ME



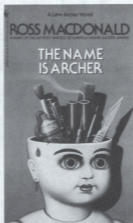
reviewers are saying when they praise a private eye novel or novels as "transcending the genre," or when they use the phrase in terms of other mystery writers (P. D. James, of recent times, comes to mind). I suspect I know what they *think* they're saying, and that they feel they're paying the writer and the books a high compliment with this catchphrase.

But, really, isn't this only a form of condescension, not only to the genre, but to the writer who has made an artistic decision to work in the genre?



Besides, "transcending" the private eye or mystery genre can't be done, not artistically. Financially, yes, in terms of reaching a larger audience, a writer can transcend the genre, but if that's what the reviewers mean—and they don't—I can't remember any of them using the phrase to praise, for instance, Mickey Spillane.

On the other hand, artistically, when Dostoyevsky, to cite just one example, chose



to write about murder, he did not transcend the genre, he wrote outside of it.

As for the genre, private eye or mystery, it is—by its very definition—a classic form, its rules and design immutable, the limits to its perimeters exact and fixed. The trick for the serious writer in the genre is to test, to probe, to realize its possibilities without destroying it.

Am I saying, then, that all private eye novels should aspire to such lofty objectives?

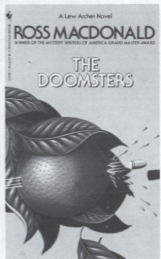
Stephen Greenleaf, one of the best of the present-day private eye novelists, gave me another answer to that question. In an interview in TAD, he stated that he thought the private eye novel is "an American art form as valuable to us as jazz..."

The thought was new to me. I liked it and accepted it into my thinking. So, yes, creating variations on a theme—as in jazz—in writing private eye novels is a worthy, honorable, even valuable, undertaking.

As to what is, or is not, literature, in the mystery field or elsewhere, only the ages can make that judgment.

To return to Ross Macdonald and his work, I once wrote of him in an introduction to an edition of his *The Moving Target*: "Ross Macdonald shared with Hammett and Chandler the ability not only to impose a personal, original vision on the private eye tradition but to do more, to suggest the greater possibilities of the form itself..."

I still feel that way. In addition, now that his work is complete, I do not think it diminishes his achievement—whatever the truth of his critical acclaim or his detractors' complaints—to suggest that he has been the "keeper of the flame" of the private eye tradition. All who care about the tradition owe him a debt. To those who can, the debt is to try to realize the possibilities he suggested in his work. □



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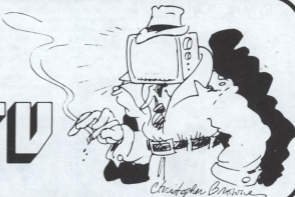


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TAD ON TV

By Richard Meyers



Hot fun in the summertime. As the networks scramble to eliminate least-watched shows—such as *Cagney and Lacey*, which is suddenly racking up huge Nielsen numbers and top-ten ranking for its summer reruns—and prepare new mystery fare, viewers are left with failed pilots, failed limited-run series, and one-shot television movies to ponder. And I get to play catch-up with a lot of programs which went unreviewed over the last nine months.

First and foremost, there was *Jane Doe*, a really nifty almost-murder mystery with Karen Valentine portraying the amnesiac victim of a not-quite-homicidal attack and William Devane as a cop on the trail of a mass-murdering stranger. While I still feel that *Murder in Coweta County* is the best TV movie of the year, *Jane Doe* comes very close, thanks to a valid and cleverly plotted script by Cynthia Mandelberg and Walter Halsey Davis, and strong direction by Ivan Nagy.

The plot is familiar stuff, but it is strong

Karen Valentine in *Jane Doe*.



© 1983, CBS Inc.

stuff, too, which works in the good acting graces of Valentine and Devane, as well as Eva Marie Saint, who plays a psychiatrist intent on maintaining the added victim's sanity from the assaults of her still free attacker and the intense detective who wants to discover the identity of her assailant. When the woman can't remember anything about herself, let alone her attacker, her photo is telecast, prompting more murders, threats on her life, and the appearance of her husband (David Huffman).

She leaves the hospital in her husband's custody, and it's open season on "Jane Doe." The solution to the story came as a pleasant surprise, especially considering how television will often opt for a dried staging of any available psychopath's torturing of an hysterical target.

What didn't come as a surprise was the abortive job TV did on *Travis McGee*. First off (as at least two of my friends sniffed), the *Busted Flush* is a houseboat, not a sailboat, and it is anchored in Florida, not in Malibu. And (as I was always quick to add), McGee may be a lot of things, but he is not a lifeless hunk of human driftwood with a puss and a demeanor that could put Richard Simmons to sleep.

Just in case some background is called for, here goes. Read quickly. Created by John D. MacDonald, Travis McGee was a paperback book series character who attained such success that he continued life in bestselling Hardcover. Up until 1980, the media had only bastardized him once. That was in the movie *Darker Than Amber* starring Rod Taylor and Theodore Bikel as his hairy, philosophizing friend Meyer.

While the film was a plodding, unimaginative adaptation of a good book in the series, it did boast two of the finest fight scenes in American movie history and a fairly faithful creation of McGee's world—i.e., his houseboat and his car (a combination of a Woody and a Rolls Royce). Taylor was no big deal as McGee, but that may have been the result of indifferent direction by Robert Clouse and a final film which didn't even explain what the

title meant ("darker than amber" was the color of the flecks in the doomed heroine's eyes).

In 1981, Warner Bros. gave Sterling Silliphant's script version of *The Empty Copper Sea* to director Andrew (The Wild Geese) McLaughlin. They foolishly cast Sam Elliott, veteran of Westerns and horror movies, as the hero and wrought the stupid changes mentioned above. The result languished on the studio shelf for two years, and its first telecast revealed the good reasons why.

The time wasted watching this thing could have been made up in several ways. The script could have been insightful, the direction could have been sharp, and the acting could have been involving. Not only were these ingredients lacking, but only the script could have been termed anything approaching satisfactory.

Granted, *The Empty Copper Sea* was not the best McGee to adapt. It was a middle-era McGee, nestled uncomfortably between the crackling early efforts and the more challenging recent works. The plot is both far-fetched and labored... a bad combination. Even so, the screenplay was rudimentary and unnatural, the direction no better than the most mediocre *Barnaby Jones* episode, and Elliott flatly awful.

The movie was over for all intents and purposes after the first twenty minutes, but I watched the plot unravel out of duty and dedication, and every time the camera rested on Elliott for more than three seconds it was squirm city. Sadly, the man is the modern version of the Medusa. He can turn you to stone with one sour glare. For the record, Gene Evans made a decent Meyer, but he could nowhere near save the day.

I'm not sure what is worse—a dreadfully dull recreation of a beloved book character or a wildly pretentious, overblown production of a hardboiled private-eye movie. Actually, I do know which is worse, and *Missing Pieces* isn't it. All right, it was labored and ridiculously arty, but that's kind of a treat consid-



Elizabeth Montgomery as both the hunted and the hunter in *Missing Pieces*.

ering the stale bread television usually serves. Well, at least it was a treat for a half-hour or forty-five minutes. That's how long it was before my wife said, "What is this? A private-eye story for babies?"

Missing Pieces spelled it all out all right. Not only in simple similes and mixed metaphors any amateur writer could comprehend but with seemingly endless repetition so that not only can you not miss a point, it is seared on your cornea. The initial idea by Karl (*Time After Time*) Alexander was fine. Elizabeth (*Bewitched*) Montgomery played a down-and-out private eye tracking the murderers of her beloved husband. As time goes wheezing on, she not only finds the killers but "finds herself" as well. In the hands of director Mike (*Peeper*) Hodges, however, it becomes a series of repeated images, tricky optical effects, avant-garde editing, and a primer-style voice-over narration:

"It turned me into a tuning fork which reverberated for the rest of my life."

"Something about it struck a chord on my fear bone."

And just in case you don't get something

the first time, Hodges runs you over with it ten or twelve times. There are some striking images, but others are college cinema-class fodder. And even the striking images wear out their welcome the eighth or ninth time they are trotted out. At its base, *Missing Pieces* was a good mystery, but it was overwhelmed by didactic overstatement, not to mention a lead performance which made Montgomery look like the leading contender for a bed at the nearest home for the continually quivering. The girl would get hysterical at the drop of a discouraging word.

When is a mystery not a mystery? When it's *Deadly Lessons*, an entertaining combination of a *Friday the 13th*-type slice-'em-up and a hot-girls-in-a-private-school-cut-off-from-the-rest-of-civilization murder story. Even the ad lacked the subtlety and taste usually associated with the boob tube. It was a two-page spread in *TV Guide* looking through the window of the dorm with a whole bunch of girls in various degrees of undress. It's a Diet Pepsi commercial with a large dose of death.

This killer is knocking off the girls one by one, all while headmistress Donna Reed (of

all people!) looks on and plainclothes detective Larry (*Chips*) Wilcox investigates. This thing is set up like a classic whodunit, but seemingly without the writers' permission. It all leads up to Ally Sheedy, the co-star of the movies *Bad Boys* and *War Games*, bound and gagged in the custodian's-basement apartment as he cackles over her. She's rescued in the nick of time, allowing the real murderer to reveal himself.

Unfortunately, while there are valid clues to his identity throughout, no one in the telefilm picks up on them, leaving me to assume that the scripters didn't even know they were clues! It made perfect sense that the promiscuous student was drowned near the wharf. It made perfect sense that the student hot for her professor's body didn't struggle when strangled in the church. It even made sense that someone would try to kill the heroine twice near the stables. What didn't make sense is that *Deadly Lessons* acted as if it didn't know it made sense. It just seemed to have no idea of what it was trying to do.

The same was not so with *High Performance*, a painfully obvious limited series which tried to combine *The Mod Squad* with *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *The A-Team*. The producers of this travesty knew exactly what they wanted to do—create a *Megaforce*-type ripoff for the moron audience. Jack Scalia,

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Ralph Waite (left) and Stan Shaw in *The Mississippi*

late of the equally abortive *The Devilin Connection*, headed up a two-guy, one-chick team of crack mercenaries who righted wrongs all over the world as long as they could still polish their teeth and blow-dry their hair. This joke was so awkward and derivative it was literally painfully to watch.

