THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE

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A Conversation with John Gardner

Robert Barnard on the Slightly Mad, Mad World of Christianna Brand

Ross Macdonald's Literary Offenses

An Affectionate Look at Hitchcock's "The Trouble with Harry"

The 1986 Edgar Allan Poe Awards

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Feature Articles

The cover photograph of John Gardner was taken by Richard Newton

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THE UNEASY CHAIR

Dear TADian:

When writers gather, the conversation—once they get beyond those current projects which can be discussed—usually turns to problems. The most often discussed problems are: agents, editors, and publishers. Not necessarily in that order, of course. It seems that no one understands the writer, what he or she is trying to do, his or her vision. The agent doesn't know what to do with a proposal or manuscript, who to send it to, who would want to buy it. The editor can't see the brilliance of the concept, doesn't want to spend the time really *reading* the novel, and probably wants to cut the writer loose, anyway, and "I've just done so much for that turkey..." The publisher simply does not know what it is doing, refuses to support the writer, refuses to spend a fortune on advertising and publicity and get the writer the distribution he (or, yes, she) deserves.

Well. To a certain extent, all the complaints are valid. Lincoln's dictum about fooling people also applies to pleasing them. Speaking for editors (or for some of us, anyway), however:

When I'm judging a manuscript, or a book for reprint consideration, I try to picture you reading it as a finished product. There are difficulties inherent in the process, certainly: *Everyman* does not exist. You may like academic mysteries and despise police procedurals; you may don a trenchcoat and fedora when you pick up a suspense novel and absolutely refuse to enter a British parlor. With experience, though, most of us manage to find the proper niche for the books we work with.

One such niche is author identification. Fortunately for *all* of us, authors develop followings, fandoms. You know you like an author's work, his characters, his approach. You are comfortable with him. (That is one of the reasons we hear customers in the bookstores saying that they've read all of a given author, who can we recommend that might be the same?) What happens, then, when an author takes off at a ninety degree angle? The question isn't idle; it is happening more and more often.

Donald E. Westlake created Richard Stark and Tucker Coe (and others) to tell other kinds of stories. For a long time, no one knew the secret. Then they did. Now, Westlake doesn't have to use pen names. Marketing, certainly, and perhaps the afficionados have become more sophisticated. Other writers, newer writers, take other tacks. Loren D. Estleman is known in two markets with little crossover: Westerns and mysteries. He writes both under his own name. But he threw his readers a curve when he started the "Macklin" series. His central character was a hit man, a murderer. How could the creator of Amos Walker do that? (Very well, actually. But I'm prejudiced.)

Bill DeAndrea has managed to produce a varied body of work under his own name, ranging from Matt Cobb's showbiz crimes to historical mysteries to his new espionage series. Still, he found it necessary at one point to become Philip DeGrave for a new series.

Of course, there are others, and you are, I know, aware of them. The question in my mind, though, is, how do you react? If you see a favorite author's name on a dustwrapper, is that sufficient impetus to buy that book? And, having bought it, what is your reaction if the book is not what you expected? (We are assuming, for the sake of this argument, that the quality of the writing and storytelling *is* what you expected.) Are you angry, and at whom is that anger directed: the author, the publisher, the bookseller for not warning you? Are you pleased to discover something new, even if it is not the kind of story you normally enjoy? What do you want from the writers you are supporting with your purchases?

As I said, it is not an idle question, and your reactions will help me, certainly, in my efforts to bring you the books you want to read. I think the writers might be interested as well; during those times that they are complaining about all the ineptitude affecting their careers, they never complain about you. That's why I extend my,

Best mysterious wishes,

Michael Seidman

MICHAEL SEIDMAN

We are happy (very happy) to announce that TAD now has a computer. All subscription records will be kept on the computer. Starting with the next issue (we hope) your label will be computer-generated (instead of tired-and overworked-people-generated). Printed along with your address on this label will be the last issue of your subscription. No more wondering when your subscription expires! If there is any error in address or subscription length, please let us know.

ALWAYS MYSTERIOUS:

"Walter B. Gibson, the Creator of 'The Shadow,' Dead at 88"

The New York Times
December 7, 1985

WALTER GIBSON IN MEMORIAM

BY J. RANDOLPH COX

In 1971, when this journal was in its infancy, barely four years of age, it published an article of mine about the place of The Shadow in the whole scheme of mystery fiction ("That Mysterious Aide to the Forces of Law and Order," TAD, No. 4 [July 1971], pp.221-29). Briefly stated, it examined the origins of the *idea* of a shadowy avenger of justice and suggested ways in which strands from past traditions in the genre had been gathered up into a fresh web spun by a consummate storyteller.

While I cannot claim credit for launching the many books and articles of "Shadow-lore" which followed, I like to think that I was in the forefront in recognizing the genius behind the raconteur called "Maxwell Grant."

While the publishers of The Shadow's magazine adventures, Street and Smith, might not have trumpeted the real name of their prolific author, it was never truly secret that Walter Gibson and Maxwell Grant were one and the same. As early as the October 1931 issue of *The Seven Circles* (the official publication of the International Magic Circle), there had been a notice calling attention to that fact. Elsewhere in that issue was the cover illustration for the November issue of *The Shadow: A Detective Monthly*. The lead novel was *The Red Menace;* it was only the fourth issue to be published. There could be no doubting the veracity of the statement. After all, the editor of *The Seven Circles* was Walter B. Gibson himself.

It was years after the publication of the last issue of *The Shadow* (1949) before I discovered that fact. Somehow, mingled with my own discovery of the joys of detective and mystery fiction was a continuing love of stage magic. I learned the names of Houdini and Kellar and Blackstone, and, most mysterious of all, the two Chinese magicians, Ching Ling Foo and Chung Ling Soo, from a chapter in a small paperback, *Magic Explained,* by Walter B. Gibson, copyrighted the same year that The Shadow vanished

from the newsstands of the nation. By the time I did know that Maxwell Grant and Walter Gibson were the same man, I had begun collecting detective fiction and had decided that my collection would not be complete without a few issues of *The Shadow*. I had known The Shadow from radio and the comic books (from Street and Smith), but now I wanted the original stories.

While I acquired copies of the magazine appearances of the mysterious avenger, I also continued to acquire books on magic by Walter Gibson. Of such desultory acquisitions is many a large collection begun. Somehow I found myself with quite a number of publications which I would learn someday were the work of Gibson. This included a complete run of a Street and Smith comic book called *Super-Magician*.

It was in 1977 that I finally met the man himself. It was quite innocently begun, the friendship between us. We were both browsing through some magazines at a dealer's table at a Pulpcon in Akron, and I asked him if he hadn't written some of the early scripts for the *Nick Carter* radio show. One thing lead to another—a visit to the hotel restaurant where we had dinner, an invitation to visit him at his home in Eddyville, New York—and the rest became a kind of history. The more I talked with him, the more fascinated I became with the man and what he had achieved, and the more I discovered that our paths were almost fated to cross. I found myself reaching for napkins on which to write down one more discovery. Here was a writer with more pen names than "Maxwell Grant," and I realized that I had been reading something by him most of my life.

Eventually, it became apparent that someone had to capture some of this lore. Certainly there were several articles, and a book or two, discussing his work with The Shadow, but there was so much more. With more enthusiasm than caution, I approached him with the idea of compiling as complete a bibliography of his works as was humanly possible. He was quite taken by the idea himself, possibly because he was contemplating writing his own memoirs and my work could assist him in that. I traveled to Eddyville several times, met him at conventions (including one of collectors of magic), and continued to probe him for areas in which he had published, pen names no one else remembered, and any anecdotes behind the publication of this volume or that. A sabbatical leave from the college where I am employed allowed me much time to concentrate on the project, and a visit with him in the summer of 1985 allowed me to tie up some loose threads. It was to be the last time I would see him alive.

With this sort of relationship to Walter Gibson, it is difficult to be objective and to assess his contribution to the mystery field. He left an indelible mark in that area where magic and mystery meet, where the reader not only wants to be thrilled and feel the gooseflesh, but demands the sensation. He put the *misterioso* (as he often called it) into the mystery novel.

The Shadow is an immortal in the annals of crime fiction. As such, he has become a symbol of the avenger, the law unto oneself, who not only captures but punishes evil men who cross his path. Now, that may sound like melodrama, and it is. The pulps were largely melodrama. Gibson's Shadow was good melodrama, in that once the storyteller had you by the sleeve you followed him to the end—because you wanted to know how it would all come out.

Pick up a Gibson novel at any point and you have the feeling that here is an author who enjoys what he's at. His stories move fast, so there is little time or place for subtleties of style, but how do you explain an author who can still include a phrase about the "moist sidewalks [which] lay black beneath the sullen walls of unlighted buildings" or who has a thrown knife convey a sound like "whim"?

Gibson enjoyed writing The Shadow more than anything else in his life. Writing The Shadow was a challenge, and he felt he was in total control of his actors and their destinies. He wrote a shelf of "how-to" books in the 1950s (but that was largely a research task), he wrote magic books (because he was a recognized authority), and he wrote true crime stories in which he could use his skills as a newspaperman. With The Shadow he was his own man and he could find places in the stories for all of the arcane lore stored in his brain, he could indulge his love of puzzles and games, and he could reveal as little or as much about his creation as he wished. The Shadow was meant to be an embodiment of the mysterious, and it would never have done to reveal all of his secrets. Not even in the famous novel in which *The Shadow Unmasks* (1937) was everything told so that there would be no further questions. Just as in his other major series about Norgil the magician, wherein we were not told everything about the hero (not even his real name), some things were held back on purpose, to be revealed only when the dramatic moment was right.

Walter Gibson left this world without telling us how all of the tricks were worked. □

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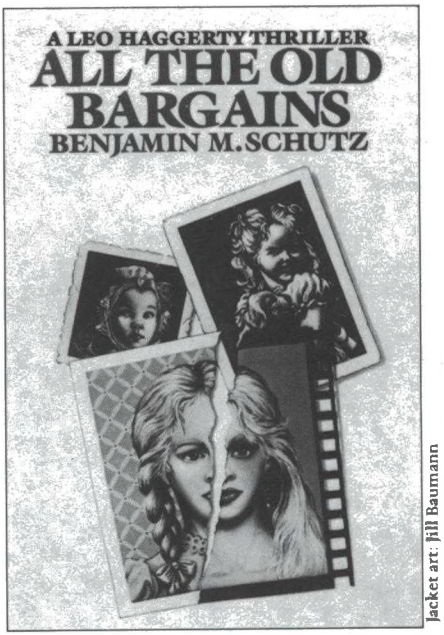

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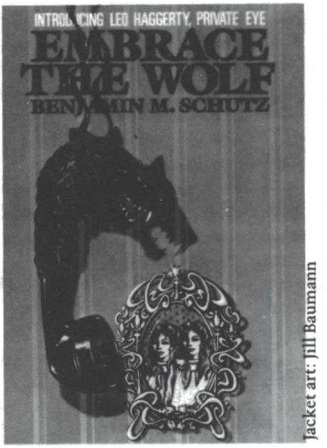

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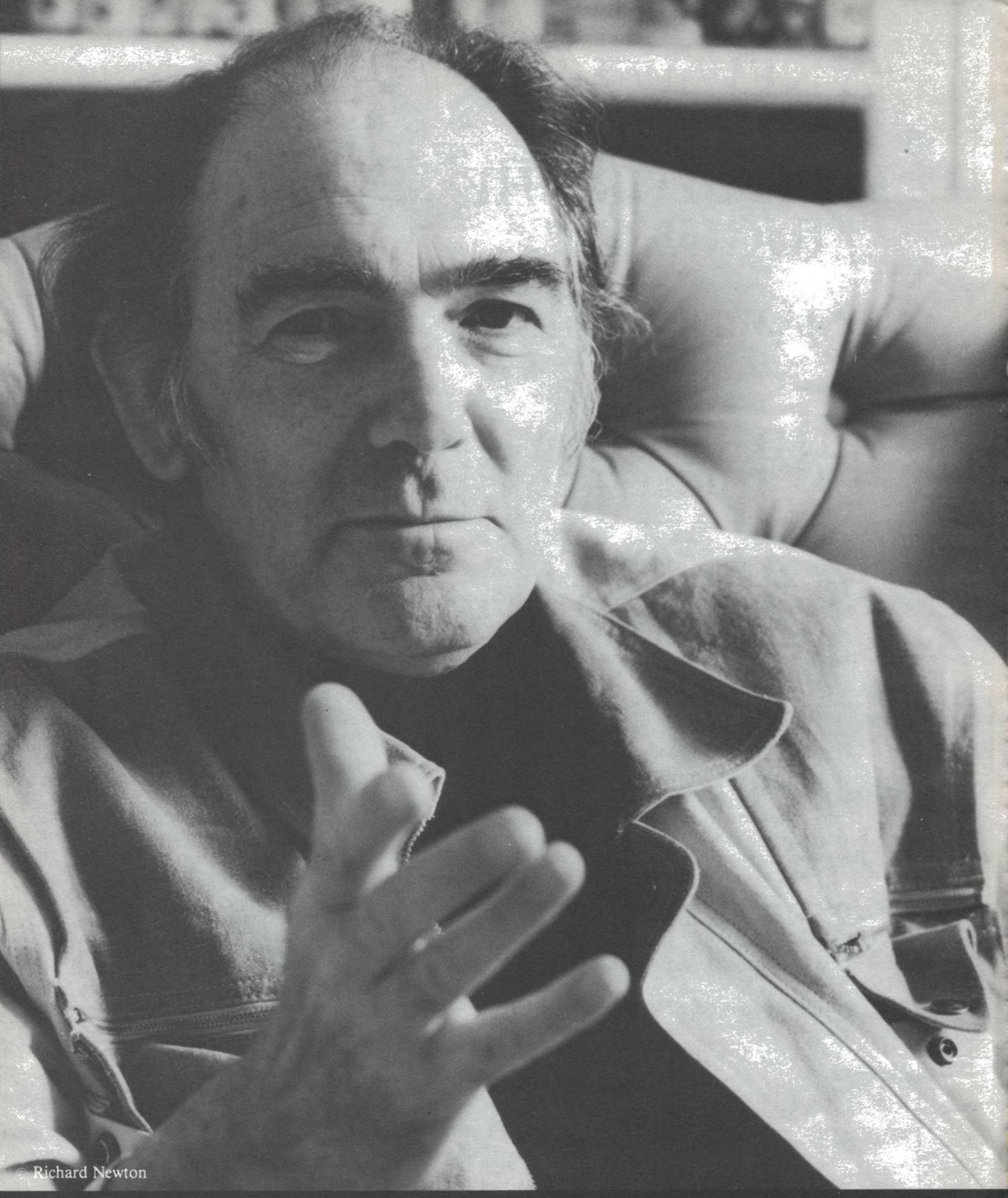


A CONVERSATION WITH

JOHN GARDNER

BY JOSEPH E. BITOWF

THE following conversation with John Gardner, one of England's most important espionage novelists, took place on November 20, 1985. The occasion was Gardner's 59th birthday, and shortly thereafter came the publication of the first volume of his new trilogy, "The Secret Generations." This is a multi-generational family saga that encompasses the history of British Intelligence within the passionate affairs of a single aristocratic family. It is unlike any other espionage novel in recent memory, and is an unqualified success.