Not so on *The Mississippi*, Ralph Waite's new series. It too was originally set to be a limited-run program—having only six episodes made to test the waters, as it were. The river was strong and powerful, so the show prospered. Waite plays a lawyer so tired of the legal jungle that he buys a riverboat, takes aboard two ex-clients, and heads down river to calm, thought-provoking adventure.

The show is all about doing what's right as well as what's legal, and Waite usually gets riled once an hour. But the actor gets riled so well, and the scripts do such an effective job riling him, that I found myself unwaveringly on his side as he sought to see justice done again and again. □

TAD at the MOVIES

By Thomas Godfrey

Little Olde Niew Yorke . . .

The 45th annual Edgar Awards dinner in New York this past May afforded me an opportunity to slip away to Anthony Shaffer's theatrical conceit *Whodunnit* at the Biltmore Theatre. It had been a slow spring for mystery-suspense films, and the summer offerings were at least a month away. A good stage melodrama is as satisfying in its own way as a good mystery book. Agatha Christie's long-running *The Mousetrap* in London bears testimony to that. Often its virtues don't translate well to other media. In the case of *The Mousetrap*, wisely no one has ever tried.

My fellow ticketholders that afternoon were a small but hearty band of suburbanites, many with packages in hand, out for an afternoon of fun. I have no doubt that most of them would rather have been near to an over-priced preview of the Burton-Taylor trashing of *Private Lives* had a ticket come their way. In retrospect, they got better value

for money at the Biltmore, but not enough, I fear, to save the play from closing before this column assaults your eyes.

Just running through a list of the venerable mystery-suspense melodramas of the past makes you realize that the form has become as comfortable to theatergoers as a pair of old slippers. Try on Mary Roberts Rinehart's *The Bat*, Emyln Williams's *Night Must Fall*, Christie's *Mousetrap* and *Witness for the Prosecution*, Doyle-Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes, Ladies in Retirement*, and more recently Ira Levin's *Death Trap* and Shaffer's own *Sleuth*. Almost without exception, each new offering has been more gimmicky and labyrinthine in its plotting and twisting. Any semblance of reality, by now, must be supplied by the audience with conscious effort.

Whodunnit continues this trend, falling right out there on the lunatic fringe of the continuum. Shaffer, a former barrister and television producer, has set out with one goal

in mind and accomplished it in the most rococo manner imaginable. As in *Sleuth*, nothing is ever quite what it means, only this time on a much grander scale.

The first of two acts opens with an unsexed off-stage voice announcing that a murder is to be committed and he/she will do it. Then a challenge to the audience is issued, and the action commences in a mahogany-paneled, book-lined drawing room. An "oily Levantine" (of the sort so beloved by Agatha Christie) drops in on a secluded house party and begins to blackmail each of the guests. By the end of the act, he has been beheaded in ritualistic fashion.

Whodunnit? Well, it's not that simple. The second act is a series of unmaskings and revelations that almost require extensive note-taking, until all is revealed and Shaffer's goal is stated in the last line.

Even for those hooked on the English country-house mystery, the cleverness of it all begins to wear thin. A smarmy atmosphere of

smugness and self-satisfaction adds to an unwelcome sense of staleness. Frequent allusions to Christie, and especially to John Dickson Carr's Dr. Fell, ultimately don't amount to much. The C. Aubrey Smith-style Scotland Yard detective and his fumbling, loutish assistant are poorly conceived. What



is meant for laughs often evokes irritation. In too many ways, *Whodunnit* seems out to show that Raymond Chandler's oft-quoted criticism of this school of mystery writing is true.

Though one must admire Shaffer's thinking and scholarship, *Whodunnit* is a disappointing cellulose tablet of a play, a palliative that nips the appetite for something better. There is dry wit and humor, although nothing remotely approaching Noel Coward, or even Terrence Rattigan. There is invention, but one can easily name a dozen Christie plots more inventive. Shaffer's own *Sleuth* is more fully realized. *Crucifer of Blood* is more boldly theatrical. *Night Watch* has more suspense. And even *Death Trap* gives us better characterization (so does the Manhattan phone directory, for that matter).

As a melodrama, it is no *Angel Street*. As a literary device with gimmicks, it is outclassed by *Night of January 16*. Shaffer gives us a game of *Clue* for the theatre; a diversion, but slight entertainment.

Wolfe in Celluloid Clothing...

***½ *Meet Nero Wolfe* (1936) Edward Arnold, Lionel Stander, Victor Jory (D: Herbert Biberman)

Edward Arnold makes an authoritative and surprisingly cheerful Wolfe in this adaptation of Stout's first series work, *Fer-de-Lance*. He was one of the screen's most forceful supporting actors, scoring his greatest successes as a hard-nosed banker or politician in such memorable films as Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington*, *You Can't Take It With You*, and *Meet John Doe*. He was perfection throwing a fur coat out the window into Jean Arthur's face in *Easy Living*, a memorable Diamond Jim Brady in two films, *Diamond Jim* and *Lillian Russell*, financier Jim Fiske in *The Toast of New York* with Frances Farmer, a spellbinding Daniel Webster in the adaptation of Benét's *The Devil and Daniel Webster*, and Baynard Kendrick's blind detective Duncan MacLain in two films for MGM, *The Hidden Eye* and *Eyes in the Night*. His career spanned the talkies to a final "B" in 1956 called *Miami Exposé* in which he was still bossing everyone else around. He was an inspired choice to play Wolfe, but you can't help wondering who told him to smile as much as he does.

Lionel Stander, who plays Archie Goodwin, is certainly plausible and entertaining, but he is playing to type as a caricature. Stander made a career of playing rough Runyonesque types until the blacklists drove him off the screen. He's been back again, currently as Max the butler on the puzzlingly successful *Hart to Hart* television series. There is, it should be pointed out, a difference between Stout's Archie Goodwin and Runyon's Nathan Detroit that this picture has missed, but at least it's in the right neighborhood.

The plot centers on the mysterious death of a college professor on the golf course of a snooty country club. Wolfe sips beer and hoards bottle caps as he uncovers the serpentine solution involving the widow's family and her shadowy first husband.

The writing successfully sprays suspicion everywhere and covers all bases intelligently. The playing is often loose and geared for laughs. It's some testimonial to the durability of humor that the line (from a stuffy servant)

that "Dinner is ruined, sir" still provokes a belly laugh. It's a period piece, all right, but very good of its kind. There are some things time does not erode, and several of them are on display here.

***½ *League of Frightened Men* (1937) Walter Connolly, Lionel Stander, Eduardo Cianelli (D: Alfred E. Green)

The plotline of this second screen translation (of Stout's second Wolfe opus) is actually more trenchant than the first, but you won't get this from Walter Connolly's interpretation. Connolly also had a significant career as a supporting actor, most notably as Claudette Colbert's father in *It Happened One Night*, Luise Rainer's (Chinese) uncle in *The Good Earth*, and the title role in *The Great Victor Herbert*, but none of this particularly qualified him to play the imperious detective. He's a more sympathetic listener than Edward Arnold, but also more prissy and effete, making him more suitable to play Father Brown (which he in fact did in 1934).

Stander repeats as Archie, as raucous as before, perhaps more so, and more frequently on camera. The humor is now lower and broader to no particular benefit. The Wolfe I know from the books wouldn't have kept this boob around past dinner.

The story is one of murder among members of a Harvard fraternity that maimed one of their pledges during an initiation ceremony. Throughout, the direction is as fast and loose as most of the acting, Ciannelli's intense performance as the crippled pledge, now a mystery writer, excepted.

Columbia dropped this series after this second entry and turned its attentions to Ellery Queen, Boston Blackie, and a series of *Thin Man* imitations (*Fast and Furious*, etc.). In retrospect, *League* looks no worse than most of the programmers of this period, but if you are expecting any hint of Stout's inimitable brownstone style of fiction, you are bound to be disappointed. It really eluded Hollywood and the television series completely. Only Gilroy's 1977 TV-movie adaptation of *The Doorbell Rang* seemed to come from a source that had actually read one of the books (as opposed to having it described to him over lunch). □



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The Radio Murder Hour

By Chris Steinbruner



Whitley Strieber is a superb storyteller, the bestselling author of *Wolfen*, *The Hunger*, and, most recently, *The Night Church*. It's easy to suspect that at least some of his spellbinding story-weaving skills ripened because of his passionate affection for old radio mysteries. No night goes by that he doesn't prepare himself for sleep listening to three or four favorite shows. The closets of his home are bursting with audio tapes. And he is no silent traveler; when he journeys, he takes with him dozens of old shows for company. As he did to the recent New England Fantasy Writers' Conference at Roger Williams College in Rhode Island—where he and I talked about some really great mystery programs out of the past which today seem undeservedly forgotten.

Quiet, Please, the wonderful anthology series written by Willis Cooper—Whitley reminisced—had a very scary story called "The Thing on the Fourboard," a fourboard being a catwalk on an oil rig. An invisible monster made out of living stone forces its way up out of a remote oil well to menace the humans nearby. The sound effects, in those radio days a work of art, were bone-chilling, and quite unusual...for the monster itself was an original, nothing like it done before or since.

Lights Out in the early '30s presented a unique little crime show called "Speed," about two crooks who used invisibility as a tool. Actually, they had acquired a potion which when drunk permitted them to move with incredible speed. Among the devices used to show their acceleration was to have the actors speak their dialogue very fast, much like tape speeded up Mickey Mouse fashion—although this show was years before tape and even wire recording! The program's finish had the crooks age fast as well, and die.

A program called *Hall of Fantasy* did an eerie ghost story, "He Who Follows Me," in which a man enters a tomb and disturbs its occupant. The thing in the vault follows him to the ends of the earth and drives him to death. Very intensely done. Like it in mood was the surprisingly neglected *Mercury Theatre* production of Lucille Fletcher's "The Hitchhiker." Orson Welles played a man driving across country who continuously sees a traveller by the side of the road begging a ride—always the same person! A drama of

atmosphere that soon darkens and becomes shudderingly ominous.

Escape, which specialized in far-flung adventure thrillers, once did a corker of a story called "The Spider." In a Malayan



jungle, two men abandon their comrades and make off with a fortune in gems, only to be menaced by a giant spider in continuous pursuit. The tale builds in remarkable intensity.

Perhaps more famous is the *Suspense* dramatization of "The House in Cyprus Canyon." The story takes the old cliché about the horrifying yarn found in a manuscript and turns it around, making it fresh again—and very frightening. The new buyer of a pleasant suburban home uncovers a manuscript warning from the previous, missing owner about a werewolf—and finds himself worked into the unfolding narrative to his undoing.

The Mysterious Traveler was an anthology thriller series with an extremely novel intro: a fellow passenger on your train ride who each week told you a different blood-curdling story. In "Blues in the Night," the play itself took place on a train—a young couple who have committed robbery and murder try to make their escape via a passenger car, but thanks to mischance or fate find themselves riding right back to the scene of their crimes.

The Shadow in the early, Orson Welles days of the series' lengthy run often did stories (Whitley believes) which, if not actually based upon, derived inspiration from, Cornell Woolrich's dark fantasies. "The Temple Bells" concerns itself with a beautiful but remarkably terrifying woman and bells which ring with a lovely but deadly tone...

Dragnet was and is the single best series of police dramas ever done, and Whitley prefers the radio series to the television version: the characters were more developed on radio, and the plots were too. Indeed, on radio, *Dragnet* was much harder-hitting in the way it dealt with such subjects as pornography and heroin. Whitley especially remembers an episode titled "The Guthries Burn To Death," in which a pleasant elderly couple are found as charred corpses. A fire has obviously been started to conceal their murder. The killer turns out to be a seemingly nice young man who worked for them as a parking lot manager, whom Friday breaks down through careful interrogation in a fast-moving, very realistic half-hour.

Whitley Strieber has some thoughtful comments on the current "revival" of dramatic radio, thin as it is—and why it fails. In its golden age, Whitley believes, *radio became increasingly visual*...masterful at making pictures in our minds. Contemporary radio has forgotten this, becoming blunt and obvious and all surface. In the good old days, dialogue was not so much informational as *sensual* to the ears on every level, with choices of words that were "immogistic." As were the sound effects as well. The great *Sorry, Wrong Number* by Lucille Fletcher was a wonderful script full of half-heard sounds utilizing subliminal channels of hearing to create a picture, to create exquisite terror.

This craft, alas, seems lost today, and the great radio murder hours belong now only to the past. □

PROGRAMMED FOR MYSTERY

By Bruce Chadwick

The air-raid-drill shriek of the phone blasted me out of what was either a deep sleep or another drunken stupor. My head felt like it weighed a thousand pounds and my blue seersucker suit was crumpled from too many turns in my sleep. The dame I was with last night—what the hell was her name anyway—was gone, and the dirty, torn shade that kept the sun out of my blood-shot eyes hid what could have been morning.

I moved my big bulky right hand out and picked up the receiver. With my left hand I pushed myself upright in bed and started looking for a cigarette. I took a look at my twenty-year-old alarm clock and saw that it was 7 A.M. Who the hell would wake a man out of bed at 7 A.M.? It must be someone important, maybe Mr. Hot Shot himself, and maybe this was the case of a lifetime. Or another wasted day with a bottle of Scotch at the end of it.

Well, I was right. It was Mr. Hot Shot, the new D.A., working himself instead of getting ready for some "tennis" with his wife's country-club friends. Damned kid. 33 years old. Why, in the old days...

Anyway, it was a case—a big case. Mr. Big in the county, Marshall Robner, the multi-millionaire industrialist, had bumped himself off. Gone to the big bank up in the sky. Suicide, they said. The D.A., using his brain for once, wasn't so certain. They

found ebullion tablets next to his body and the door to his study was locked—from the inside. Had to break it down. The medical examiner said the guy had enough ebullion in him to kill an elephant, in his case a rich elephant. Then there was his wife, who wasn't cooperating with the D.A.'s flatfoots. There was this Miss Dunham, old Robner's devious servant and unofficial adviser. And what about his business partner, who everyone knew was trying to steal the company away from the old boy? And this boyfriend Mrs. Robner kept on the side. Then, of course, there was the guy the D.A. said probably did it, the son George, whom Robner had disinherited in his last will.

"Chief," the D.A. told me, "only a detective like you can crack this one."

He was right. I lit a cigarette and picked up my razor blade for the first time in a week. 7:15 A.M. I had a case to crack. I went to the drawer and pulled out the old .38. You never know about old .38s. They're like old girlfriends. Sometimes, on a cold night, they come in awfully handy.

The investigation into the death of Marshall Robner, noted industrialist, has not been written down anywhere in the dreadful '30s spoof pulp detective prose above. It hasn't been written on a typewriter, that is. Neither has the mystery about

where old man Cranston buried all of his money before he, too, died very mysteriously. No one has written two paragraphs about why several rather obvious suspects seemed intent on scaring the Kim family out of their new (and the town's old) haunted house. Not one word has been written about the bizarre murder, and even more gruesome police investigation, at the Crowley estate just outside Trafalgar Square, in London, circa 1913.

All of them are written, but not on paper. They are written into the microchips of computers and are all detective stories designed for use by mystery lovers who are also personal computer lovers.

While most game programs for the home computer are still arcade games of some sort, mysteries are gradually finding their way into someone's 48K RAM. Since over 4,000,000 Americans now own computers, software companies reasoned—as would any sharp detective—that a certain percentage of them would gladly trade a shoot-'em-up spaceship game for the detective mystery.

They were right. "Deadline," the Marshall Robner case program, by Infocom, Inc. of Cambridge, Mass., this spring became one of the five top-selling programs of any kind in the computer world (according to Softsel, Inc., the California firm which tracks all national computer software sales). "Snooper Troops," the case of the Kim family, was in the top

twenty. Other computer detective programs have, since 1979, done well. Two by Ken and Roberta Williams, founders of Sierra on Line, are "Mystery House" and "Cranston Manor." They have sold over 220,000 copies in three years (at \$39 each). If those copies were hardcover books, the programs would have remained among the top ten bestsellers for all three years.

In fact, mystery computer programs have become the "mystery novels" of the computer world. And there are few other novels. The adventure computer games are either fast-moving video-arcade-style games, like "Star Raiders" or "Pac Man," or graphic adventures that move very slowly and tell the story in pictures, not text. The mystery programs dominate text adventures (Infocom also makes "Zork" I, II and III and "Starcross," which are science fiction text adventures). They do this in computers as they do it in paperbacks and in films. Mysteries intrigue people. Always have. They offer more intrigue than ever to the computer user because, by definition, he/she is a person fascinated with twists and turns of buttons and dials and . . . cunning.

There are three main reasons why detective computer games are selling so well, even at \$24 to \$39 per program:

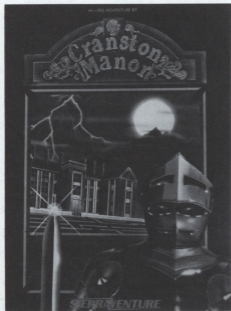
(1) They are interactive games. In a novel, the writer drags the reader along for the trip. In a computer mystery game, the reader decides what will happen in the mystery and can, in fact, alter it.

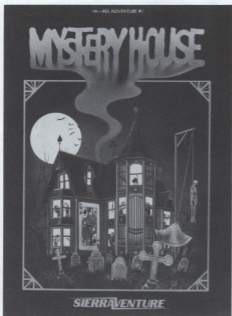
(2) Mystery games are 12 to 40 hours in length and tend to keep intellectually intrigued people satiated. Computer people are intellectually intrigued to begin with.

(3) More than any other strategy/adventure game, the mystery computer program represents a dramatic 1982-83 shift away from shoot-'em-up video/computer programs to strategy- and planning-oriented programs.

Bruce Cummings, an official at Softsel who has watched trends for years, nods his head knowingly. "People who own computers don't want one-dimensional shoot-'em-ups all the time. They want to try strategy games, a lot of them, and that's what mystery programs offer. We believe a lot of non-mystery people are buying these games just to be challenged mentally."

The computer mysteries are good ones and, interestingly enough, none of them are by mystery writers. Some computer officials considered going to top mystery writers to get program notes and plots, and they also considered buying the rights to famous novels or characters (Spade, Poirot, Marlowe, etc.), but in each case the cost was prohibitive. Remember that the video games rights for the film *E.T.* reputedly cost over \$4,000,000. Also, the technology was not ready for a 'star' writer.





The games are not by individuals, either. The Williamses at Sierra On Line adapted games sketched out by someone else. A team of writers/programmers put together "Deadline" and "Witness" for Infocom. "Snooper Troops" creator Tom Snyder laid out the format of the computer and game, then hired children's writers to flesh out the story. The mystery novels/programs are by committee more than author.

No one seems to mind.

In fact, a single author would never be able, at this stage in program development, to come up with a good game, and the game, not the story, is the key to good computer mysteries.

And the games are good ones.

There are two kinds. Mysteries such as "Night-walker," "The Curse of Crowley Manor," "Witness," and "Deadline" are text adventures. In these, the computer/TV screen tells you, in vivid and graphic detail, what is happening, where you are, who is nearby, and what the area looks like. In adventures like "Snooper Troops," "Mystery House," Hayden Inc.'s "Crimebuster," and "Cranston Manor," the game is graphics and text. When you are in a dining room, the graphics show you everything and there is little text.

Both have staunch defenders.

"I believe in graphic games for mysteries, adven-

tures, kids' games—everything," says Roberta Williams. "The user has to see what is happening. A computer game has to be a game, but it also has to look as much like television or a movie as possible, especially for younger players. You must hold people's interest, and a text game, no matter how well written, just doesn't do that."

"I can't stand text mysteries," agrees Tom Snyder. "They are not appealing to the eye, and they make you work too much. These take thirty or forty hours, and the average person is just not going to sit through that period of time without some kind of graphics."