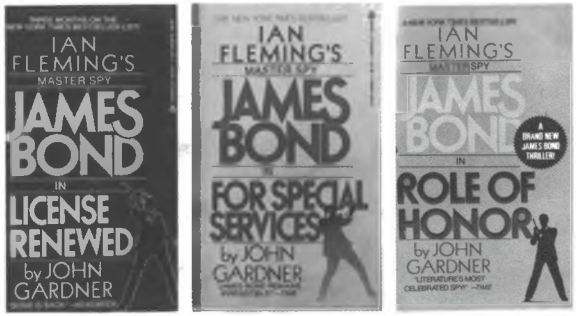
The conversation took place at the offices of The Mysterious Press.

TAD: Mr. Gardner, the first question that I would like to ask you is about your attitude toward interviews. In *Traitor's Exit,* you trashed the fictional interviewer for daring to suggest that there might be a bit of the author in some of his characters, even hinting that people like me asked Will Shakespeare that question. You also seemed a bit put out by an interview that took place some years ago with a reporter from the *Morning Star,* in which you were branded a leftist. Do you generally detest interviews?

Gardner: No, I rather like interviews. Except when the interviewer presumes too much. The *Morning Star* thing was very funny. The reviewer for the *Morning Star,* which is a Communist newspaper, said, "Let's have lunch together, and do an interview." And the interview was quite good. Then another paper picked it up and said that I was a lefty, which I am not. Now that's all that was about. I enjoy interviews; in fact, I sometimes read the final result. I do not read reviews any more, ever.

TAD: Since you are, without a doubt one of England's premier espionage novelists, you might have some mixed feelings about working with a character not of your own making, a character created by Ian Fleming. Of course, we are talking about James Bond. Is there anything that you can share with us about your feelings in this respect?

Gardner: Yes. Just to show you how dumb I am, they came to me and asked me to do it. I thought for a very long time about it, like two minutes, because actually it came at a moment when I figured I could do a very light book or I could do a serious book, which is the thing I like doing. And I thought, marvelous, I can do the heavy book for my own, and the Bond thing will be light and easy and fun. I was the first one on a short list of six people. They didn't tell me who the other five were. And I was gentleman enough not to ask. And I don't think they would have told me anyway. I just did it, and it wasn't until the first book came out that I realized what an enormous thing I'd taken on. Of course, I'm in a straitjacket with Bond. I cannot shape the character. Once you have the character, you've got it, and it means you write rather like Fleming. All I've done is update him, and, thank God, it's been successful, and 90% of the people who read him, apart, I gather, from the reviewers, love him. The one that is just finished is called *You Only Die Once.* And , after five books, I think I have just and only just got the measure of it enough to enjoy doing it. And I now do really enjoy doing them. I didn't enjoy doing the first four, but this one was a ball. I found it came very easily. It's fast and, I think, exciting reading.



TAD: Will you continue doing the series?

Gardner: The sixth Bond synopsis has been accepted. And I think it will probably be called *Tomorrow Always Comes.* And I guess I'm going to go on doing them, because it's now come to a point when it's working if I want it to work.

TAD: It's been said that you detested the Bond character. It was Douglas McCormick, in *Who's Who in Spy Fiction*... is that so? Why did you detest Bond?

Gardner: No. I don't detest Bond. I never did detest Bond. My first meeting with Mr. Bond was when I had a flu, and I had brought some books in from the library. Among them, two Bond books, and I devoured them. I was of that generation that really enjoyed them tremendously. Douglas McCormick did that interview with me long-range. I wrote some answers to some questions. I did not say I detested Bond. Rubbish! Absolute rubbish!

TAD: It's conventional publishing wisdom that mysteries can be funny, but that suspense or spy novels had better not be. So, in the face of this conventional wisdom, how do you account for your success with Boysie Oakes, and was there any reluctance on your part, at first, to try a comic spy novel?

Gardner: The first of those books started off as a very serious novel. It was going to be The Great British Novel, and it was going to be about how the government used individuals. How people are manipulated. And I wrote the first 10,000 words and sent it off to my then agent, who called me and said, "John, I want to talk to you." And I went off by train to London and sat down in his office, and he said, "John, this is dreadful. I mean, absolutely terrible, but I have an idea for you. Why don't you make it funny, because it could be very funny indeed." And, going back on the train, I came up with the funny ideas with regard to it. It's one of those strange things, that Oakes came just at the right moment. It was the right antidote to the more serious stuff. I mustn't deny the fact that it was a slight send-up of Bond. But it was more of a send-up of the hundreds of people who at that time were getting on what was called the Bond Wagon.

TAD: Why did you stop writing about Boysie Oakes?

Gardner: He was absolutely played out. And I shall never do another.

TAD: How do you feel about the film versions of your books? Do you like them?

Gardner: Awful. The first one—you must realize that I was of that age that grew up with the movies. I'm the original guy who went to the movies at least three times a week. And probably four, if I could sneak in on Saturday. So when I had a movie made of my book, it was the greatest thing that had ever happened to me. I went on location and reveled in the whole thing. I thought the movie was fabulous. Now, when it is on television, very late at night, I make certain that I've already taken my tranquilizers and am in bed with the door locked. *Stone Killers,* another version of a book of mine—the real title is *A Complete State of Death*—was set in London. It's about a Catholic cop with strange religious problems. I recognized one-and-a-half scenes. It was dreadful. I am probably one of the highest paid authors for movies, because it worked out to something like £30,000 per word for the title. You know, it was one of those stupid things—and then they changed the title. They say one thing and then they do something else.

TAD: Why do you think you became a spy novelist, as opposed to almost any other kind of novelist? Besides the obvious answer, which you have stated over and over again, the passion to entertain?

Gardner: The passion to entertain, of course. I think because as a child I was very secretive. Some people say that I am still extraordinarily secretive. I remember in my very early childhood spending literally hours sitting in a tree house watching people who didn't know I was watching them. I was an only child, which doesn't mean that I didn't have friends, you know. I belonged to a gang like everyone, and we would roam the streets of the town that I lived in and cause havoc with the girls. It was all very innocent. I think there is something of the spy—I've been saying this since the 1960s—something of the spy in everyone. You see it in England, I think you see it here—the twitch of the curtain as the stranger walks down the street. People like to know what's going on. That's why spy scandals make such big news. Because we like to think we know what's going on. But we don't. We just think we do.

I'm very muddled about religion. I spent five years as an Anglican priest. And then I found I had no faith and had to give it up.

TAD: What do you wish your espionage novels to tell us about the individual, society, and spies?

Gardner: I'm going to use the old movie saying that goes back, I think, to Mr. Mayer—messages are for Western Union. I don't have any messages; I just have entertainment. And I think the espionage novel provides great entertainment. Because you combine all sorts of things. It's got to have twists at the end, its got to have sudden turns. It's got to do with secrecy,

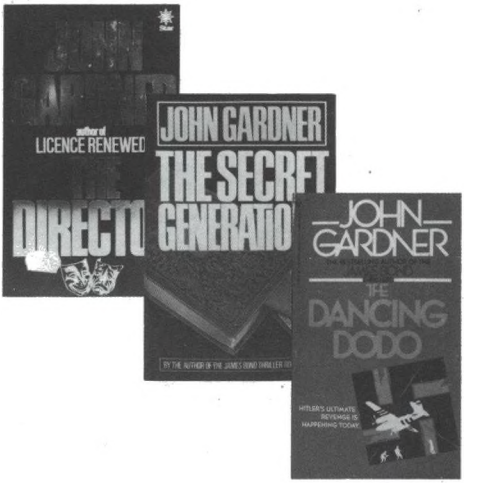
it's got to do with mankind's desire for privacy, but, no, I'm sorry, I've got no messages at all. Just pure entertainment.

TAD: You have been quoted as saying that your main passions are the secret world of security services, politics, crime, and police organizations. Do you have a comment about that? Are they still your main passions?

Gardner: I think so. Those and military history. The microchip—you can add that. I'm a computer freak. I do have a passionate interest in all secret societies, I suppose. To the outsider, you and I belong to a secret society. Authors are a secret society. Publishing is a secret society. I find publishing terribly interesting because we have our own jargon; we have our own secrets, which we keep from the public, we have our own little scandals. We are all hot little modules of secrecy, which finally meld together into one big module, in a sense.

TAD: There is an element of the occult in many of your novels—obvious titles such as *The Werewolf Trace, The Dancing Dodo,* and even in "The Secret Generations." It is apparent in Derek Torry's religious problems. Do you think that this recurrence of the occult has any relationship to your own religious vocation?

Gardner: Probably, yes. I'm very muddled about religion. I spent five years as an Anglican priest. And then found out that I had no faith and had to give it up. I still have not got a faith back. I believe in a Prime Mover, but I do not believe in the Christian religion as such, though I have a great admiration for the Christian ethic. I lean toward Judaism, but I have some problems in that I lean toward certain areas of the occult—precognition and preknowledge, knowing when someone is close to you and knowing there is something wrong with them, when they are a long way away, and that you should call them. That has happened to me. There are incidents in *The Werewolf Trace* which actually happened. And they happened to me. The crying child happened to me in



Kensington many years ago; in fact, another child living in that house reputedly saw something also. In any case, there certainly was sobbing. There was a very strange sound in the house, so much so that the people who were there got used to it and just used to say, "Well, there it is again." The other thing that happened to me personally was the drawing on the wall in *The Werewolf Trace.* It was the face of a sixteenth-century boy, a little page boy, complete with this little page-boy bob, upside down on a wall, and it appeared through a layer of paint. It had been painted over and it re-emerged through that. It was

not done by any of the workmen present at the time. It was not done by a child. It was a very expert drawing. And it continued to reappear through the layers of paint, and it remains inexplicable. And that is where that came from. And it really was scary. It was still there when I left that house. It is still there. It couldn't be gotten rid of.

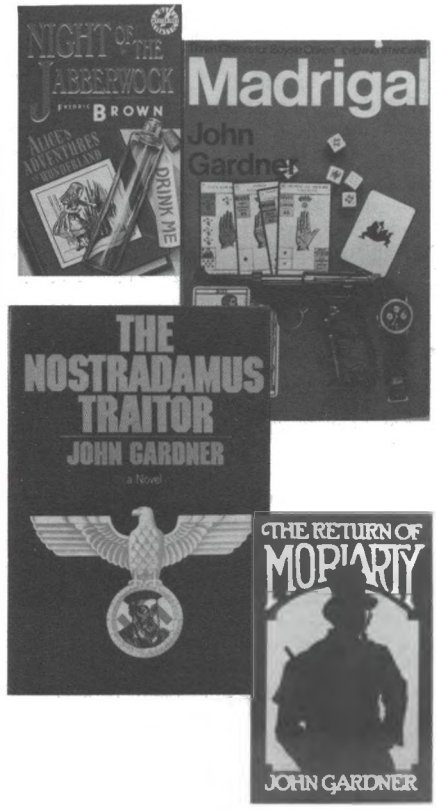
TAD: Do you thing you might ever want to write a purely occult novel, or a horror story?

Gardner: No, no. Stephen King has got that all sewn up, and I'm not going to take him on. I think there is some sort of King-Straub stuff in *Dodo*. I always remember...I had finished the book and I was driving to London. I had a very great friend sitting in the back of the car reading the typescript, and he suddenly went "*Ah!*" And then he said, "John, is this for real, or are you having us on?" It was the sequence where the guy opens the door and there's this thing. That scares the living daylights out of me because I can still remember writing it. And I didn't know that the thing was on the other side of the door. He went to the door as I was writing—because my method of writing is to tell myself the story—and he opened the door, and there was this terrific dead, decaying thing outside. It scared the daylights out of me. I kept on writing, but I didn't have a clue why I had done it, or what the outcome was going to be. I didn't know if it was real, or whether this was just me, being silly. At one point, I thought, well, I've got to take this out. I can't justify this. But then I came up with a reason, and it all worked, and it wasn't supernatural.