The creators of the text games disagree.

"I think the graphic games are laughable. They are silly and just a step above cartoons. There's no real story and no real interaction in them," said Mark Blank, vice-president of Infocom.

The graphics in mysteries are gorgeous, though static. Nothing really moves, as in video games, although the player does. In "Cranston Manor," as an example, the player has to go to old man Cranston's estate and search for hidden treasure. He walks through town, and, as he goes down each block, the graphic look of the block changes and the pictures are good—like classic comic book recreations with matrix color dots. You see banks, junkyards, gates, doorways, windows, staircases, and people running about.

In "Cranston," in fact, in order to get into the manor (the front gates are locked), you must go through town and find a crowbar to force open a side gate. In "Snooper Troops," you must find a pay phone booth to make critical phone calls (yes, you hear the phone ring). In "Mystery House," you must read notes that are on the screen. The graphics are interesting and fun and, matched with the short text, get you very involved in the mystery.

The text mysteries on computers do the same thing, but in your imagination. These are very well written. You are told quite explicitly what you are seeing and where you are. In "The Curse of Crowley Manor," the opening scene vividly describes your office in the red brick Scotland Yard building in the year 1913 and tells, in colorful detail, how you hail a hansom cab and ride across London's cobblestone streets to your destination (you even tip the driver; don't be cheap either).

When something happens, it happens! At one point in Crowley Manor, the computer tells you that one of your assistants, whom you sent into a corridor to investigate something, has been torn to pieces by wild animals. In other games, you can actually be murdered yourself if you're not careful.

Many of the games, text and graphics, come with wonderful accessories that make the entire experience a unique delight. In "Snooper Troops," you get a casebook with caricature drawings of each suspect,

the Kim family, and Snooper Headquarters (which, any Snooper Trooper would tell you, could use a paint job and a few working water fountains). In "Deadline," all of your information comes in a brown, sealed "Documentary Evidence" dossier which you break open. And what is in it? There are carefully-wrapped samples of two pills found near the deceased body, an official letter from his lawyer suggesting foul play, a medical examiner's report suggesting murder, a photo of the placement of the body on the study floor, and written interviews done by your underlings in Q & A form. There are even fingerprint charts of suspects. Everything but a dirty trenchcoat!

But forget about the graphics and the colorful packaging. What makes computer games real houndings is the interaction play and the involvement of the player in the game. When you read a novel, you are just a bystander who can, at best, take a guess about the culprit. In a board game, dice and cards decide what happens next. They are interesting but unfulfilling. In computer mysteries, the player draws maps of each room, house, estate and keeps copious notes as the detective adventure continues. You scribble notes on things from a ladder with caked mud leading up to a balcony to the description of the local drugstore and prescription-number of pills you find in someone's bathroom. You keep charts of telephone numbers and suspects and past histories. You are a detective in every sense of the word. You make everything happen.

The game only does what the player wants to do. You can be in the foyer of Marshall Robner's mansion and want to go upstairs. You tell the computer to do that and up you go (by the way, as you'll soon discover, these are very creaky stairs and on the night of the murder any intruder climbing them would have awakened Mrs. Rourke, the housekeeper). You want to question George Robner, whom you just saw duck into his bedroom? Walk down the hall and talk to him as he sits on his bed. He'll tell you all about his father's hatred of him. You see suspicious prints on a coffee cup? Command Sgt. Duffy to have the lab analyze them—you'll have lengthy analyses back in five minutes and you may get some interesting prints, too.

You determine what happens. You accuse people. You make arrests. You can shoot at people, or duck if they shoot at you. The suspects, or bystanders, will let you interrogate them and either answer your questions or clam up. You'll find through tough questioning that Mrs. Robner had a lover, that George wanted his father's will changed, that Baxter tried to railroad his partner Robner.

You can stumble your way into oblivion. I played "Mystery House" and, forgetting to take a flashlight, fell out of an upstairs window and was killed.

You can follow people, phone people, ask the machine for help, and, at the end of each game, conclude with an arrest. In a novel, the author concludes the game. In computers, you do. You also may be wrong (my suspect in "Deadline" was completely innocent and was released without so much as a grand jury investigation. I nearly lost my badge, too, for being such a dunce).

"I think the beauty of the mystery game is that, unlike any other game, the player becomes the participant and determines what is going to happen," says Tom Snyder. "It totally involves people. My 'Snooper Troopers' and other mystery games' are designed for many people to play, unlike novels, so everyone can try to crack the case at the same time. This makes the mystery fun and entertainment at the same time."

"People have yearned all their lives to become a real detective," remarks Paul Grupp, of Adventure International, the Longwood, Florida company which makes "Curse of Crowley Manor." "That's what makes mystery books, movies, and TV series so popular. A detective is one character just about everyone would like to be. In computer mysteries, the player becomes one. It's a realized fantasy, and people love that."

The Williamses agree. "Alfred Hitchcock, one of my idols, once said that a good mystery movie takes ordinary people and puts them in extraordinary situations," says Roberta Williams. "That's what the computer mystery does. It takes ordinary people and, through electronics, lets them solve a crime."

The people at Infocom nod their heads knowingly. "Our games are like stories that constantly change, and you, the player, wander through them, like you're on a ride, but you can stop and do whatever you want and make all the people in the story do what you want. People like that," concludes Mark Blank.

The future for mysteries, based on their success, seems bright.

As the games become more challenging and sophisticated, major mystery authors will probably be hired (they were not in the beginning because the companies wanted to save money and, actually, get the electronics down right first. Future mystery games will be more complicated and involve more and more people who can interact with the player.

Ultimately, text adventures will read like complete, interchangeable novels, and graphics games will move as quickly as video games but take twenty hours to play.

Someday a future Sherlock Holmes will turn to Dr. Watson, after arresting someone, and say he could tell he had the right man because, by the fibers in his sleeve, it was obvious to all that he had just returned from a computer store. □



Real Life Cases

CRIME HUNT

By T. M. McDade

THE WAITE CASE

The name of Grand Rapids, like that of some other Midwestern towns such as Kokomo, Kalamazoo, or Dubuque, carries its own aura: a suggestion of the bucolic, a touch of the hayseed. That simple citizens of that prosaic city could lead dangerous lives was amply demonstrated early in the century.

On September 9, 1915, one of the more fashionable weddings of the season took place in the Fountain Street Baptist Church, "uniting in holy matrimony" Miss Clara Louise Peck and Arthur Warren Waite, a couple who had known each other since high school days. Miss Peck had a number of social advantages her father's money could supply: education at the Chevy Chase School in Washington and Columbia University and an active life in local charities such as the hospital free bed guild and the humane society. Her husband, while lacking the monetary stability of his in-laws, had, with admirable energy, acquired a degree in dentistry at the University of Michigan, attending the University of Edinburgh Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, and had practiced in South Africa for five years. He was but twenty-nine; she was three years younger. For people so situated, life could be beautiful.

For her wedding, Miss Peck wore white satin with court train and tulle veil. During the ceremony, Mrs. Thomas Ford rendered a program of wedding songs with Rudolph Wellenstein at the organ. Following the ceremony, a small reception for relatives and friends was held at the home of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Peck, whose substantial home was but one of the assets Mr. Peck had acquired as a very successful drug manufacturer. As a young married couple, they were indistinguishable from thousands of others except that they possessed advantages beyond the common lot of most. If Miss Peck were not strikingly attractive (she was in fact, quite plain, her nose, lips, and chin being on the heavy side), neither was she an ugly duckling. Moreover,

her millionaire father was anxious to be devoted to the young couple. Waite, on the other hand, had no discernible cash assets but was possessed of quite good looks, straight, regular features, a charming smile, and an engaging manner with people, particularly with Mrs. Peck, his new mother-in-law. Despite his youth, he had already accomplished much, and it was reported that the couple would live in New York, where Waite was connected with Bellevue Hospital.

The honeymoon couple went to the Ponchartrain Hotel in Detroit for a few days. For the first time, Waite was critical of his father-in-law. He was disappointed that instead of the \$50,000 cash present he had expected, Mr. Peck had given his daughter an allowance of \$300 monthly. But in New York, where the newlyweds were to live, they found a fine seven-room apartment, tastefully furnished, awaiting them at 435 Riverside Drive near 116th Street. In addition, the bride's aunt, Miss Catherine Peck, who lived at the Park Avenue Hotel, gave each of them \$3,000 in cash.

Two months before the wedding, Waite had enrolled in Cornell Medical School in New York, paying an entrance fee of \$225, which he had raised only by cashing in a small insurance policy. Now securely married, the urge to study seemed to have passed, and, telling the school he was planning to leave the city, he obtained a refund of \$200. But if Waite were not interested in formal schooling, he was still interested in expanding his medical knowledge. In October, at his request, a bacteriologist named Moos came to the apartment to discuss the culture of growing bacteria. Waite was doing research at Fordham Hospital, he told Moos, and through the latter he was supplied with diphtheria and typhoid bacilli as well as diphtheria antitoxin. He had also set up a small laboratory in the apartment.

It was generally believed he was a medical doctor, and occasionally he would make reference to unusual and delicate operations he had performed. Actually, he was more prosaically occupied; he was studying voice culture at the YMCA and taking foreign language courses with Berlitz.

The fall came and went, and Mr. and Mrs. Peck, who had been expected to visit the newlyweds, did not arrive. When the Christmas holidays arrived, Clara went to Grand Rapids to be with her parents. Waite was not lonely. At Berlitz, he shared lessons with a twenty-four-year-old woman, Margaret Horton. He went to Grand Rapids for a few

days with his wife but returned almost immediately, giving as excuse that he had to perform a delicate eye operation.

On January 10, Clara returned home, bringing her mother with her. Wherever Waite and Mrs. Horton had been practicing their French, they now sought a new rendezvous. On January 17th, they registered at the Plaza Hotel as Dr. A. W. Walters and wife. Later, Mrs. Horton was surprised at the conclusions people drew from the simple desire of two people to be alone to test their language skills without the embarrassment of strangers hearing their slips.

"We were never there at night," she said. "There was no bed in the room. It was fitted up as any artistic studio in a hotel would be. It was just a room to study and practice between classes."

Waite, however, had more on his mind than Mrs. Horton. He had in fact been planning the extermination of the entire Peck family for quite some time and ultimately inheriting the combined estates of all the Pecks. It only required him to find the necessary means, and in this respect he was completely openminded.

One of the great puzzles of the human mind is how a thoughtful and precise murderer can plan and execute his crime and yet fail to see the clear and plain trail of his wrongdoing. There is a blindness which keeps from the schemer an awareness of how much evidence of his wrongdoing is accumulating. In part this is due to his belief that "it is only his word against mine"; that he has but to deny he said this or that and the matter is therefore unproven. He forgets or never conceives that such a position may be valid with one witness; with half a dozen he is plainly condemned. In part again it is due to a kind of super ego—a lack of sensitivity—a failure of awareness which keeps him from looking ahead to the possible failure of his plans. The same lack of moral conscience which makes it possible for him to plan and execute his crime also dims his awareness of the trail he is leaving behind him.

Only eight days after the wedding, Waite had begun actively to acquire the means of carrying out his plans for removing the Pecks. On September 17, he began the study of germs under Dr. Louis Heitzman at that doctor's 78th Street laboratory and at the Flower Hospital under Dr. P. L. Nye, an associate pathologist from whom Waite sought the most virulent germs. At Cornell University Medical College, he was able to acquire other cultures.

With his mother-in-law within his reach, Waite went ahead with his plans. It took him exactly twenty days to kill Mrs. Peck, though just which of several methods he used proved effective is not clear, as the real cause of death was never established. Unquestionably, Waite tried his germ cultures, but it would appear that these were a disappointment, and the failure seemingly made the doctor impatient. A week before Mrs. Peck died Waite got his wife to go to bed early. She was awakened later that evening by the smell of gas, and an open vent was found in her mother's room; there was also a rug against the door. Some days later, Mrs. Peck did become ill, and, when Clara heard her heavy breathing one night, Waite reported that she had a heavy cold. In the morning, she was found dead. A local doctor, William H. Porter, who had treated Mrs. Peck during her illness, finally certified her death as due to kidney trouble.

The body was returned to Grand Rapids, and Waite managed to have it cremated so that when suspicion subsequently arose it was not possible to determine the true cause of death. All this time Waite was a paragon of solitude. Later, Clara recalled: "I remember when mother just before her death experienced several chills, Arthur sat by the hour and sympathized with her. Once, only a few days before she died, she complained of having cold feet and Arthur immediately went out and purchased a foot warmer for her. He bought her flowers every day even up to the Saturday before she died." Two days after Mrs. Peck's death, Waite wrote to Archibald B. Morrison, the family attorney, "What would become of Mr. Peck's money now that Mrs. Peck is dead? Will Mr. Peck make a new will? He is old and in poor health."

In February, John Peck came east to visit his daughter, and in a letter to a druggist friend in Grand Rapids he wrote, "I am quite well and not only that, I am taking good care of the physical body." When he wrote this, Waite was already exposing him to a number of hazards, seeking one to bring down his seventy-two-year-old father-in-law. He had purchased cultures of typhoid and tubercular germs, which he began feeding to Mr. Peck. To weaken his constitution, he drove him in the rain and had him sleeping on damp sheets to contract pneumonia. One night he left the gas turned on, but it was discovered and a servant blamed. Impatient with the failure of these methods, he turned to arsenic, of which he fed 90 grains in servings of oatmeal, rice pudding, milk, and soup. Now Peck really became ill, and Dr. Albert A. Moore was called on March 5. Moore prescribed simple soothing remedies for diarrhea. The remedy proved ineffectual, and Moore visited on successive days from the 7th to the 11th. On one occasion, Waite drove the doctor to his next house call and en route asked him, "If Mr. Peck doesn't get well, do you think you ought to tell Clara?" To this the doctor replied, "Well, Dr. Waite, don't let's be so pessimistic. I think Mr. Peck will be all right." In this he was wrong, for on his

Sunday morning call on the 11th, Waite met him at the door to announce, "I'm afraid something has happened to Mr. Peck. It seems to me he has died."

Again there was no suspicion of wrongdoing, and Mr. Peck in his coffin departed for Grand Rapids the next day on the 5 o'clock train.

There is a disposition among some reporters of violent crime to allude to the event as a Greek tragedy. The Waite case has more claim than most to this appellation, for, at the point just reached in this telling, there enters the *deus ex machina* which provides the retribution so necessary to the completion of the tragic muse. In Grand Rapids, Percy Peck, Clara's brother, had received a telegram reading, "Suspicious aroused. Demand autopsy. Keep telegram secret," signed K. Adams. The sender was unknown to Peck, but we will make the curious reader wait for the unveiling of the sender. Mrs. Elizabeth C. Hardwick, a New Jersey school-teacher, was the sister of Dr. Jacob Cornell, a relative of the Pecks. Dr. Cornell had called at the Waite apartment on the Sunday morning after hearing of the death of Mr. Peck and had been brusquely treated by Waite.

"What did you come for?" Waite asked through the half-opened door. "I thought my wife had called you up and asked you not to come." Cornell admitted that she had telephoned but said that under the circumstances he felt it his duty to call. All the while, Waite, wary and nervous, kept him in the hall and reluctantly let him in. Upon hearing this from Dr. Cornell, his sister recalled seeing Waite lunching at the Plaza Hotel with an unknown woman whom he felt it necessary to identify as a nurse who had just assisted him in a delicate operation. Mrs. Hardwick, by one of those mental jumps, concluded that Waite had murdered the Pecks, and, to avoid any possible suit for libel should she prove wrong, used the name of a friend in the wire which she had her minor daughter send to Percy and which arrived in Grand Rapids before the body of his father.

With this prod from the telegram, Peck's mind went back to Waite's urging the cremation of his mother, the suddenness of both deaths, and how little he really knew of his brother-in-law. A hurried consultation with Dr. Perry Schurtz, the family doctor, and Dr. Wishart, his minister, decided his next steps. When the body arrived on the Wolverine, accompanied by Waite and his wife, Percy Peck was on hand to meet them.

"Give me the baggage checks for the casket," he asked Waite. There was a long pause as he stood with his hand extended, waiting for his brother-in-law to comply. Finally the latter dropped his eyes and handed over the checks. Without further ado, Percy had the body taken to Spattler's, the undertaker who had handled his mother's funeral.

At Peck's house, Waite was consumed with curiosity. What was happening to the body? Were they performing an autopsy? When he learned that the body was at the mortuary, he called there to see it with the excuse that he wanted to put a rose in the casket, but he was

refused admission. In fact, Peck had already set in motion a full investigation. After consulting with his doctor and clergyman, he had hired a New York private detective, Ray Schindler, to look into the case. Before Dr. Schurtz left for New York, he had removed the principal organs from John Peck's body and delivered them to Dr. V. C. Vaughan, Dean of the Medical School at the University of Michigan, who found the arsenic which had been administered in the soup, custard, and eggnog, the total amount recovered equalling five grains.

In New York, Schindler's operatives with great speed found that Waite was unknown at Bellevue where he had claimed to have performed so many operations. A search of the Waite apartment before he returned from Grand Rapids disclosed a wall safe with bankbooks and a key to a bank lock box full of currency. The source of these funds turned out to be his wife's aunt, Catherine Peck, who, taken with Waite's blandishments, had on December 19 entrusted him with \$40,000 to invest for her. Waite had sent some of this to a broker and \$10,000 to his brother Frank with a note, "There's more where this came from."

Undoubtedly made suspicious by events in Michigan and the evident coolness the family was showing him, Waite returned alone to the city. He was followed as he came off the train and when he made a telephone call from a station box, Schindler, in the adjoining box, overheard his conversation with Mrs. Horton at the Plaza Hotel, telling her to pay the bill and check out of the hotel. Still followed by detectives, and knowing that arsenic would be found in Peck's body, Waite went to see John Potter, the undertaker who had handled the preparation of the body in New York. Potter, however, had hired an embalmer, Eugene Kane, and when Waite asked for a sample of the embalming fluid, Potter sent him to Kane. Kane also was evasive when approached by Waite and told him that the composition of the embalming fluid was a secret (actually it consisted of formaldehyde, glycerin, and sodium phosphate). Could there be arsenic in it? asked Waite. That would be against the law, replied Kane.

After this fencing about, they arranged to meet the next day at a garage on 113th Street, where Waite passed to Kane a check for \$9,000 and, returning an hour later, stuffed a roll of bills into Kane's pocket and told him to "get some arsenic in that fluid, for God's sake, and send it to the District Attorney." By now, Kane was frightened and beyond his depth. After burying the money, he did send a true sample of the embalming fluid to the District Attorney and washed his hands of the affair.

During all of these maneuvers, Waite was skillfully followed by Schindler's operatives, who never missed a trick. Schindler now felt that he had enough evidence to go to the District Attorney, Edward H. Swann. Although doubtful of the case, Swann sent his chief medical examiner to Grand Rapids for the results of the autopsies. As an after-thought, he called Waite to his office for an

interview, and, when he denied any wrongdoing in connection with the death of the Pecks, Swann sent the young man home. In the meantime, Schindler, who already had the results of the autopsy, was able to enter Waite's apartment the next morning, aided by the building superintendent. There he found Waite stupefied from drugs he had taken, either for sleep or in an attempt at suicide. He was in no condition to match wits with the detective, and, when Swann arrived belatedly that morning to arrest Waite, Schindler handed him his prisoner along with a full confession.

In the ensuing days, the case was a reporter's dream. Each day brought new revelations. Mrs. Horton, nee Weaver, Waite's friend from Berlitz and the Plaza, was thoroughly vetted. Born in Cincinnati in 1894, she was married to Harry Mack Horton, an engineer twenty years her senior. She was an actress; Waite had seen her at the Strand Theatre in December and at the Academy of Music in January. He got himself introduced to her and induced her to join him in French and German lessons at Berlitz, hinting at the opportunity for foreign travel to follow. She was identified as the woman who had accompanied Waite when he brought germs at Cornell Medical School. For a brief while, it seemed proper for her to have her own attorney, but she was never seriously considered as involved in the murders. Her voice, reported as a militant contralto, may have helped to get her a new contract—ten weeks at Loew's, singing and playing the piano.