TAD: How abot the Moriarty books? You must have done an enormous amount of research into an unusual background. That time period is like the other side of the moon to Americans. I'd like to hear about that.

Gardner: That was quite incredible. One day, out of the blue, I got a call asking me to come and talk about a very interesting proposition. I must admit now that what I'm about to say is going to raise the hackles of everybody, and I'm going to get a lot of hate mail. I do not particularly like Sherlock Holmes. Julian Symons once said that, out of the twelve best detective stories, at least six would be Sherlock Holmes stories. I agree with him. But I would also say that, out of the twelve worst detective stories, six of them would be Sherlock Holmes. Now, they asked me to do the Moriarty books, and I immediately thought, well, okay, have I got complete freedom? And they said, "Yes." But I realized very early on that what they were looking for, in fact, was not what I was going to give them. They were looking for a Flashman-type Moriarty. And I thought, no. First of all, it's going to be my Moriarty, not the Conan Doyle Moriarty. And second, I would do it for real. I went into a sort of six-month preparation for the thing, reading every book that I could come across

on the Victorian underworld, and books on Victorian underworld slang—and came up with extraordinary things, quite extraordinary things. Victorian crime was a lot like organized crime today, and like the Mafia. If you were a "family" man, you were a criminal. The word "racket," which we always associate with America, is actually a Victorian underworld term, which crossed the Atlantic and then came bouncing back through the movies of the '30s, with people like Bogart and Cagney. And for real, through Mr. Capone. I became totally immersed in this thing. I am told I was very beautiful to live with at the time; I did identify with Moriarty terribly. I became very courteous, almost a Victorian gentleman—very quiet and calm. I apparently became the nicest I've ever been to those who were close to me.



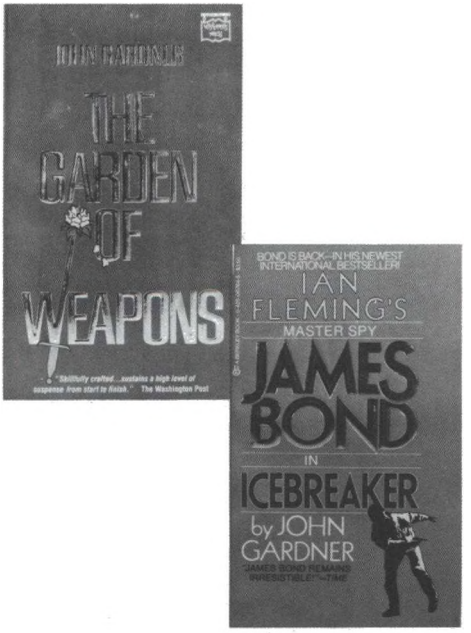
TAD: The Kim Philby affair seems to continue to haunt British and American espionage novelists. I think I can see a tiny bit of it in "The Secret Generations," and in the Kit character in *Traitor's Exit*. Why do you think it has such power?

Gardner: Well, *Traitor's Exit* was a send-up of the whole thing, because I think it got very boring. They were always talking about Kim. I had a lovely note from Graham Greene the other day: he said, "Kim is still getting around a lot, I had a card from him from Cuba." Yes, I think it's getting very boring that we identify all moles with Kim, when in fact we should be identifying them with very different people nowadays. I think the affair is still important insofar as moles are concerned, because there are moles around. You know it, and I know it, and we've seen one or two surface recently. We've seen the Walker brothers surface, and they were an odd kind of mole because they were doing it for money, not for ideology, and that's very sinister. Kim Philby says the Burgesses and McLeans of this world are doing it for ideology. I think it's a very different breed now, who don't do it because of an ideological point of view, but do it for money. I heard someone connected to the Foreign Office say, "The one thing I hate about Kim Philby is he didn't take money."

I had a lovely note from Graham Greene the other day: he said, "Kim Philby is still getting around a lot. I had a card from him in Cuba."

TAD: About the Herbie Kruger trilogy, *The Nostradamus Traitor, The Garden of Weapons,* and *The Quiet Dogs.* It has been said that you consider this trilogy to be your best work, and that your own favorite book is *The Garden of Weapons.* Is this accurate, and can you tell us why you feel so strongly about Herbie Kruger in particular?

Gardner: Well, I love Herbie. Herbie is very real to me, a very real person. And I'm very sad for him, as well. I'm glad everything worked out. When I think



of the three books, the middle one [*The Garden of Weapons*] is the best, and I enjoyed doing it most of all. I believe that some of my best work is in that book. At first, I didn't know about Herbie. I had written the first section of *Nostradamus,* which was the bit at the Tower of London with the German lady, and put another piece of paper in the typewriter —that will show you how long ago it was—it was a typewriter in those days, not a word processor. I sat down and wrote, "The file landed on Herbie Kruger's desk." And I said, who's Herbie Kruger? I kept on writing, and there he was in front of me. This again was a strange precognition thing. I then went to Ireland for five years to find a tax hideout. When I arrived in Dublin, I found the apartment that I had got organized was not ready. Had to stay in a hotel. I was told by another author, "Oh, go there. It's a German couple and their daughters. They run the place." I remember arriving in the dark of night. No sign of light. Rang the doorbell, and there was a yapping of dog and some curses in German. Then the door opened, and there stood Herbie Kruger. Quite extraordinary.

I'm not going to tell you his name, but he was the guy I had described to the life. Including the walk, the size, the bulk, the accent—everything! He was there. And I was able to observe him at close quarters. He was a German ex-infantry sergeant.

I've been asked to do another one, to bring Herbie back. There are plans along the line to do that.

TAD: What was the genesis of "The Secret Generations"? What did you hope to show and tell us?

Gardner: I hoped to tell you a story, some of which had a basic truth and fact. In the '60s, someone came to me and said, "Would you write a short history of espionage, of security and intelligence, from 1909?" which is a good beginning date. Because what we now know as MI5 and BSIS and their various offspring came into being in 1909. It was a good starting point, and I spent a week looking into it. Then I said no, I'm not a historian. It's going to take too long, and there is not enough money to carry me through the project. I can't do it. And they said, "How about a pictorial history?" And again I said no, because that's equally difficult. So I went away, but I kept thinking about this. I thought I'd love to do this, but I'm a writer of fiction, so why don't I do it as a novel, and sort of follow this skeleton of truth? Let's see what we can get by following the lives of two families, one British, one American. Tell the story, some of which will be true. The great fun is playing God because there are areas where you can say, yes, I've got my theory about this. This is the official explanation. I don't believe the official explanation. Let me tell my theory, just as someone like Charles McCarry has done with *Tears of Autumn.* In "The Secret Generations," I play a little bit with the facts. There are real characters there as well as fictitious characters, real events as well as fictitious events. For example, I came across a letter from Clementine Churchill to Winston, written in 1914, in which she said she had very firm information that there was a plot to kidnap her by air and hold her for a ransom. The ransom was a capital ship of our Navy. She writes to Winston, saying, "If this happens, you are not to let them have even the smallest or the cheapest ship. I could not bear the shame of returning to England ransomed. I would rather die and allow you to live Stoic." This letter exists in truth, and it is a peg upon which I hang another character. It is very important to the book.

TAD: The betrayal, or the duplicity of one character is quite shocking to an American reader, and probably even more so to a British reader. Were you prepared from the beginning to have him be a double agent?

Gardner: No, I was not prepared. It shocked me to the core. I only discovered it halfway through the

book. I slowly make a voyage of discovery. Sometimes I have to backtrack. Sometimes I have to take new bearings. Sometimes I get lost, which is very sad. But that's the job. That's what you do. And if you've gone wrong somewhere—it's just like writer's block. I believe writer's block is sometimes a question of—how does one know one is going in the right direction? And that's the moment you go over to the other computer and you fight the Battle of Normandy, or the Battle of Britain, or you fly an airplane, or you shoot down aliens. Then you go back and you put the other thing right. So that's how I discovered it, literally, halfway through the book.

TAD: How far will "The Secret Generations" trilogy carry us? Do you know that yet?

Gardner: To the present day. The Railtons will remain, and the Farthings will remain. They are obviously up and coming.

TAD: When do you expect the next volume to be published?

Gardner: I think the publishers expect it tomorrow, but they aren't actually going to get the manuscript until the end of [1986]. The news has got to be broken very quietly to my British publisher that that is what is going to happen. My American publishers, who dominate the scene, have already agreed to that, because I'm doing another Bond beginning January 2.

TAD: Can you tell us what you believe you have accomplished with this first volume of the Trilogy?

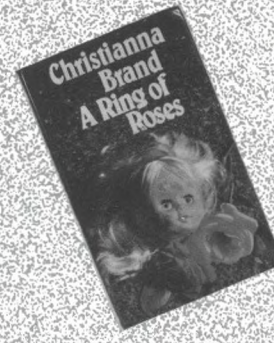
Gardner: I think I have pulled off this double trick, to combine the family saga with the novel of espionage, which is not an easy thing to do, but it's great fun trying. You can imagine my database programs in the computer, full of files on which one is scratching his nose; which woman is promiscuous; which one does this or that with the other; when they were born; when the children were born—all so I can carry on with it.

TAD: I think of "The Secret Generations" as sort of R. F. Delderfield with blood.

Gardner: Thank you, that is the second nicest compliment that I have ever had. That really is. We have a radio soap opera which has been running since the year one in England, called *The Archers*. *The Archers* is about a farming community, a farming family, and it is compulsive listening for about 50% of the population. Now, someone has written that the Railtons are to espionage what the Archers are to farming. That and the Delderfield comment—I treasure. I really do treasure. Thank you.

TAD: Thank you, Mr. Gardner. □

The Slightly Mad, Mad World of Christianna Brand



By Robert Barnard

In the field of popular fiction, critics may help to make reputations, but in the longer term it is the reading and buying public who determine who the classic writers are. Critics may throw brickbat after brickbat at, say, Patricia Wentworth (the present writer has lobbed the odd one himself), yet she stays obstinately on the shelves of British bookshops and is currently being reprinted in the States. In the new edition of *Bloody Murder,* Julian Symons sniffs delicately at the reputation of Josephine Tey, and sniffs rudely at that of Christianna Brand, yet the demand for both in library editions and paperbacks is constant, and Brand, one is delighted to note, is currently being made widely available again in this country.

Which is remarkable, because here, especially, Brand should have been forgotten long ago. Though very much still with us (as the other two are very much not), her last full-length crime book to be published in the States, *Tour De Force,* is now thirty years old. Her one crime novel since then, *The Rose in Darkness,* failed to find a publisher here, as did her two short-story collections (though a special collection of her short fiction, *A Buffet for Unwelcome Guests,* was put out by a university press). Yet the reputation lives on, and a new generation of readers queues up for *Green for Danger, Fog of Doubt,* and the rest. It looks as though Miss Brand has the quality that lasts, so it may be worthwhile trying to analyze that quality and to discover the reasons for its appeal.

There is a spirit that suffuses the eight Brand novels which is compounded of many different attributes and to which I give the name "Christiannity." Readers who find such a designation blasphemous may prefer to call it "Brand X." Rather than try to define this quality, I prefer to point to a collection of characteristics: gaiety, gallantry, insouciance, effrontery, wit. These characteristics are to be found both in the people in her novels, and in her treatment of them. The suspects in the books whom the author seems to like most and feel closest akin to may be a little mad, even highly irresponsible, may even, indeed, turn out to be murderers, but they all have charm and nerve, and they lead with their chins. At best, they sail through life buoyed and protected by their effrontery; at worst they say to life: "All right—knock me down. See if you can keep me down there for long!" Their most characteristic activity is cocking a snook, and they do it with style.

This quality of "Christiannity" gives to the best of her books a vivacity, a vigor, and a charm which are unique, though some of the very early Allingham books have something slightly akin to them. Brand has other skills: she is perhaps the best puzzle-maker of her generation of crime writers, which is the one immediately following the Golden Age; she writes wonderfully speakable dialogue, which is so vividly in character as often to avoid the need for lengthy character-exposition; and she has a rare (in crime fiction) elegance and sense of style. But it is the "Christiannity," I think, that has won her her readership and has kept renewing it during her long and obstinate silences.

One can illustrate *in parvo* the effect of "Christiannity" on familiar crime-story materials through a brilliant little short story, "The Merry-Go-Round." The merry-go-round in question is one of blackmail, with murder coming at mid-circuit. The setting is a small town where moral values have ossified into rigid social ones, and where respectability and appearance are everything. Since the motive force of the plot is a collection of pornography, this might suggest a date earlier than the 1960s, when it was

published, for by that date in sophisticated circles a bit of hard porn was neither here nor there. One must remember, however, how little impact permissiveness had had on small and respectable British towns.

The protagonists of the story are two sets of parents. Harold Hartley has married beneath him, though nobody in this snobbish, stifling town acknowledges that it was he who got the best of the bargain. He is suspicious and neurotic, while his wife dotes on their only daughter and craves social acceptance for her sake. The Birdells are social leaders, and despise Mrs. Hartley and her daughter. They are determined that the little girl shall not be allowed into the same snob school as their daughter is to attend.

When Harold Hartley lies dying, he is visited by Mr. Birdell (a lecherous solicitor), who then claims that the dying Harold is worried about something and volunteers to go to his office to find whatever it might be. After Hartley's death, Birdell blackmails his widow with a package of porn which he claims to have found there. After paying up twice, as a sort of rehearsal, Mrs. Hartley shoots Birdell and uses the pictures she rightly claims to have found on his desk to blackmail his widow into allowing the Hartley child into the posh school and sponsoring her own social acceptance into the community.