After all the revelations which had been made by the District Attorney as they occurred, Waite's trial was an anticlimax. Neither the prisoner's counsel nor the District Attorney tried very hard to instill any excitement into it. For a case of such notoriety, it was almost scandalously short. The whole case took a mere six days, which by the standards of the times should have been required just to pick the jury, which in fact required but a couple of hours. One prospective jurymen, asked if he was opposed to capital punishment replied, "Not in this case," and Waite's laughter was as loud as any in the courtroom.

With speed and conciseness, the prosecutor ran through a long list of witnesses, giving all the damning facts of Waite's stumbling but murderous efforts. In cross examination of all these people—druggists, pathologists, doctors, and others—Waite's attorney never tried to refute their testimony, nor did he seem to question its truthfulness. He was concerned only to draw from the witnesses the admission that in all their experience with the prisoner, Waite was uniformly gentlemanly, courteous, polite, and considerate. The surprise of the trial came on the third day, when Waite's nemesis appeared in the person of a beautiful girl, not yet twenty-one, Elizabeth C. Hardwick. Tall, attractive and composed, Miss Hardwick, the teacher, testified that it was she who had sent the cryptic telegram signed K. Adams which had urged Percy Peck to have an autopsy performed.

The ratiocination behind the act was actually the thinking of Miss Hardwick's mother, the sister of Dr. Cornell. Dr. Cornell had told her of Waite's chilly manner when he and her nephew Arthur Swinton called at the apartment on the day Peck died. This man, who was always so polite, so considerate, had barred the door to the two men, kept them for several minutes in the hallway, and only reluctantly let them in.

When Mrs. Hardwick was called to the stand she recalled a chance meeting with Waite in the Plaza Hotel dining room on the previous George Washington's birthday. She had been with Swinton and her daughter, and when Waite entered with a woman, on seeing them he steered her to a distant table. Then during the meal he came to their table to say that he had just performed an operation at Bellevue Hospital, and this was his private nurse, and they were to go to another hospital for another operation. As she, Cornell, and Swinton talked about the deaths, she had realized that Waite was now in control of a very large sum of money. Dr. Cornell had no suspicions of Waite; he merely saw him as being under a strain from the sudden death. Convinced that Waite must be responsible for the two deaths, Mrs. Hardwick decided to alert Percy Peck to her suspicions. Fearful of the consequences should they prove to be wrong and that Waite might sue for libel, they decided to send the telegram pseudonymously, and Mrs. Hardwick's daughter, who had no property of her own, was chosen to send it. But for Mrs. Hardwick's action, Mr. Peck's body would have been cremated and there would have been no evidence of his poisoning.

On April 3, 1917, less than a year after his conviction, the Court of Appeals announced that Waite's sentence must stand. The unanimous court found nothing to say on the question of guilt, affirming the conviction without an opinion. Not a point raised had warranted a word from the court. Not wishing to appear hasty, the trial judge waited a month before setting a new date of execution—the week of May 21. Waite's attorney made what few moves were still available at the time. He applied to Governor Whitman to have a panel of doctors examine Waite to determine if he were sane. Three doctors promptly performed this task, and, after they reported him sane, the Governor declined to intervene. When this news was brought to the prisoner, he never lost his composure; he merely smiled, hummed a tune, and said, "Is that so?"

He had been writing poetry in his last days. Now he wrote a letter to the Warden:

Dear Warden,

In one of the newspapers today is the statement that "A. W. Waite is to die next week," and on inquiry I learn that you have the power to name the day of that week.

I am sure you would not be averse to obliging me if you found it possible and reasonable to do so, and I wonder if we could not arrange for the Monday of next week.

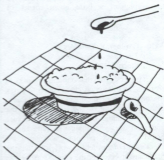
There really is a reason for asking this, although I will not trouble you with explanations. I would be very grateful indeed for this favor.

Yours respectfully,
Arthur Warren Waite

The warden did not oblige; the execution was set for Thursday night. During his vigil of the past months, Waite had but two visitors, his brother Frank and his attorney, Walter Duell. The last evening, he sat reading the Bible and Keats' poetry. He also wrote a letter to Dr. Squire, the prison doctor, which he sealed in a double envelope. Shortly after 11 p.m., Waite walked down the corridor to the death cell, composed and unafraid. He had been unmoved by the grief of his brother and the illness of his mother. Nothing seemed to break his calm as he waved to other death row prisoners and said, "Goodbye, boys." He hesitated but a second as he entered the death chamber, and while he was being pinned he replied to a question from Dr. Squires: "No, thank you, doctor, there is no one to whom I care to leave a farewell message." A few minutes later, he was dead.

The letter to Dr. Squire, so carefully double sealed, contained only a quotation from Robert Louis Stevenson: "Call us with morning face, eager to labor, eager to be happy." Two weeks later, his widow filed suit to recover the \$7,000 he had paid to have the embalmer say there was arsenic in the embalming fluid. When, three years later, she married again, at Pasadena, the news passed almost unnoticed.

Waite was a puzzle to many; even the doctors could not explain the contradiction of his great charm and callous viciousness. Catherine Peck, who probably knew him as well as anybody, having learned that his whole life had been a fraud, that he had stolen large sums of money from her, had murdered her brother and sister-in-law, and had tried to murder her, could only say of him, "Dr. Waite does not smoke, drink, or swear. He is one of the most complete gentlemen I know." □



A CATALOGUE OF CRIME

S207 Duff, Beldon
Ask No Questions
CCD 1930

The sole interest of this book is to show what mindless stuff was accepted by the supposedly demanding Crime Club half a century ago. This second and last tale by this author (the first being *Murder in Central Park*) is a farrago of unbelievable events, people, and utterances. A haunted house, an old crime, a beautiful girl, and a he-man hero who masters her fierce stallion while people get killed and melodramatic millionaires rant and collapse in shame, form the furniture of this incoherent, ill-written, and interminable affair.

S208 Footner, Hulbert
The Casual Murderer
Lipp n.d. [1937]

This collection of six Rosika Storey tales is a fair sample of what she is good for—a certain amount of primitive detection woven into situations in which her aplomb and ability to play roles enable her to right wrongs, avenge murders, and give her assistant-narrator Bella a chance to admire her amid fits of fright. Scenes and types vary from plain folk in upstate New York to gigolos and kidnappers on the Riviera.

S209 Footner, Hulbert
The Whip-Poor-Will Mystery
Harp 1935

This is an early example (but not the first) of the ad put in the paper by a mysterious girl living in a remote ramshackle house (see Duff, *Ask No Questions*). It bodes no good to the girl or to the reader, for, although the maiden-in-peril theme is subdued, the cock-and-bull series of events are dull in proportion to their supposed power to astonish. Footner does better to stick to his Madame Storey adventures in the short form. Here the only point of interest is the topography of a little-known corner of Maryland.

S210 Gardner, Erle Stanley
The Case of the Singing Skirt
Morrow 1959

It is perfectly true that our author works to formula, as follows: A client comes to Perry Mason with a predicament that contains a fishy element—he or she is probably lying about something. But Perry takes the case and soon does something not quite above-board. New facts pile up that suggest his client's guilt in murder (or worse), so that the predicament becomes the lawyer's as well as

**By Jacques Barzun
and Wendell Hertig Taylor**

the client's. By sheer reasoning and court tactics, Mason saves his skin, finds the culprit, discomfits the prosecutor, and clears his client. In one sense, the plot never varies.

Having said this, one must add that the variety of persons and circumstances and the ingenuity in contriving details that Gardner dreamed up in his dozens of cases are astonishing and entrancing. In *The Singing Skirt*, the unflappable lawyer rescues a cabaret girl from a frame-up and defeats a neat conspiracy by the "law and order" of a small town which the prosperous gambler has in his pocket. The court scene is excellent, and the characters, though thin as usual, are amply credible. The pace never flags and the dialogue throughout beautifully carries one along.

S211 Langford, Gerald
The Murder of Stanford White
Gollancz 1963

The subject, unavoidably, is the despicable behavior of Harry and Evelyn Thaw much more than the character of Stanford White, though the author strongly hints that White is not so black as those other two had him painted. The main interest lies in the trial scenes, which are related here with satisfying fullness and very shrewd comments on the strategy and tactics of both sides. There are two trials, one commitment to a hospital for the criminally insane, an escape therefrom, and a third trial ending in acquittal. During these and in between, the worthless pair and their relatives behave in wild, stupid, and shady ways duly recorded, with the epilogue to the drama of the youthful pair the saddest part of the whole.

S212 Radley, Sheila
A Talent for Destruction
Scrib 1982

Ms. Radley writes well, as her two earlier books have shown, but it is now evident that she is more interested in characterization than in detection. Fully half of this short tale has passed, giving the reader the sad story of the failing marriage of Gillian to her handsome rector, before Det. Chief Inspector Quantrell really gets down to work on the case of the body of an Australian youth discovered in the local churchyard. A red-haired (female) troublemaker is very well portrayed and there is a neat twist at the end. But this is scarcely a detective story, though it does indeed live up to its title.

S213 Ross, Jonathan
(pseud. of John Rossiter)
Dark Blue & Dangerous
Scrib 1981

Under his own name, this author has produced at least eight detective novels, several featuring Roger Tallis. The present book gives us Det. Supt. George Rogers in his ninth adventure. The author was for thirty years a policeman, retiring with the rank of Det. Chief Superintendent, so the police detail should be accurate. Much is made of the "emotional life" of the detective, who is a fairly credible man. The handling of an unsavory case of a venal police constable is interesting enough.

S214 Simpson, Dorothy
The Night She Died
Scrib 1981

The author here introduces a new detective, one Det. Insp. Luke Thanet. The scene is a smallish city in Kent, where Julie Holmes is murdered in her own house twenty years after she witnessed the murder of painter Annabel Dacre. Thanet finally works out the links between the two killings, demolishing a critical alibi rather too easily. Not outstandingly good, but quite readable.