Mean people, then, and rather sordid material, but the distinguishing mark of "Christiannity" is given it by its framing device of the skipping game played by the children of the two families, in which they reveal a complete knowledge of the goings-on of their parents, and a calm acceptance of the awfulness of adults:

> "'Cod, skate, sturgeon, shark—
> Your mother's on the blackmail lark!
> Whale, walrus and sea-cow—
> *She's* got the feelthy peectures now!'"

The energy, exuberance and gaiety-in-darkness of the children is quintessential Brand and removes any nasty taste from the murky doings of the adult characters, though, as so often, even the gaiety has a dark side: the ending has a cunning glimpse of a possible future in which the children themselves find a blackmailing use for their knowledge. It also has a neat twist—an additional piece of information that completes the circle of the "merry-go-round."

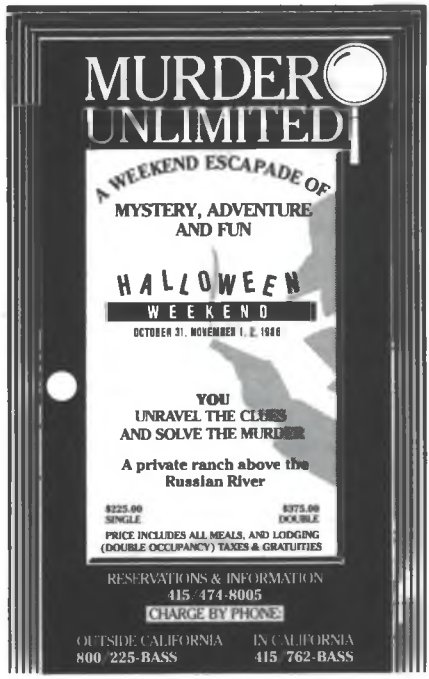
Christianna Brand's first novel, *Death in High Heels,* is not entirely typical Brand, being looser and less clean-cut in its plot and its telling. This has its advantages as well as disadvantages: we break more often out of the charmed circle of suspects, and there is a greater sense of life going on around the case. Brand is always good at the talk of girls together, particularly bright, hopeful, middle-class girls, and, though there are rather too many of these in this book for them to be entirely individualized in the reader's mind, there is a general impression of sparkling brightness which is appropriate to the setting of a Regent Street couturier's. The least individualized of the girls is the victim, which is a pity, and, if the murder has to be done so early in the narrative, one wishes that more could be done later to bring her to life in the reminiscences of other characters. Still, in spite of some unlikelihood, this was a notable debut, and the writing was already marvelous, reminding us that even at this stage Brand was a mature woman and a well-read one:

> Mrs. 'Arris, the charwoman, would be there already, flicking a casual duster over the office furniture. Upstairs in the great gleaming showroom, with its golden carpet and shimmering curtains, its crystal lights and flattering

mirrors, the silver glittered and the parquet shone and the glass was clear and bright; but in the basement, where the gilded staircase gave way abruptly to an unwholesome chocolate brown, a flick and a promise would do; and a flick and a promise was all Mrs. 'Arris vouchsafed.

Prose writing is always difficult to analyze satisfactorily, being a matter of rhythm as well as words, of finding the right rhythms, and varying and contrasting them. Here the sway of the lines describing the couturier's showrooms comes down to earth with a dismissive thump as we descend below stairs. The effect is reminiscent of early Waugh—of the way, for example, Mrs. Hoop's vision of eighteenth-century elegance and style at the Anchorage House reception is abruptly earthed by the horsy Lady Circumference's "That's all my eye."

The seven novels which succeeded *High Heels* form the basis of Brand's popularity. Since they cannot all be analyzed at length, some general features may be noted. Brand likes to have a small and closed circle of suspects, emphasized by her frequently putting a cast list at the front of her books and telling you that so many victims and one murderer will be found among these people. The smallness of these cast-lists gives many of the books what I call a *Cards-on-the-Table* feel: we are not to be surprised by the identity of the murderer but intrigued by the successive character-revelations or by the ingenuity of the various possible solutions



Her characters' most typical activity is cocking a snook, and they do it with style.

proposed. One negative effect of this, on occasion, is that at a certain point in the book one after another character is proposed as the murderer, with possible means by which he could have done it, and this can seem mechanical and contrived. One of the books, *Death of Jezebel,* in fact seems to me mechanical and contrived both in its scheme and its solution. On the other hand, the splendid circular effect of *London Particular* (christened in the States, by that wonderfully pedestrian mind at Scribner's which thinks up new titles for British crime novels, *Fog of Doubt*), by which in its beginning is its end, is miraculously ingenious and satisfying.

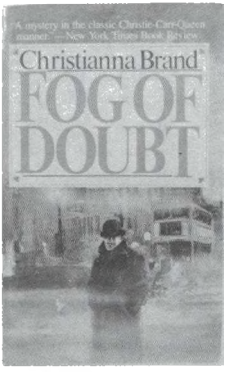
In most of these books, Brand is sparing of description and relies for creation of character and atmosphere on her dialogue, almost always with striking effect. That her verbal skills are not confined to dialogue, though, can be seen in *Cat and Mouse,* a modern Gothic story which reworks a novel by another C.B.—the eldest Miss Bronte. Here the deformed wife in the locked bedroom is rendered in such a way that it formed one of the nightmares of my childhood. What I found I had forgotten, by the time I re-read the book recently, was the splendidly bouncy surrounding material, pure "Christiannity," of Miss Friendly-Wise and her Welsh policeman (or is he?). In *Green for Danger,* the crisis atmosphere of a wartime hospital is conveyed more by the general sense of bustle, tiredness, and incipient hysteria among the characters than by any more direct descriptions designed to arouse admiration for the beleaguered British and the testing and unfamiliar work which the middle-class civilian suddenly finds himself undertaking. This is most people's favorite of her books, and one reason (apart from the fact that it is very, very good) may be the sense of murder in the midst of national crisis—it is anchored more firmly into national life than, say, *Heads You Lose.*

Through all these books slouches the wonderfully endearing figure of Inspector Cockrill, grouchy, fallible, susceptible, his hat askew, his fingers stained with nicotine from the wispy little self-rolled cigarettes which he smokes. He is in the grand line of eccentric detectives, and physically he is rendered as palpable as any of them. Often the comedy of the books is enriched by the contrast between the setting and the chief investigator—a stately home, with

Cockie in it; London, with Cockie in it; San Juan el Pirata, with Cockie in it (though in the latter case the reader has only with difficulty convinced himself that Cockie would ever have gone on that damned tour in the first place).

Tour De Force may be looked at in greater depth, not because it is the best of her novels, though it is certainly among the best, but because the "Christianity" is most perfectly integrated here with all the other sides of her talent. The novel concerns a Mediterranean package tour which is stopped short by murder on a tiny island, San Juan el Pirata, off the Italian coast. The island, Spanish in origin, is barbarous in its customs, disgraceful in its morals, and has a history uniquely besmirched and ignominious.

I had pigeonholed the book, after adolescent reading, with those "package tour" mysteries such as Christie's *A Caribbean Mystery* and Marsh's *When in Rome,* but such comparisons are unfair, except insofar as they underline the distinction of Brand's achievement, and the special qualities of her invention. For San Juan is an entirely imaginary principality, which is yet given the sort of lunatic solidity which makes Christie's Caribbean seem a very

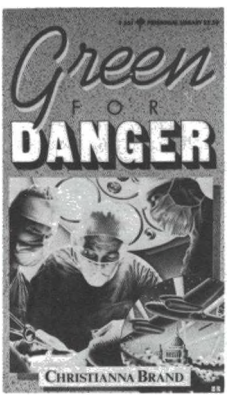


shadowy place indeed by comparison. Even the very language—Brand's invention, and a mongrel, slovenly amalgam of Italian and Spanish which she uses with hilarious effect—seems to sum up the place, as does the proud boast "Smuggled" which is affixed to most of the tourist items for sale. San Juan el Pirata is a cross between Kaddafi's Libya and one of those South American dictatorships of which the Reagan administration does approve. It is a comic version of Conrad's Costaguana: romantic/exuberant, where his is romantic/pessimistic. It is perhaps worth remembering that Brand was born in Conrad territory, to empire administrators and traders in the Conradian mold, and that she grew up when Conrad's reputation was at its height.

For what strikes one here first of all is the romantic richness of the writing: the prose has resonances, intellectual and emotional, well beyond anything in the earlier books. San Juan is corrupt, dangerous, ridiculous—and yet it is lovely, a supremely glamorous snare. And all sides are embodied, sometimes simultaneously, in the prose descriptions. Sometimes this is just a matter of an exact rightness of phrase: the sea at night "like wrinkled black treacle under the silver moon"; the ducal palace, a "cobweb of fretted white marble"; and who that has experienced the heavy and inconvenient furniture in elderly Mediterranean hotels could ever have found Brand's perfect description for it—"Iberian-Abbotsford"? Sometimes she lets herself go in longer passages of beautiful, and beautifully judged, description:

> The island, seen from the deck of the gay little vaporetto which plies between Barrequitas and Piombino on the mainland, looks like an outsize cathedral, rising abruptly out of the sea. Perched fantastically at the tip of its spire is the fairy-tale palace of the Grand Duke. To the West, built up from the sheer rock face, is the prison—a dark, dank fortress where, in the splendid old piratical days, a countless toll of prisoners mouldered to merciful death; balancing it to the east is the Duomo which houses the illustrious bones of the founder, and to the north the cobbled streets thrust their way down to the quays of the fishing boats. But looking southward over the sunlit blue starred with a dozen satellite islands, what would be the façade of the cathedral slopes down, crumbling and pine-clad, to an indentation of little beaches: and here, above many-flowered terraces stand the long lines of the Bellomare Hotel whose boast it is that every room faces into the sunshine and over the sea.

But the important thing is that this rich, romantic atmosphere can also absorb the familiar high spirits, gusto and relish for the absurd, and the two things co-exist quite without effort or incongruousness. The romantic sets off the absurd, the absurd highlights the romantic. Contrasts proliferate, the central one being that between the setting and the tourists themselves, whose very skins proclaim them to be aliens: Mr. Fernando, from Gibraltar, may be at home here—"a vast, quaking, reddy-brown sea-anemone"—but his lady-love points up the screaming disjointedness of place and people, "Wrapped in striped towelling like an angel on horseback, a very thin prune in a very large rasher of streaky bacon." Shins are irritated, peel, go an unhandsome red—and thereby hangs a clue! Throughout all this, Brand's command of the various attitudes and reactions of different types of Englishman abroad is unerring: who but Brand, in the mind of Mr. Cecil, could talk about "that heaven-blue faded cotton that one saw on all those touching ouvriers and people in France"?



It is the word "touching" that shows such a sharp eye for people and attitudes.

In the action and characterizations, too, the serious and the absurd commingle. The characters conceived most in depth, the Rodds, are done with considerable insight. He is a pianist who has lost his right arm (he seems never to have heard of the Ravel Concerto for Left Hand). His wife knows, at all moments of difficulty or exasperation, that whether she tactfully helps or tactfully refrains from helping, she will do the wrong thing: he is unable to accept help gracefully or reject it. This is sensitively done, in a familiar way. More unusual are the English spinster and her gigolo. In Christie or Marsh, these would inevitably be pathetic or absurd, and they are both here. But, more unusually, they—both of them—have dignity as well, and this combination of apparently contradictory qualities is splendidly dramatised:

"I marry Miss Trapp because she is kind and true and will keep me in future from being what—and I say, perhaps you are right—you call adventurer. I marry her when she is penniless. Thanks to me that she is penniless, yes—but I offer her not only gratitude, not only some recompense. I offer my heart." He placed his hand upon the plump bosom covering that organ with a gesture oddly moving and dignified; and spoilt it with a second gesture, addressed to Mr. Cecil, not dignified at all.

Of the plot one can hardly speak, beyond saying that it is traditional, done in bravura style, and hinges on a variation on the *Lord Edgware Dies* trick. It bears the closest scrutiny *on its own terms,* which are not the terms of realism but those of the most elaborate artifice. The familiar Brand device of presenting a putative case against one after another of the suspects is here much better integrated into the flow and texture of the book as a whole, so there is no feeling of the mechanical or of the clever-clever. And the clueing is impeccable, with Brand (as sometimes in Christie) taking you back to where the clues are, rubbing your nose in them, and still fooling you nonetheless.

San Juan el Pirata reappears in Christianna Brand's latest novel, *The Rose in Darkness* (1979), though only on the periphery of the story. Arguably it would have been better to substitute some other principality, less concretely present in the reader's memory, for San Juan is a survival from a rather different sort of book—more artificial, more high-spirited, more full of gusto.

Not that *Rose* lacks charm or humor, or the essential "Christiannity." The cast-list of principals, Sari Morne and the Eight Best Friends, see to that. For they are very much a group, it seems, and they behave with group instincts: loving, mutually dependent, they both prop each other up and strike sparks off each other. Many of them have the typical Brand combination of flair, style, and vulnerability. Some are creative—in films, designing, acting. Some are on drugs, or fly to them at the least crisis. Most of them seem to live in sudden switchback alternations between gaiety and depression, as they do too between poverty and affluence. Some of them, in spite of their real bravery, are pathetic figures, fighting a world that has decreed they are losers. Sari Morne has starred, some years ago, in just one film, and has been, briefly and unsatisfactorily, Princess of San Juan. There is also Sofy, or Sofa, who has become that fish out of water, a fat actress:

"She's got to stay fat because nowadays she only gets fat-girl parts, but there aren't all that many fat-girl parts going: and she has to spend a fortune stuffing herself with food she can't afford, to keep herself in work she doesn't get."