In the later *Six Feet Under* (Scrib 1982), Thanet comes a bit more alive in a tale of village secrets and jealousies that are credibly linked with his own domestic difficulties and those of his associate, Sgt. Lineham. In her third Luke Thanet case, *Puppet for a Corpse* (Scrib 1983), the author has set herself the difficult task of explaining the undoubted suicide of a successful physician who apparently had much to look forward to. Thanet deals with the rather complex case quite adequately, though it is only fair to say that the author's choice of motive for this self-destruction has been almost hollowed by its earlier use in detective fiction. It is also fair to say that Thanet has improved steadily.

S215 Troy, Simon
Blind Man's Garden
Goll 1970

Inspector Charles Smith takes his vacation near Grasse with friends in the perfume industry and gets drawn into a complex family battle. Two accidents (one resulting in death), a teenage pregnancy with blackmail about shady pasts, serve to keep things moving while Smith remains practically indifferent. There are some first-rate domestic quarrels and a good cliff-and-car ending, but the way is not ever smoothed for detection. Rather, the emphasis is on psychology. These readers prefer Smith in his earlier haunts, the Channel Islands and Cornwall. □

LETTERS

From Greg Goode:

This letter, mostly on TAD 16:1, is late because I got my copy of 16:1 about ten weeks after everyone else. About my article in it on Oriental detectives, I'd like to correct something and make two additions to the corps of Asian sleuths. The correction is on page 69, first full paragraph, 6th line. The word "Kalan" should be changed to "Koa." The two additions I owe to the mention and kindness of TADian Mark Schreiber of Tokyo, Detective Sergeant John Ho is Chinese and works in London. He appears in Michael Hardwick's *The Chinese Detective* (London: BBC, 1981), which is taken from the BBC-TV serial which stars David Yip in the title role. Then there is a modern Japanese PI, Kenji Honda, who appears in Douglas Kenrick's *Death in a Tokyo Family* (London: Hale, 1979). I have not seen the book; word is that Kenrick is working on a sequel.

Actually, 16:1 is the first TAD in a long time in which I've thoroughly enjoyed every article and department. Having grown up in L.A., I feel nostalgic when I read mysteries set in L.A. or Hollywood. So I always like to read about them. I enjoyed Nicholas Warner's (any relation to the W Bros.?) piece on Hollywood in detective fiction. In spite of my nostalgia, I'm convinced that Chandler and Ross Macdonald are right about L.A. and the glittering city. There have been other articles about Hollywood and mysteries, and I'm waiting till someone writes about *The Hollywood Detective*, Roger Garrison, who appeared in two books by film buff and writer Jeff Rovin, viz., *Hollywood Detective: Garrison and Hollywood Detective: The Wolf* (both Manor, 1975). Garrison is a roughish sort of troubleshooter for the early big studios. Author Rovin is presently, I believe, on the editorial staff of that grisliest of horror film fanzines, *Fangoria*.

Michael, your rousing editorial is impelling me to dig deep into the pockets to afford Bouchercon XIV. John Carr's J. M. Cain interview is awesome. The Chambers story is my favorite piece from the Archives for quite some time. I enjoyed a new, albeit somewhat socioculturally slanted, view at a latter-day Great Detective in Libby Schlegel's Rabbi Small article. Thanks to Mike Nevin's and Frank D. McSherry for the tips on sinister Oriental doings in H.S.K. and E.S.G. As for Jim Doherty's suggestion, how about the "Elery" for American winners and the "Sherlock" for winners abroad? Actually, there's just one thing I didn't like about 16:1—that's the notice on the bottom half of p. 99.

From George H. Madison:

For me, a meal in Paris or Rome is more



romantic than one in New York City or Miami. The ambience and beauty of a foreign locale is very appealing to me. Books can provide a return trip to your favorite spot, but at a substantial reduction in cost. Recently, there have been many fine mysteries set in France and Italy.

Pierre Audemars has written five novels featuring M. Pinaud of the Sûreté, a strong, compassionate warrior for justice. Each episode is a moral tome, with the emphasis on character development. He is a legend of a man who loves his family, is devoted to duty and God, whom he thanks for all of his blessings. The novels move slowly but pleasantly, with much attention paid to the routine details of life.

Audemars is Swiss born, writing in London. His total output is 28 novels, but Walker has published the following five titles: *Slay Me a Sinner*, *How Dead Is Any Man*, *The Bitter Path of Death*, *Go To Her Death*, and *And One for the Dead*.

Mark Hebdon's adventures of Inspector Evariste Clovis Desire Pel are rapidly improving. *Pel and the Faceless Corpse* is much better than *Pel Is Puzzled*. Walker has just published a third Pel book, *Death Set to Music*. Cantankerous and cursed by a disastrous relationship with a shrewish housekeeper, Pel commands an interesting squad of detectives, solely, it seems, to preserve his sanity.

Richard Grayson's series features Inspector Gautier of the Paris Sûreté, c. 1890. Time and place are alive in this very good series—*Murders at the Impasse Louvain*, *The Montmartre Murders*, and *The Death of Abbe Didier*. The publisher is St. Martin's.

Bernard St. James has authored two Inspector Blanc works, *April Thirtieth* and *The Seven Dreamers*. Blanc works in Paris, shortly after Napoleon, when it was hard to survive the machinations of the various bureaucratic hierarchies. St. James handles the era well.

My favorite French detective is Inspector Damiot, created by Vincent McConnor. A contemporary, Damiot is featured in *The Provence Puzzle*, *The Riviera Puzzle*, and *The Paris Puzzle*. Great reading! McConnor has been dropped by Macmillan,

and his fate is unknown. Does anyone have further information? Who is McConnor?

From France to Italy is always a lovely journey; although the literary pickings are rather slim and not nearly as enjoyable. Magdalen Nabb, an Englishwoman living in Florence has written *Death of an Englishman* and *Death of a Dutchman*. Both feature a Sicilian, Marshall Guarnaccia. A little too static for my taste.

A much better choice is Timothy Holme's *The Neapolitan Streak* and *A Funeral of Gondolas*, set in Verona and Venice respectively. They feature Inspector Achille Peroni, the "Rudolph Valentino" of the Italian police.

To the best of my knowledge, all of the above titles are currently in print, either hardcover or paperback. Should anyone be able to suggest other mystery titles set in France or Italy that might be of interest to me, I would be most appreciative.

From Bill Blackbeard:

Re: Barzun and Taylor's "Catalogue of Crime" column in TAD 16:1: B & T quite properly put down *Man Drowning* (1952) but are in error in crediting Kuttner with the blame. This mistake understandably results from unfortunate but long-standing division of literary concern between crime fiction buffs and science-fiction fans. SF aficionados in general have known for decades that a minor writer of some talent in that field, Cleve Cartmill, wrote *Man Drowning* for Hank Kuttner and Cat Moore because their other literary obligations of the time prevented either of them from getting at the contracted-for Harper title. (I presume that B & T do know that virtually all writing under the Kuttner byline in the 1940s and 1950s was co-penned in part by his wife, C. L. Moore?)

Many SF fans have also known for some time about the Vance authoring of the Queen paperback titles mentioned by Joe R. Christopher in the letters section this time. It is noteworthy that Hubin seems to have lacked SF interests and contacts, since the Vance and Cartmill ghostings go uncredited in BCF #1. (I write BCF #1 deliberately, since there obviously has to be a BCF #2 eventually; it is unthinkable that the key reference work in the crime fiction field should continue on through the years leaving Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* unlisted!)

I enjoyed the current TAD thoroughly, as always. I'd give it more of a slant toward thrillers, private-eye, and hardboiled material myself, but I can understand how your own biases toward the body-in-the-parlor sort of thing produce the present TAD orientation—not at all hard to take as packaged by you.

How about a regular column made up of corrections and additions to BCF #1, con-

tributed by readers and edited by Hubin? (I have about fifty titles and/or corrections to make based on the collection in the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art alone.) This would enable readers to annotate their shelf copy of BCF #1 immediately, without having to wait for BCF #2.

✓ *Dear Bill:* Thanks for the note and the instructive comments and insights. Copies have been passed along for responses and reactions, and we'll see what develops. And, as always, your kind words about the magazine are appreciated. But—
What do you mean by "your own biases

toward the body-in-the-parlor sort of thing?" That may be the most frightening rumor I've heard since they told me of the takeover of Ace/Charter by the Hollywood whiz-kids of MCA. Just looking at TAD 16:1, the issue you were reading, the major articles were an interview with James M. Cain and a piece on Hollywood and detective fiction—definitely a hardboiled context. Volume 15 featured articles on the PI novels of 1980, a profile of Norbert Davis, a piece on Chester Himes, two articles on espionage (Manning Coles and the fiction of Anthony Price), William Ard, Nick Carter, and Stephen Greenleaf.

If anything, I think we've become more thriller-oriented during the years I've been editing TAD (which is reasonable: my bias is toward the PI, procedural, and pure suspense novel). We do, of course, have to maintain a balance since our readership—fortunately—represents a cross-section of fandom.

While we're about it—why don't you do a piece on some of the crossover writers—the skeletons (or ghosts) in both our closets? Make it as hardboiled as you'd like.

—Michael □

THE BALLAD OF CORPSCANDAL MANOR

A POEM

By Celia Fremlin

His lordship is locked in the library,
Guests lurk around in the hall;
Inspector McNosey, backed up by Aunt Rosie,
Can't understand it at all.

Everyone here has a motive—
His lordship is wealthy as sin—
From Gramp to young Jane, they would all stand to gain
If milord was done (tactfully) in.

And then there's that odd-looking couple
Who've turned up from no one knows where;
And it's rather peculiar that Harold's niece Julia
Should suddenly choose to be there.

The library windows are fastened;
There isn't a trap in the floor;
The guests in the hall swear that no one at all
Had passed through the library door.