A typical Brand touch this, envisaging a world in which the President of the Immortals thinks up ludicrous traps for hapless mortals, whose writhings titillate his twisted sense of humor.

We get a vivid sense of the Eight Best Friends as a group: the in-jokes, the accepted mispronunciations, the assertions of standards whose main function is to fly in the face of commonly accepted standards. How hideous to wear colors that *match,* Sari proclaims, and their whole life scheme demands thrilling, clashing contrasts. This creates a consistently bubbling surface of shocks and laughter, which is only occasionally interrupted by murder, threats, terror. As the murder investigation proceeds, however, we are made aware of various things that, properly considered, could lead us to take another

Brand's clueing is impeccable—she takes you back to where the clues are, rubs your nose in them, and still fools you nonetheless.

view of the Eight. We learn that they are not as stable a group as we have imagined: there have been others, bosom pals, unceremoniously dumped. We wonder momentarily why some of the group *are* members at all: Charlie, the devoted but dull Pakistani; Nan, the complete middle-class suburbanite, welcomed into the group on the strength of one poorish joke at a party. What is this group *for,* we wonder?

Once again we have a *Cards-on-the-Table* situation. Though Vi Feather has been killed at some unknown spot and is found in Sari's car, Miss Brand limits her suspects by the favorite device of the list at the beginning. Here, in addition to her familiar assurance that "Among these nine people were found a victim and a murderer," she also assures us that "There is no collusion as to this murder." Anything like a surprise solution, therefore, is out, and we are certainly provided with enough information along the way to fix on the murderer if we will. The interest of the book lies more in stepping gingerly through the delicate web of fantasies and supportive half-truths which Sari and her group have woven around themselves. The group itself, we gradually see, is a late product of the permissive '60s, and by the end of the book "doing your own thing" seems considerably less attractive than it did at the beginning. The last pages show the group rapidly crumbling, as one by one they are discarded, or face up to the truth about the egocentric nature of their activities and lifestyle. The gaiety that permeated so many of the early pages first begins to sound forced, then latterly becomes nothing more than a distant echo.

It should be emphasized, in view of the above account, that, though Christianna Brand was in her seventies when the book was published, this is on no account to be classed with, for example, Agatha Christie's arthritic attempt to enter the world of swinging London in *Third Girl.* All of Brand's characters bear the mark of authentic observation. They are individuals rather than symptoms, and they carry a conviction and a vitality that is quite lacking in Christie's unfortunate book. What publisher's quirk it is, or what agent's incompetence, that has led to the novel's not coming out in the States it is difficult to imagine. If I were one of Brand's American fans, I would certainly want to know on what grounds I was being deprived of her first novel in twenty years.

Christianna Brand, then, is a survivor. She is also a survival, in that so much of her practice and her aims seem consonant with the great writers of the Golden Age. To me, one of her claims to importance is that, while others who began writing when she did took the British crime novel in the direction of realism and a sober reflection of the everyday, she resolutely held aloft the banner of artifice. I see that one of the words I have used most often in this appreciation is style, and that, I think, is the right emphasis. Christianna Brand's contribution to the crime novel is, most memorably, to give it style and panache. □

Short notes...

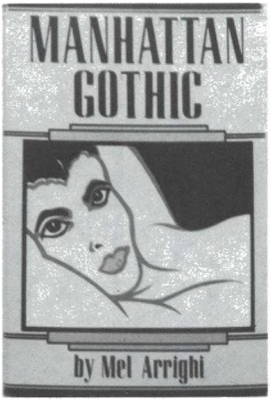
Harold Adams has told several stories about Depression South Dakota and drifter Carl Wilcox. The latest is ***The Naked Liar*** (Mysterious Press, $15.95). Here a sexy lady is accused of the murder of her unfaithful husband. She asks Wilcox for help, and, because she has an equally sexy sister, Carl agrees. The dead man dealt in stolen jewelry, and a pair of tough guys come to town to collect money owed them or—failing that—the equivalent in Wilcox skin. Interesting tale, nicely atmospheric.

If gothic novels are normally female oriented, Mel Arrighi's ***Manhattan Gothic*** (St. Martin's, $14.95) offers the male counterpart. Carl Hopkins is really a wretched fellow. A novelist with writer's block, he here sells himself into emotional, mental, and sexual slavery to a mysterious and beautiful Italian widow. Unable to differentiate truth and lie, love and sex, incapable of normal relationships, he sets sail on a sea of disaster in his leaky and rudderless vessel. The story sparks a sort of grim interest, but in the end the reading is not particularly rewarding.

The Coyote Cried Twice by Austin Bay (Arbor, $14.95) is gratifyingly fresh in protagonist, and well uses its range setting. Bill Buchanan, a pilot in Vietnam and now a drifter, falling into trouble where it's to be found, then drifting, hitchhiking on, comes thus to border country Texas, to a job planting fence posts on the Masterson spread. His boss, the foreman, is a likeable chap, the ranchowner a cold lady. The former gets murdered, the latter doesn't, and Buchanan, provoked by both, decides to find out what's going on among the rich folks and their nocturnal airplane traffic.

Literate ugliness is what ***Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*** by Thomas

Boyle (Godine, $15.95) offers. We've yet another psychopathic multiple killer in New York, with the target, as usual, females. While he's about his bloody enterprises, a reprehensible and egocentric college professor is kidnapped by the People's Revolutionary Tribunal for the crime of elevating style over



content. A not very engaging Brooklyn cop, Lt. DeSales, is saddled with both cases while trying to sort out his relationship with a black prostitute. And much is mourned about the gentrification of tenement/brownstone areas and the resultant expulsion of downtrodden minorities. Intriguing tale, but not fun.

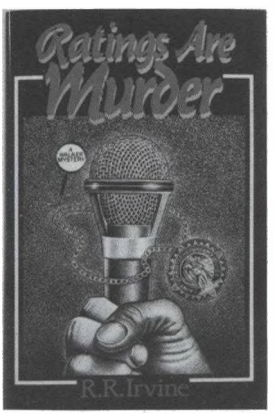
Lesley Grant-Adamson, newspaperwoman turned freelance writer of fiction and TV documentaries, debuts with ***Death on Widow's Walk*** (Scribner's, $13.95). Her protagonist is Rain Morgan, a gossip columnist and basically a shallow and uninteresting woman. She's vacationing in the English village of Nether Hampton in a cottage borrowed from the cousin of her current bedmate. An archaeologist, rummaging in local ruins, turns up a fresher body than anticipated. Then comes another murder, and Rain, not enchanted with police attitudes, conducts her own inquiries, putting herself at risk to a murderer in the process. Very predictable plot.

Margaret Hinxman, a former film critic in London, uses well her knowledge of movies and television in ***The Night They Murdered Chelsea*** (Dodd, Mead, $13.95). *Wild Fortune* is a tremendously successful TV serial, the star of which, Dame Charlotte Saint-Clair, announces her withdrawal from the show. Charlotte plays Chelsea, a much hated character, so it's decided to write her out through murder. And on the night that show is broadcast, Charlotte is killed for sure. Enter retired Insp. Ralph Brand, who has worshipped Charlotte from afar and who cannot accept the police identification of the killer. He will—despite orders—poke about, and someone will die for his meddling. Good story.

Ratings Are Murder (Walker, $13.95) by R. R. Irvine is the third appearance (the first in hardcover) for TV reporter Bob Christopher. Los Angeles is sodden with day after day of unremitting downpour. The time for the annual measuring of TV audience size is at hand, a process crucial to advertising revenues and careers. Channel 3's management and personalities are maneuvering for position with monomaniacal fervor. Christopher is losing the battle of the calorie and is only one belt notch away from a hefty fine. All this mess needs is a murder or two to really stand the

TV station on its ear. Coming right up: the cleaning lady who wants Bob's help in getting the Catholic Church to reinstate Saint Christopher is murdered just outside the studio. The madness is diverting but a little hard to follow.

Foxprints by Patrick McGinley (St. Martin's, $14.95) is the most bizarre affair I've ever read that might loosely be called a crime novel. It's set at Foxgloves, a house in the London suburbs occupied by four divorced men. Their leader is Quilter, a psychotic preoccupied with foxes, their habits and excre-



tions. As a matter of fact, the entire novel has an unwholesome interest in animal functions—for example, the Midnight Crapper, who leaves unflushably large deposits in the toilet. A series of murders also takes place in the vicinity, and our peculiar male quartet comes to suspect one another. The author displays some uncommon wit, and speckles his text with words unlikely to be recognized much less understood. For very specialized tastes.

Margaret Maron's fourth mystery, ***Bloody Kin*** (Doubleday, $12.95), is set in rural North Carolina, where family relationships prevail. Jake Honeycutt, a native, is killed accidentally. His wife, pregnant, a New York model and fashion designer, decides to live on the Honeycutt property. There she is an outsider, though kin, and her discovery of a body on the premises does not increase her sense of welcome. Then doubt is cast on the accidental nature of Jake's death. What has all this to do with Jake's pictures of his Vietnam buddies? Maron writes with a nice touch.

George Milner's ***A Bloody Scandal*** (St. Martin's, $11.95) seems to celebrate the accomplishments of an unrepentant multiple murderer, one Peter Farquarson, rear admiral in the British Navy. The admiral, having committed the unforgivable folly of winning a military engagement (a minor skirmish blown to heroic proportions, actually), sets aim at those standing in the way of

his financial dreams. Those thus standing are fairly numerous, alas, and of course complicated plans run some risk of unzipping. I guess all this is a satire—the tale is recounted with considerable wit and style and will bear reading even if the "hero" is an unredeemed bounder.

In Roger Ormerod's ***Seeing Red*** (Scribner's, $12.95), Harry Kyle, a suspended police officer, is asked to look into the accidental death of a well-to-do amateur scholar and scientist. The dead man's daughter believes it was murder, and certain factors—plus a few suspects—come to light to support her views. Her husband, a car dealer of flexible ethics who had much to do with Kyle's earlier suspension, now plays a shadowy role, and Kyle is by no means a dispassionate, uninvolved investigator. A pleasant read.

A Day Without Sunshine by Leslie Whitten (Atheneum, $16.95) is an intrigue tale arranged against an unusual backdrop: world wine production. A British lawyer and his international cohorts, a crew not bashful to murder, begin to buy up vineyards around Europe and elsewhere. A small Austrian winery, run by Bethany von Mohrwald and her husband, resists the lawyer's minions and hires Aubrey Warder to find out what's going on and stop it. Warder, who tends a few vines in Maryland himself, is a retired investigative reporter, well equipped to investigate but less well to deal with killers. The schemers seem bent on cornering the wine trade and making a financial killing, but what is their ace in the hole? This is an engaging tale, but curiously bloodless and low in tension for all the bloodletting that goes on. □

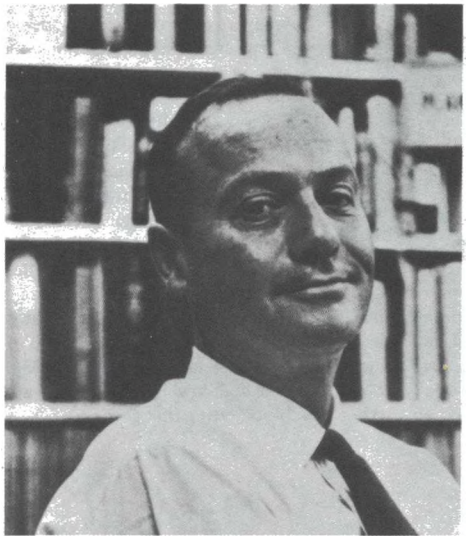
The legitimate heir to the Hammett–Chandler–Macdonald tradition.

—Quote from *The Cincinnati Post* on the back cover of Robert B. Parker's *The Godwulf Manuscript* (Dell, 1983)

Robert B. Parker has taken his place beside Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald.

—Quote from *The Boston Globe* on the back cover of Robert B. Parker's *A Savage Place* (Dell, 1981)

ROSS MACDONALD'S LITERARY OFFENSES



EVER SINCE June 1, 1969, when the influential *New York Times Book Review* published a front-page article by William Goldman describing the Lew Archer mysteries as "the finest series of detective novels ever written by an American," Ross Macdonald's reputation has flourished until he is now regularly linked with the leading members of the "hardboiled school" of American fiction by critics who apparently have never read his books—or else have never read Chandler's or Hammett's. It is poor Raymond Chandler who has to turn over most frequently in his grave, because Macdonald aped him so mercilessly that some reviewers and dust-jacket blurb writers seem to have gotten the idea the two men were virtually collaborators or, worse yet, that Chandler wired together the crude prototype which Macdonald came along and very graciously perfected.

But Ross Macdonald was a pretentious, over-educated, second-rate writer who did the American detective novel more harm than good. Chandler called him a literary eunuch. Macdonald has no business being hyphenated with writers such as Chandler and Hammett and sometimes James M. Cain. When he is elevated to their level, he drags them down to his.

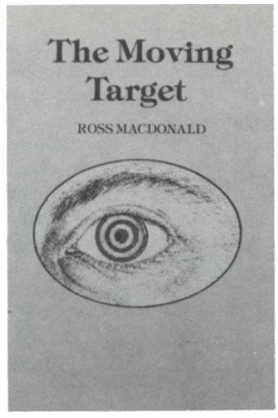
To illustrate a few of Macdonald's literary offenses, I have chosen one of his best-known works, *The Moving Target,* which was made into the movie *Harper* starring Paul Newman. The film adaptation was written by the aforementioned William Goldman, who says in his recently published *Adventures in the Screen Trade* that he went through all the Lew Archer books then in print—about ten of them—before selecting *The Moving Target.*[1] So it seems fair to consider it an example of Macdonald's better work. Macdonald himself wrote of this, his fifth published novel: "I remember how I labored over those scenes, striking them out in heat and then reworking them over and over for more than a year."[2]

Here are the opening lines:

The cab turned off U.S. 101 in the direction of the sea. The road looped round the base of a brown hill into a canyon lined with scrub oak.

I have thought and thought about that second sentence, and have even used up a lot of paper drawing diagrams, but I can't for the life of me account for that seemingly gratuitous loop around the base of the brown hill. You would think an author would at least try to get his opening sentences right, wouldn't you? If the cab is heading in the direction of the sea—that is, west—then after doing that little loop

The best successor to the Raymond Chandler-Ross Macdonald tradition to come along in a decade.
– Quote from *The New Republic* on the back cover of Stephen Greenleaf's *Fatal Obsession* (Ballantine, 1983)



By Bill Delaney

it is still heading west, isn't it? Why the loop? Is the road through the canyon at a lower elevation than U.S. 101? Does the cab have to wind down around a hill to get into the canyon? No, because it loops around the *base* of the hill. Now either the paving contractor was guilty of a little boondoggling or his men were drunk the day they worked on that stretch or some local politician was planning to put a house on that hill or else Macdonald's loop is a purely stylistic loop, like a ballet dancer's toe-twirling in mid-leap, intended to give the sentence an added flourish. This may seem like a trivial point, but it is illustrative of one of Macdonald's major weaknesses: he was more concerned with sound than sense; he preferred style to accuracy any day of the week.

Lew Archer, the Los Angeles private eye, has been summoned to the home of Mrs. Elaine Sampson, wife of a multimillionaire who has been missing for nearly one whole day. The Sampson mansion is located in a fictitious place called Cabrillo Canyon near Santa Barbara. Archer lives only about eighty miles south of Cabrillo Canyon, but instead of driving up the coast like a sensible man, he has evidently taken a train or bus or airplane to Santa Barbara and then hired a cab to drive him back down the coast. Or is it possible he took the cab all the way from Los Angeles? I can't believe that, even of Lew Archer. However, if he were approaching Cabrillo Canyon from the south, then there might be an explanation for that little loop around the brown hill. There could be a turnoff to the east that looped around and went under Highway 101. You see a lot of those tunnels along the coast highway. But in that case he couldn't say the cab turned in the direction of the sea, because this is the Pacific not the Atlantic, and the cab would be turning away from the sea. Maybe Archer was reading Proust in the back seat and not paying attention. Anyway, we know that Cabrillo Canyon lies south of Santa Barbara because when he is being driven to see Mrs. Sampson's lawyer, Albert Graves, the limousine enters town at the south end.

Why Archer is taking a cab to his client's home in the first place is a mystery within a mystery. Is he trying to save time? It has never taken longer than two hours to drive from L.A. to Santa Barbara. You can make it in an hour and a half if you step on it. So it should only take about an hour and forty-five minutes at most to drive to Cabrillo Canyon. If he drove to the airport in L.A. (it would have been the one out in Burbank in those days) and was able to catch a flight right out, how much time could he possibly have saved after taking the cab back down the coast? Most likely it would have taken him much longer to fly than to drive. Archer owns a car – a blue convertible – and it isn't in the shop. In Chapter 5, we find him using it to get around Los Angeles looking for Ralph Sampson, and later he uses it to drive back to Santa Barbara, which is what he should have done the first time. We see in Chapter 4 why Macdonald couldn't allow his hero to drive to the Sampson mansion on his first visit – but I'm not going to tell you why just yet; I want to make you guess.

After the road loops around the brown hill, we get our first sample of Macdonald's dialogue writing, which has been compared with that of Hammett and Chandler by critics of questionable discernment.

"This is Cabrillo Canyon," the driver said.

There weren't any houses in sight. "The people live in caves?"

"Not on your life. The estates are down by the ocean."

It is a mistake for anybody but Lew Archer to try that kind of wit on a cab driver. Any cabbie you or I have ever ridden with would have responded, "What the hell are you talking about caves? There ain't no caves around here. Where do you see any caves?" And Archer would have had to say, "Well, I just mean, heh-heh, I don't see any *houses*." Whereupon the cabbie would have hunched over the wheel and snorted, "We're *getting* there. Keep your shirt on. Let *me* drive the cab, will you?" And that would have been the end of the snappy dialogue.

But Archer always has splendid rapport with

members of the proletariat. Macdonald, who was never the least bit bashful about comparing himself with Raymond Chandler, wrote: "Marlowe and Archer can go anywhere, at least once, and talk to anybody. Their rough-and-ready brand of democracy is still peculiarly rampant on this side of the Sierra Nevadas."[3] This is true of Chandler's Philip Marlowe, but it is only true of Lew Archer because Macdonald's lower-class characters are as unreal as Munchkins. They seem on the average about one foot shorter than his middle-class characters and to be sort of deformed and cowering. I picture them dressed in sackcloth and wearing wooden shoes. Macdonald seems to have gotten his working men and women from the pages of Victor Hugo of the canvasses of François Millet rather than contemporary American reality. Lew Archer can question one of these humble souls relentlessly for four solid pages of dialogue without that person once interrupting to ask, "Hey, who in the hell are you, Jack? And how come you're asking me all these questions?" Nowhere is Macdonald's bookish mentality more evident than in his depictions of the working class. The fact that he didn't truly like or understand the common man explains why he couldn't write in the language of the common man—though that's what he complacently assumed he was doing. If Chandler wrote like "a slumming angel" (a Macdonald-simile Chandler would have detested), then Macdonald wrote like a visiting professor.

You would think that anybody—not even a professional detective but anybody with ordinary horse sense—would guess that if wealthy people wanted to build a colony of mansions along the Southern California coast, they wouldn't want to be stuck in a canyon full of rattlers and coyotes but just might decide to build where they could have a view of the ocean. But this doesn't occur to Archer until the driver says, "The estates are down by the ocean..." (and probably mutters under his breath, "...you jerk!"). Then when they come in sight of the blue Pacific "stretching deep and wide to Hawaii," Archer undoubtedly thinks, "Hey, this *is* a better spot to build a house!" As a detective, he is not in the class of Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe but that of Inspector Clouseau and Maxwell Smart.

Macdonald's description of the setting includes one of his famous patented double-barreled similes, of which Eudora Welty, in another eulogistic article in the *New York Times Book Review,* wrote: "A great deal of what the writer has to tell us comes by way of beautiful and audacious metaphors."[4]

> The light-blue haze in the lower canyon was like a thin smoke from slowly burning money.

It was in his grotesque metaphors and similes more than anywhere else that Macdonald displayed his obtuseness and bad taste. He was fond of speaking of himself and Raymond Chandler as if they were practically drinking buddies, but this is what Chandler wrote of him:

> Have read *The Moving Target* by John Ross Macdonald and am a good deal impressed by it, in a peculiar way. In fact I could use it as the springboard for a sermon on How Not to be a Sophisticated Writer. . . . There is nothing to hitch to; here is a man who wants the public for the mystery story in its primitive violence and also wants it to be clear that he, individually, is a highly literate and sophisticated character. . . . "The seconds piled up precariously like a tower of poker chips," etc. The simile that does not quite come off because *it doesn't understand what the purpose of the simile is.*
>
> ...The thing that interests me is whether this pretentiousness in the phrasing and choice of words makes for better writing. It does not. You could only justify it if the story itself were devised on the same level of sophistication, and you wouldn't sell a thousand copies, if it was. When you say "spotted with rust" (or pitted, and I'd almost but not quite go for "pimpled") you convey at once a simple visual image. But when you say "acned with rust" the attention of the reader is instantly jerked away from the thing described to the pose of the writer. This is of course a very simple example of the stylistic misuse of language, and I think that certain writers are under a compulsion to write in recherché phrases as a compensation for a lack of some kind of natural animal emotion. They feel nothing, they are literary eunuchs, and therefore they fall back on an oblique terminology to prove their distinction.[5]

What Chandler meant about the purpose of the simile, of course, is that, by comparing the unfamiliar with the familiar, it should help the reader understand what the writer is trying to communicate. But with Macdonald, it is usually the other way around: he compares the familiar (e.g., haze near the ocean) with the unfamiliar (slowly burning money). Why would people be burning money down by the ocean (or anywhere else)? Why burn it slowly? Are they afraid they might change their minds? Does the smoke from slowly burning money look any different from burning hot-dog wrappers? I wouldn't know because I have never seen anyone burning money—and if I ever did I would run over there and try to snatch some out of the flames. Maybe this is Archer's roundabout way of saying the people in Cabrillo Canyon have "money to burn." In other words, it might be a simile for a metaphor. But if they have money to burn, why burn it slowly? Maybe they want to tempt people like me (and you) to try to grab some of it so they can sick their Dobermans on us. Macdonald should have known that people who live in mansions don't burn money and people who burn money don't live in mansions.

Macdonald's favorite writer was Marcel Proust.[6] I guess it figures. It was undoubtedly from the French aesthete that he acquired his taste for off-the-wall similes. But Proust's similes, however recherché, generally help clarify the author's subtle meaning. Macdonald's are all too obviously intended to make the reader *think* he has subtle meanings and to impress the reader with his talent. Chandler admitted he had stretched sensibility as far as he could go with

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his character Philip Marlowe. If a man is too sensitive, he just doesn't become a cop—or at least he doesn't last long as a cop. But Macdonald displays his own insensitivity by bragging about his Frankenstein creation as if it were the quintessential perfection of Chandler's crude prototype. Lew Archer is just too sensitive to be a cop. That's why he seems so unhappy all the time. It isn't existential *angst* or anything as fancy as his admirers try to make out. He should have been a hair stylist or an interior decorator.

The driver turned on the fan-shaped drive and stopped beside the garages. "This is where the cavemen live. You want the service entrance?"

"I'm not proud."

"You want me to wait?"

"I guess so."

Not only is Archer going to enter the house by the service entrance, but the cab driver (who is still sort of chuckling over that cavemen joke) somehow *knows* he is going to use the service entrance. He can tell a schmuck when he sees one. In the beautiful opening of Chandler's *The Big Sleep,* we see how a private detective should behave.

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills. I was wearing my powder-blue suit, with dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars.[7]

And Marlowe waits for Norris the butler to admit him through the tall front entrance where he sees the now-famous stained-glass window in which the knight in armor is untying the naked lady with the conveniently long hair. Marlowe keeps his cool even when the General's nymphomaniac daughter Carmen topples into his arms and later when the other daughter Vivian tries to "ritz" him and pump him for information in her all-white bedroom. One of the

CHANDLER CALLED ROSS MACDONALD A LITERARY EUNUCH

things we admire about Marlowe is that he knows how to handle himself in any situation; but Lew Archer usually seems to have one hand in his pocket and one foot in a bucket.

A heavy woman in a blue linen smock came out on the service porch and watched me climb out of the cab. "Mr. Archer?"

"Yes. Mrs. Sampson?"

"Mrs. Kromberg. I'm the housekeeper." A smile passed over her lined face like sunlight on a plowed field.

Now get this: Archer is calling on Mrs. Sampson, wife of a multimillionaire who lives in a mansion in a private beach colony. A heavy woman in a blue linen smock, with a face like a plowed field, comes out on the service porch and he goes, "Mrs. Sampson?" What kind of detective is this guy? What would Mrs. Sampson be doing on the service porch dressed in a maid's uniform? Does he think she's playing peasant like Marie Antoinette? Archer can recognize the oil painting in her bedroom as a Kuniyoshi (whoever *he* is), but he seems congenitally incapable of making the simplest logical deduction. Maybe if Mrs. Kromberg had been carrying a mop it would have given him a clue. And this is one of the scenes Macdonald reworked "over and over for more than a year." I would love to have seen the first draft.

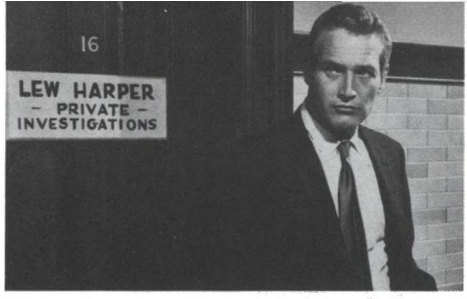
I paid off the driver and got my bag out of the back. I felt a little embarrassed with it in my hand. I didn't know whether the job would last an hour or a month.

Archer at least deserves credit for being embarrassed about arriving at his client's home in a taxi with his suitcase. It shows he has some dim idea of how a normal person would behave. He brings his suitcase and his gun but leaves his *car* in Los Angeles. Maybe he thinks this is going to be one of those English-type mysteries like *And Then There Were None,* in which all the murders conveniently take place under one roof. It's a wonder he didn't bring his tennis racket!

"I'll put your bag in the storeroom," the housekeeper said. "I don't think you'll be needing it."