The mystery deepens, and thickens;
The Butler says Dinner is Served,
The hero once more tries the library door—
Then hesitates, somewhat unnerved—

For the door has swung silently open—
He staggers back into the hall—!
For his lordship sits there, to the author's despair,
And nothing has happened at all.

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Civilized Recipes of Crime

By Ellen Strenski

You could learn how to do it from a murder mystery. Hit the victim over the head with a frozen leg of lamb, snip some digitalis leaves into the salad, or following Stanley Ellin's gruesome "The Specialty of the House" simply eat all the clues and the victim at the same time. But mystery addicts obviously don't read Ellery Queen the same way they read *Popular Mechanics*. Why then is there such loving attention to food and drink in detective stories? Why do so many of their readers also subscribe to *Gourmet* and collect cookbooks? Why are so many mystery writers and their detective progeny accomplished cooks? Is there some connection between an interest in crime and *haute cuisine*?

Clues and red herrings (note: red herrings) are everywhere. The *New York Times* reviewer of the recent bestselling *Someone Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe* is an expert on sauces. What is one of his major points? An error in the preparation of *Espagnole demi-glace*. The jacket quotes James Beard calling the tale "the most luscious gastronomic murder imaginable." Or consider this example in which Spenser, a detective created by Robert B. Parker in *God Save the Child*, is cooking breakfast. No corn flakes or Egg Beaters for this hardboiled dick:

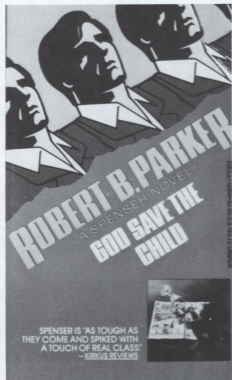
I sliced two green tomatoes, sprinkled them with black pepper and rosemary, shook them in flour, and put them in about a half-inch of olive oil to fry. I put a small porterhouse steak under the broiler, and got a loaf of unleavened Syrian bread out of the refrigerator. While the steak and tomatoes cooked I drank my first cup of coffee, cream, two sugars and ate a bowl of blackberries I'd bought at a farm stand.

The evidence really does suggest that mystery buffs and gourmets share common pleasures and preoccupations.

One such is their attention to detail. This has been a characteristic of mysteries ever since Sherlock Holmes crawled around examining footprints through his magnifying glass, or Freeman Wills Crofts devised his elaborate split-second-alibi timetables. No wonder we mystery fans like cooking and cluttering up our kitchens with paraphernalia. We like to have handy just the right slotted spoon with just the right left. So too we must know the precise shade and shape of the bloodstain on the library carpet, or whether Amanda before going to bed was last seen downstairs by Jeremy at 10:47 or by the parlormaid at 11:19. Of course we also want to know who regularly wound the clock and if it had been tampered with and if the butler had done it. Done what? Anything. Poor butler in his pantry. He, not the chauffeur or the parlormaid, gets suspected of everything. Mud on the shoe matters, and so does warming a soup bowl. Gourmets and mystery fans are materialists in the best sense.

We are also curious. Mysteries for good reason are called "whodunits." We really want to know. So too we're always looking for new recipes. Sheer novelty is not what counts, but an opportunity to experiment imaginatively with a new combination of familiar ingredients. Just consider the "You Asked For It" section in *Gourmet*. The rest of us who have never, alas, had the good fortune to dine at the Auberge du Cheval Blanc in Vezelay are still fascinated by the recipe for Chef Godard's *pâte de campagne*. Or think about the ever-increasing popularity of cookbooks,

especially about ethnic cuisine. We may be somewhat repelled by the little fishy eyes of the whitebait staring up at us from that distinctive Roumanian soup, but we are intrigued. We read mysteries in series in the same way. We may know Lord Peter or Perry Mason intimately from other stories. We know their principles and motives, just as we know about



kitchen staples and what flour and sugar and salt will do in a recipe. With murder, as with cornstarch, the plot thickens. What is cooking is the crime. And we relish another story just as we enjoy another recipe or cookbook, the more exotic and far-flung the better. Of course, recipe and story must also remain palatable and convincing. No matter how gory, in whodunits there is a residual aesthetic and ethical sense of limits.

In some sense we can even hunger after new stories, be addicted to them and go to great lengths to

eat up a new story in a series. If there are alcoholics and foodaholics, might there quite literally be mystery addicts? Such an hypothesis would explain the demand that heroes' tastes become ever more refined as violence becomes ever more brutal, bloody, and pornographic. A better case along these lines could be made for viewers being hooked on TV cop shows, a related but more passive, less discriminating or demanding activity than reading mysteries. The TV viewer's handy bottle of whatever is essentially a baby's comfort, and his bowl of peanuts, pretzels, or potato chips below the gourmet's notice.

Of these, more than one Rex Stout fan has admitted trying to figure out and then reconstruct not the crime but one of Fritz Brenner's recipes. It was surely to answer such a need that all the references to Brenner's dishes in the Stout *opera* were recently collected and edited, Stout adding their recipes which he had personally created and tested.

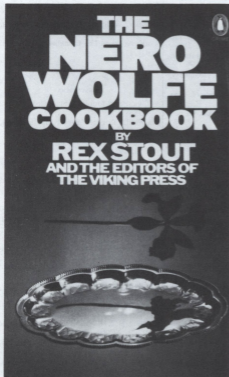
The Nero Wolfe Cookbook differs somewhat from Julia and the Rombauers. Wolfe has no sense of economizing. Why should he since he is a millionaire? More importantly, Brenner, Wolfe's French-speaking Swiss chef, under Wolfe's direction, also sometimes requires rather unusual ingredients and rather unusual measures. These details are significant. They are either subtly effective seasonings and critical amounts and therefore crucial to the culinary denouement, or they are distracting, eccentric gestures, false suspects, innocent bystanders playing no real part, just like characters in the stories. We in our kitchens are constantly caught trying to figure out what bizarre ingredients we can omit, or vary in quantity, just as we try to outwit the detective or at least keep up with the clues. And if we prefer Simonon to Stout and Archie, we can consult Robert Courtine's *Madame Maigret's Recipes*.

There are also two Sherlock Holmes cookbooks, but they are somewhat different. As one Baker Street Irregular confessed, a Sherlock Holmes nut would not consume anything about him. It is no coincidence, however, that William S. Baring-Gould, noted Holmes expert, maintains that Holmes was Nero Wolfe's father.

It is not so strange, either, that one well-meaning public library shelves Nicolas Freeling's autobiography *The Kitchen* among the cookbooks. Freeling was a restaurateur before turning to mysteries, and his detective Van der Valk, although somewhat limited on a Dutch policeman's salary, is also a connoisseur. His French wife, Arlette, naturally is an accomplished cook. When she is annoyed by Van der Valk, frequently absent or distracted during a troublesome case, she will dish him up leftovers, but his triumphs are suitably celebrated by special

dinners in the best Brillat-Savarin tradition. This association of the detective with gourmet cooking is so well established that Hitchcock could even parody it in *Frenzy*.

The whole idea of a recipe, moreover, suggests parallels with mystery story plots. The detective is a kind of cook, who sorts through all the ingredients,



organizing chaos into order by solving the crime. Whodunits, along with Westerns and soap operas, are, of course, "formula" fictions, but the mystery plot is even more like a recipe than the other two. Although there is much firewater and drinking in the Western saloon, the chuckwagon does not really produce much of gourmet interest. Soap opera characters are usually too upset by various amnesia, divorces, cancers, and affairs to eat. And when they do, as in Mary Hartman's famous chicken soup sequence, total disaster results.

Mysteries, however, glory in eating and drinking. The plot conventions of the whodunit formula or recipe are staple ingredients, sometimes quite culinary like "the famous solution dinner," as Cyril Connolly remarked in 1936, "that should occur at the end of every good detective story." Like a recipe, a whodunit follows a special sequence. The murder comes first, and then the suspects, just as the butter must be creamed with the sugar, not melted and poured in later. Like a recipe which sometimes mysteriously flops, a whodunit has suspense and drama. How will it turn out? And both recipe and whodunit plot can be ironic, since often the unexpected does happen. The least likely suspect may have done it; the simple and easy quickie turns out to be the most popular dish on the buffet table. Emma Lathen's sophisticated vice-president sleuth, John Putnam Thatcher, for instance, avoids a corporate luncheon by sneaking into a downtown cafeteria. Who does he find sharing his table? The president of the very motor company which is hosting the luncheon and who is later unmasked as the murderer. The detective hero resembles a good cook because both to succeed must be knowledgeable and resourceful and both must have fine discriminating taste. But, most importantly, both are in control, both shape the sequence of events and re-establish a measured harmony for others. They are civilizing agents, symbolizing and reassuring us about cultural values we treasure.

Mystery writer Frank Sisk suggests that mystery writers become interested in cooking through boredom. Working at home, they wander around, end up in the kitchen, and can there create a meaningful product with the range if not the typewriter. If so, this theory should hold true of all writers who work at home, but it doesn't. So, too, with mystery readers. We enjoy mysteries as we do cooking. Their exotic details satisfy our needs for imaginative stimulus. Far from revealing in us a morbid interest in crime and violence, they prove our civilized style of good living where amenities must be protected by detectives and chefs from the forces that diminish them: criminals, madmen, Twinkies, and Reddi-Whip. In this vein, John D. MacDonald has his hero Travis McGee meditate for a while on "something self-destructive about Western technology and distribution" as he breaks out the very last bottle of Plymouth gin bottled in the United Kingdom. "The very good things of the world go down the drain, from honest turkey to honest eggs to honest tomatoes. And gin." Good living, in both its ethical and practical senses, is endangered. *Haute cuisine* and detective stories reassure us about individual and cultural values. The difference, although considerable, is only in degree. □

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Continued from page 447

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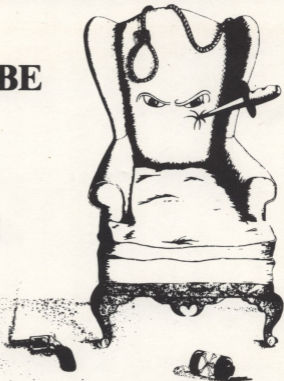
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