This has got to be the most awkward entrance of a major character in all of Western literature. It reminds me more than anything of Groucho Marx. I picture Archer and the housekeeper wrestling over that suitcase in the kitchen until the handle breaks off and the whole think dumps open on the linoleum. It's a good think Mrs. Kromberg has the delicacy to relieve the poor chump of his suitcase; otherwise he might carry it right up to Mrs. Sampson's bedroom, and that forthright lady might say, "Jesus Christ! I wanted you to find my husband. I didn't expect you to move *in.*"

When we get to Chapter 4, we finally understand why Macdonald didn't let Archer simply drive his own car up the coast to Cabrillo Canyon in the first place. This "imaginative novelist," whose style, according to Eudora Welty, is "very tightly made" and "doesn't allow a static sentence or one without pertinence,"[8] wanted to describe an airplane flight from Santa Barbara to Los Angeles. For this purpose he has Alan Taggert, Ralph Sampson's private pilot and gofer, fly Archer back home. Archer couldn't have gotten the free plane ride, you see, if he'd brought his car. I'm sure Macdonald labored over this logistical problem while he was laboring over



LEW ARCHER IS JUST TOO SENSITIVE TO BE A COP. THAT'S WHY HE SEEMS SO UNHAPPY. IT ISN'T EXISTENTIAL ANGST. HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN A HAIR STYLIST

everything else, but even an imaginative novelist like himself couldn't figure out a way for Archer to fly back to L.A. and leave his car in Cabrillo Canyon.

Archer, who is always happy to halt his investigation to admire a pretty view and will step blindly over a corpse to examine a Kuniyoshi, records the following aerial impressions:

> Santa Teresa was a colored air map on the mountain's knees, the sailboats in the harbor white soap chips in a tub of bluing. . . . The peaks stood up so sharply that they looked like papier mache I could poke my finger through.

Macdonald should have saved the Saint-Exupery number for another novel (not that it was worth saving), because he forces poor Archer to drag his suitcase in and out of a half-dozen conveyances over three different counties without ever opening it once. It must have been a big one, too, if he thought he might stay with the Sampsons for as long as a month. It probably contained an extra suit, a sports jacket and a pair of slacks, six clean shirts, six changes of underwear, six pairs of socks, his toothbrush, underarm deodorant, shaving accessories, a map of Santa Barbara, a box of extra cartridges for his gun, a copy of *Swann's Way,* and a conservative plaid bathing suit in case they let him use the pool. It's a good thing he didn't bring a Saratoga trunk because it would have been hard to get it aboard Sampson's private plane.

After walking out on a performance of one of Wagner's operas, Tolstoy wrote of the German composer:

> The question for which I had come to the theatre was for me answered indubitably. . . . From an author who can compose such false scenes as I witnessed here, which cut the aesthetic feeling as though with knives, nothing else could be expected; a man may boldly make up his mind that everything which such an author may write will be bad, because such an author does not apparently know what a true artistic production is.[9]

The same can be said of Ross Macdonald. His later novels may show some improvement over *The Moving Target,* but he could never approach the artistry of Hammett or Chandler because he lacked the capacity. He had the literary equivalent of what musicians call a "tin ear." He could hardly write a decent sentence. Here, by way of comparison with Archer's plane ride, is an unobtrusively beautiful sentence by Dashiell Hammett from the scene in *The Maltese Falcon* where Caspar Gutman tosses the envelope containing ten one-thousand-dollar bills to Sam Spade.

> The envelope, though not bulky, was heavy enough to fly true.

Macdonald boasted about having mastered the art of writing in the American colloquial language, but he could never have composed such a sentence. In the first place, if he wrote a beautiful sentence he wanted you by God to know it was a beautiful sentence. He would have compared the envelope to a Japanese lantern or something. His prose, both in his fiction and his nonfiction, is opaque because it is inaccurate and overwritten. His shortcomings as a writer are nowhere more glaring than in his overblown similes, which are regarded by his admirers as the crowning glory of his art.

Here is an example offered by Jerry Speir in his critical study titled *Ross Macdonald.* Speir introduces the quote with the following explanation: "Perhaps the most persuasive argument for the unique appeal of Macdonald's similes can be made through a close inspection of their use in one novel to support and clarify the author's general themes. *The Underground Man* offers many opportunities for such evaluation." (Speir italicizes the similes so we will be sure not to miss them, though it is very hard to overlook a Ross Macdonald simile: they have a tendency to zoom at you like the sponsor's logo in a TV commercial.)

> They [the thin beams of sunlight peeping through the drawn blind] were thrust across the room *like the swords of a magician probing a basket to demonstrate that his partner has disappeared. As if he would like to disappear indeed,* the gardener crouched in the corner of the iron bed with his feet pulled under him. . . . He peered at the swords of light thrust through the chinks in the blind *as if they were in fact the probes of a rational universe finding him out.*[10]

At first glance, this is certainly a striking image. But Speir recommends a "close inspection," so let us move in. We visualize the sunbeams crisscrossing the room horizontally, vertically, and at various diagonal angles. But wait a minute! This cannot be. There is only one light source. The sunbeams are all coming through little holes in a blind drawn over a single window. So the light rays must all be parallel and close together. What kind of a magician would stick all the swords in at the same angle like that? Or aren't

we supposed to ask such questions? Even an audience of little kids would know the pretty lady in the shiny costume was curled up where the swords couldn't reach her. Furthermore, we realize we are being asked to visualize this trick from *inside* the basket. (That's the sort of thing Ross Macdonald does to you.) Here is another instance of comparing thing familiar (sunbeams in a room) with something unfamiliar (a basket stuck full of swords from the point of view of a woman who, according to Macdonald, isn't even there, since the magician is supposedly demonstrating that she has disappeared). But Macdonald takes us even deeper into his Dadaistic imagination by comparing his metaphorical swords to "probes of a rational universe"—whatever *those* might be. So we have a metaphor within a metaphor or simile within a simile—and all within a basket. If you can see anything *rational* in it, you're crazier than I am.

I have seen this sword trick performed a number of times. The magician never uses a basket but a trunk fitted with slots on all sides to stick the swords through. I think Macdonald has the trick confused with the Indian Rope Trick or a snake charmer's act, but confusion is his normal mode. Anyway, the magician doesn't stick the swords into the trunk to demonstrate that his assistant has disappeared (not that this would matter in the least to Ross Macdonald or Eudora Welty in their quest for Higher Truth): the magician does it to create the illusion that he is sticking the swords *through his assistant* while she remains inside. If he wanted to demonstrate that she had disappeared, he would simply lift the lid and show us the empty trunk. Magicians do this sort of thing all the time; they use mirrors or something. But in this trick the magician does just the opposite: he pulls the swords out, opens the trunk, and shows us the girl is still inside. What would be the point of sticking a bunch of swords into an empty trunk, or basket?

Let's replay the scene in slo-mo. Archer throws open the door and stops in his tracks. In one sweeping glance, his trained mind takes in everything. He and the gardener are not in a room but in a basket. A gigantic magician is sticking swords into the basket to demonstrate that his assistant has disappeared, but somehow Archer and the gardener manage to avoid being impaled, though it should be twice as easy to stick two grown men as one slim girl. Now Archer sees that the swords are not swords but probes of a rational universe. (There might be a loogan behind the door hefting a rod, but Archer wouldn't notice that where there are sunbeams to look at.) Does the gardener see them as swords or only as probes? If he sees them as swords, then he is inside the basket with Archer, but if he only sees them as probes of a rational universe, then maybe only Archer is inside the basket. In that case, how can he see the gardener? Archer says, "He [the gardener] peered at the swords of light as if..." etc., but that doesn't mean the gardener *sees* them as swords of light. Maybe only Archer sees them as swords of light while the gardener is seeing them exclusively as probes—or as sunbeams that are "in fact" probes (I love that "in fact"!). The gardener is one of Macdonald's proletarian types. It wouldn't look too good if such a stunted creature could see more in the sunbeams than the hero. The gardener probably sees the sunbeams as (1) sunbeams, (2) swords, and (3) probes; but Archer beats his three-of-a-kind. He sees them as (1) sunbeams, (2) swords, (3) probes, and (4)—he sees that the *gardener* sees them as sunbeams, swords, and probes. The poor dumb gardener probably thinks Archer just sees sunbeams.

Macdonald's writing is not ridiculous unless you think about it. It seems intended for people who have taken the Evelyn Wood course and can read two thousand words a minute. Reading Macdonald is like skating on thin ice: if you slow down, you're lost.

> We writers, as we work our way deeper into our craft, learn to drop more and more personal clues. Like burglars who secretly wish to be caught, we leave our fingerprints on the broken locks, our voiceprints in the bugged rooms, our footprints in the wet concrete and the blowing sand.[11]

This is a sample of Macdonald's nonfiction, which is every bit as murky as his fiction. I have known quite a few writers but no burglars—at least none who told

MACDONALD'S WRITING IS NOT RIDICULOUS UNLESS YOU THINK ABOUT IT. IT SEEMS INTENDED FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE TAKEN EVELYN WOOD'S COURSE AND CAN READ TWO THOUSAND WORDS A MINUTE

me they were burglars, although some were so hard up they could have been burglars on the side. I have never heard of a burglar who wanted to be caught; it seems somehow out of character for a member of that furtive profession, though I suppose it takes all kinds of burglars to make an underworld. My impression is that it is far more common for murderers and rapists to want to get caught, but, if Macdonald had said we writers are like homicidal sex maniacs, he might not have gotten many of us to go along with his analogy. I don't think most of us would even agree to be like burglars who want to be caught, but let's assume for a moment that you are a writer-burglar and have a secret urge to do one-to-five in the slammer with a bunch of losers. You might try leaving your fingerprints on broken locks, though it would be better to leave them on doorknobs and mirrors. I guess it is a question of how badly you want to be caught and how soon. You might leave a voiceprint in a bugged room if you could figure out which room

was bugged. You might even be gross enough to tramp through the wet concrete on your victim's new driveway. But there would be absolutely no point in walking through blowing sand, even if you could find a convenient sand dune, because the sand would blow right over your footprints. If you insist on walking through blowing sand because it seems sort of *Beau Geste*-ish, then I'd strongly advise you to do so *before* you walk through the wet concrete; otherwise you'll be clumping around with great big balls of sand and concrete stuck to your shoes and an exasperated look on your face reminiscent of Oliver Hardy.

Do we writer-burglars "secretly" wish to be caught, as Macdonald says, or do we *unconsciously* wish to be caught? If it's a secret wish, that means we know about it but haven't told anybody else. But I should think it would be a secret that we were burglars at all. So who could we tell? I guess we might tell our wives, but even that isn't such a hot idea. If we were known to be burglars, we wouldn't have to worry about being caught. And if we are not known to be burglars, there is no one to keep our secret wish from. On the other hand, if we unconsciously wish to be caught, how do we justify some of the crazy things we've been doing, such as traipsing through wet concrete and shouting out our names while sneaking through people's houses? We ought to stop and ask, "What the *matter* with us? Why, we're acting just exactly like burglars who secretly wish to be caught."

How do you leave fingerprints on broken locks, anyway? Is Macdonald talking about padlocks? Are we breaking into the garage? Why not break into the house? We'd stand a better chance of getting caught that way, and if we managed to avoid being caught at least we'd find something more valuable. If we're going to be burglars, let's act like professionals and not go around swiping hubcaps and old wicker furniture.

How can you leave "voiceprints" in bugged rooms? Voiceprints are visual representations of voices on paper. At most we could only leave recordings of our voices, and the police would have to have them translated into voiceprints at the crime lab. Or we might have the voiceprints made and mail them in. But why not just leave our driver's licenses on the coffee table?

Macdonald's worst faults were that he didn't write accurately and he didn't observe accurately—serious handicaps for any writer but particularly for a mystery writer. How can we tell whether we're reading a clue or just another blunder? He probably didn't write accurately *because* he didn't observe accurately. He was essentially a scholar. He fell in love with the woman he married because he found her reading Thucydides in the original Greek at the campus library. His writing smells of the lamp. He was captivated by *Oliver Twist* at the age of eleven and apparently never got over it. His plots are reminiscent of what was worst in Charles Dickens.

I am not going to try to examine Macdonald's plots or themes or "vision" because life is too short. I see no point in searching for higher meanings in a man who could hardly write a straight sentence. I am not saying he didn't have higher meanings; only that it would drive you crazy trying to figure out what they were. If you build a house with lopsided bricks, you end up with a lopsided house. Even his admirers admit that his plots are tangled and full of improbable coincidences. Joe turns out to be his own uncle, and that sort of thing. It is nearly impossible to remember a Ross Macdonald story; they go through the mind like Chinese food through the stomach.

Not only are they hard to remember, but it is hard to read them over again. In trying to go back through *The Moving Target,* I found myself plodding like a man who had somehow gotten his legs encased in sand and concrete. The plot is just too stupid for words. Raymond Chandler with his worst hangover wouldn't have dreamt of fobbing off such a clinker on the reading public. Why does Mrs. Sampson hire a private detective to look for a man who has been gone for less than 24 hours? If her husband stayed home by the fire all year round like Santa Claus, then his departure might be regarded as something of an event. But we soon realize that Ralph Sampson is gone most of the time. He goes to Texas, he goes to Las Vegas, and he even keeps a private suite at a Los Angeles hotel equipped with a wardrobe complete "from golf clothes to evening dress." Yet no one seems surprised when his wife hires a private eye to look for him, any more than they seem surprised when that private eye shows up in a taxi with his suitcase on his lap. Archer asks Mrs. Sampson if she has tried the Missing Persons Bureau, but he's just saying that because private eyes are supposed to say, "Have you tried Missing Persons?" and he certainly wouldn't want to be original. Even Archer can't be stupid enough to believe that Missing Persons would get excited about a husband who had been gone overnight without the slightest indication of foul play.

If Mrs. Sampson is so concernd that her husband has been missing for approximately twenty hours (he "disappeared" at 3:30 in the afternoon in Los Angeles and Archer arrives in Cabrillo Canyon the next day just in time for lunch), then time is obviously of the essence. If so, why drag him all the way to Santa Barbara just to send him back to L.A. after an interview that couldn't have lasted more than ten minutes? Haven't these people heard of telephones? If Archer had phoned her after receiving her telegram, he could at least have established that she wanted him to handle a matter in Los Angeles. That would have saved him the trouble of packing that big suitcase and schlepping it all over Southern California. But even a man as dense as Lew Archer might have guessed she

was hiring a Los Angeles investigator because she wanted something investigated in Los Angeles.

Compare Mrs. Sampson's implausible motivation with the subtle and complex considerations that prompt General Sternwood to send for Philip Marlowe. The old man is being blackmailed by Arthur Gwynn Geiger (Rare Books and Deluxe Editions). He suspects that Geiger is just testing him with a modest initial demand and may have much larger sums in mind for the future. He doesn't know what his two daughters may have been up to, but with a daughter like Carmen it could have been just about anything. Rusty Regan, his older daughter's estranged husband, has disappeared. Sternwood is afraid the ex-Irish Republican Army officer might be involved in the blackmail scheme. Furthermore, the wily General wants to try Marlowe out to see how he handles a relatively simple problem before possibly giving him more important jobs. The old man would like to know a reliable "soldier" he could call on in emergencies. But beyond all of this, he feels hurt that Regan ran off without even saying goodbye. He would like to find out what happened to him and help him if he is in trouble. This shows the difference between an excellent craftsman like Chandler and a second-rater like Macdonald. Chandler's characters are people; Macdonald's are puppets being put through their paces to illustrate some highbrow theory. *The Big Sleep,* incidentally, was Chandler's first novel, while *The Moving Target* was Macdonald's fifth. Macdonald's admirers might protest that his writing improved in his later works. I will concede that; he had nowhere to go but up.

WHY DID MACDONALD NAME HIS DETECTIVE AFTER MILES ARCHER IN "THE MALTESE FALCON"...WHOM SAM SPADE DESCRIBED AS "A SON OF A BITCH"?

My overall impression of Macdonald's Lew Archer novels is that his characters are so uniformly unattractive that I don't care who murders whom. Archer does a lot of chasing around, but it's often hard to figure out why he's going wherever he's going. He favors country settings and especially likes airplanes and mountains, where he can enjoy the view. Give him a case to crack and he'll find a mountain to climb. He probably wishes he didn't have to go down so many mean streets in his unlikely profession but could find all his corpses and culprits up among the lupins and poppies. There was really no need for Macdonald to place the Sampson home in Santa Barbara, since most of the important action takes place near L.A., but he liked Santa Barbara better and he didn't want to sacrifice that free plane ride. His clumsy contrivances make his hero look even more stupid than is his birthright.

Macdonald was an English Romantic at heart. His Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Michigan was titled "The Inward Eye: A Revaluation of Coleridge's Psychological Criticism." In *The Moving Target,* the man Archer has been hired to find is dead by the time he finally locates him, and we have the feeling that if Archer hadn't wasted so much time admiring the scenery he might have caught up with Sampson in time to do him some good. Sampson is described as a hateful character by most of those who knew him, but we suspect the poor guy deserved something better than Lew Archer.

Why did Macdonald name his detective-hero after Miles Archer in *The Maltese Falcon,* a character who doesn't have a single redeeming quality? Sam Spade describes his murdered partner to Brigid O'Shaughnessy as "a son of a bitch." Let me quote a little from Dashiell Hammett's fine prose, just for the hell of it, the way a host might put on a treasured 78-rpm toward the end of the evening.

"Miles hadn't many brains, but, Christ! he had too many years' experience as a detective to be caught like that by the man he was shadowing. Up a blind alley with his gun tucked away on his hip and his overcoat buttoned? Not a chance. He was as dumb as any man ought to be, but he wasn't quite that dumb. . . . But he'd've gone up there with you, angel, if he was sure nobody else was up there. You were his client, so he would have had no reason for not dropping the shadow on your say-so, and if you caught up with him and asked him to go up there he'd've gone. He was just dumb enough for that. He'd've looked you up and down and licked his lips and gone grinning from ear to ear—and then you could've stood as close to him as you liked in the dark and put a hole through him with the gun you had got from Thursby that evening."[12]

Now *that* is the American colloquial language, the kind of language Macdonald only kidded himself he was writing. It has the impatient, staccato rhythm characteristic of a people who invented the drive-in theater and the disposable douche. It has intonations and inflections so subtle that a foreigner misses them completely, like the note of interrogation held back in the second sentence until the word "overcoat" and the chord of irony and menace in the word "angel." Typically each sentence has only one or two words stressed and all the others are run on as monotonously as a typewriter clacking away in the next-door office, as in the following excerpt, which I have taken the liberty of garnishing with italics.

I'm *sunk* if I haven't got you to hand over to the police when they come. That's the only thing that can keep me from going *down* with the others.[13]

Didn't Macdonald realize that a certain stigma would attach to a private eye bearing the same surname as Spade's stupid and lecherous partner, not to mention the fact that in appropriating the name he would be inviting comparison with Hammett, a writer whose

wastebasket he was unworthy to empty? But perhaps he unwittingly came up with the right name for his hero after all, because Lew Archer and Miles Archer are intellectual twins.

Macdonald wrote: "It is Marlowe's doubleness that makes him interesting: the hard-boiled mask half-concealing Chandler's poetic and satiric mind. Part of our pleasure derives from the interplay between the mind of Chandler and the voice of Marlowe."[14] Macdonald liked mask metaphors and similes. In one place, he says the detective *persona* is like a welder's mask enabling the author to handle dangerously hot material, and elsewhere he says that the same *persona* is like a fencer's mask (presumably protecting the author from getting poked in the eye). According to Macdonald, Raymond Chandler also wore a welder's mask—and then half-concealed that mask behind the mask of Philip Marlowe. (Or maybe he had a fencer's mask on over the welder's mask.) Anyway, Macdonald is wrong, as usual. Another of the things we admire about Philip Marlowe is that we *don't* see Chandler's mind (or face) behind the mask of Philip Marlowe. Nor do we see Chandler's welder's mask behind Marlowe's fencer's mask. We believe Marlowe is a real person and that his observations are his own observations. It is as disgustingly simple as that. Chandler was too much of an artist to make his character a mere ventriloquist's dummy. He knew that, if we lose the illusion that the viewpoint character is a real person, we also lose the illusion that the events being depicted are real events. The other characters become unreal, too. The murders fail to move us because they look as if they have been staged with catsup and rubber daggers. This is exactly the case with Lew Archer. Macdonald couldn't help peeping out from behind Archer's mask because he was too pretentious to conceal his authorial presence and too incompetent to be able to do it even if he had wanted to. So he made a virtue of necessity: he not only claimed that this was what he wanted to do but that it was what Raymond Chandler and a lot of other mystery writers had wanted to do as well. We don't think of Chandler peeping out from behind Marlowe's mask any more than we think of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle peeping out from behind the mask of Sherlock Holmes. What a suggestion! It shows Macdonald's lack of understanding, if not contempt, not only for the mystery novel but for fiction in general. He always displayed a patronizing attitude toward his chosen medium. It was reflected in the fact that he wrote under a pseudonym; he wanted to keep Kenneth Miller unsullied.

Archer is a hero who sometimes verges on being an anti-hero. While he is a man of action, his actions are largely directed to putting together the stories of other people's lives and discovering their significance. He is less a doer than a questioner, a consciousness in which the meanings of other lives emerge. This gradually developing conception of the detective hero as the mind of the novel is not new, but is

probably my main contribution to this special branch of fiction. Some such refinement of the conception of the detective hero was needed, to bring this kind of novel closer to the purposes and range of the mainstream novel.[15]

PERHAPS MACDONALD DECIDED "I'LL WRITE HARD-BOILED NOVELS, BUT I'LL ONLY BOIL THEM FOR THREE MINUTES."

This is better-than-average Macdonald prose, but even when you can understand him you can't understand him. Archer is a hero and yet an anti-hero, or almost an anti-hero. He is a man of action but he spends most of his time thinking about other people's motives. Though he is a man of action, he is somehow more a questioner than a doer. Or maybe he is only a "consciousness"—something like Donovan's brain bubbling around in a big vat. And this is his own creation Macdonald is explaining. Don't get him started on the Wife of Bath!

Who in the hell ever *asked* him to bring the detective novel "closer to the purposes and range of the mainstream novel"? Even though some mainstream novels like *The Great Gatsby* and *Lolita* are roughly patterned after detective novels, does that mean *all* detective novels are aspiring to be mainstream novels or *vice versa*? Macdonald reminds me of some mad scientist finding cures for diseases he himself invented. He has that monomaniacal intensity of a guy who's got you strapped to a table and is explaining how he's fixing to turn you into a coloratura soprano.

"Refinement" is the key word here. Macdonald took up the detective novel, as Chandler correctly observed, because he wanted the market. He could make money writing detective novels, but if he tried to write "mainstream" novels, he was afraid the bulk of them would end up in frayed dustjackets on that melancholy table at the bookseller's, marked down to 99¢. So with his zany logic he decided: "I'll write hardboiled novels, but I'll only boil them for three minutes." Eventually he might have found a way to write murder mysteries in which there were no murders and no mysteries. We are all guilty anyway, according to him, so why not arrest everybody and let us take turns guarding one another?

Macdonald said that when Archer "turns sideways he almost disappears."[16] Here he was undoubtedly right for once. By his own admission, Archer was a kind of literary stalking horse he used to sneak up on the sunbeams and the Kuniyoshis—and he was so myopic he thought Raymond Chandler was trying to do the same thing but not doing it as well. Instead of improving on the private eye genre, Macdonald came close to killing it through self-satirization. He created an entirely new plot for the detective novel: the genre itself is the victim and the author is the killer. Old Chandler has him pegged pretty well: "Here," he wrote, "is a man who wants the public for the mystery story in its primitive violence and also wants it to be clear that he, individually, is a highly literate and sophisticated character."

After Macdonald had captured his share of the market for the mystery story, he set to work to transform it into something nearer to his heart's desire—something larded with Jungian symbolism, Freudian motivations, and similes that would out-Proust Proust, something that would rehabilitate him with his academic colleagues and titillate the dowagers of Santa Barbara in a polite manner. I don't see how anyone who truly admires Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler—both of them real artists, working in a thankless medium, spinning straw into gold—can admire a hotdog like Ross Macdonald. Hammett "took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it in the alley";[17] Macdonald tried his best to stuff it back in the Venetian vase. If the hardboiled mystery novel ever recovers from Ross Macdonald, it will have proven itself to be very hardboiled indeed.

Notes

1. William Goldman, *Adventures in the Screen Trade* (New York: Warner, 1983), pp. 177–78.
2. Ross Macdonald, *Self-Portrait: Ceaselessly into the Past* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Capra Press, 1981), p. 37.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
4. Eudora Welty, "The Stuff Nightmares Are Made Of," *New York Times Book Review*, February 14, 1971, p. 1.
5. Raymond Chandler, *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, edited by Dorothy Gardiner and Katherine Walker (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), pp. 54–55. (My italics.)
6. Jerry Speir, *Ross Macdonald* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978), p. 9.
7. Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1939), p. 1.
8. Welty, p. 30.
9. Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?* Translated by Leo Wiener (New York: AMS Press, 1968), Volume XXII, p. 266.
10. Speir, p. 144.
11. Quoted in Peter Wolfe, *Dreamers Who Live Their Dreams: The World of Ross Macdonald's Novels* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1976), p. 21.
12. Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1930), p. 256.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 262.
14. Speir, p. 121.
15. Macdonald, *Self-Portrait*, p. 121.
16. Speir, p. 109.
17. Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," in *The Simple Art of Murder* ([London]: Hamish Hamilton, 1950), p. 330. □

J'Accuse!

By William L. DeAndrea

Exclamation point!

There should be one! At the end of the logo! At the top of the column! If you don't see one there now, imagine one, please!

Okay, I'm calm now. I just received TAD 19:1, which had the first of these columns in it. Loved the issue, like the spot the column got, but that missing screamer drove me nuts.

The life of a writer is like that. Or the life of *this* writer is like that. Going crazy because it's so *obvious* that *J'Accuse!* is an infinitely funnier title than *J'Accuse,* or that *The Sign of Four* is poetry while *The Sign of the Four* is dreck, and why can't everybody see it? Why do they look at you with pity in their eyes, and act as if you're being silly, but creative people are so eccentric, aren't they?

Of course, things really get to be fun when you have *two* creative eccentrics sharing the same house. If Orania had her way, for instance, she would eliminate the exclamation point not just from my typewriter, but from literature in general. I think she could probably be convinced to let it remain as a mathematical symbol. And at the top of this column.

I was recently sent (free of charge) a copy of a new magazine called *Mystery Scene.* It's put together by Ed Gorman and Bob Randisi. Yes, this is the same Bob Randisi who writes the private eye novels and the Westerns, and edits the anthologies, and created and runs the Private Eye Writers of America. I suspect he does his bit for *Mystery Scene* on waterproof paper in the shower. It was a fun read. The issue I was sent featured TAD's own Mike Seidman letting off some well-aimed blasts at writers' groups in general, and the Mystery Writers of America in particular. The cover story was an interview with Elizabeth Peters/Barbara Michaels. Much to my gratification and surprise, there were *two* glowing reviews of a book I wrote under another name.

And Warren Murphy, in a wonderfully acerbic column, made me feel like a dope. Using the same examples I used in the first *J'Accuse* column, he makes a case showing that what I saw as the current mystery boom is an illusion. And he's right. But so am I. How can the same evidence make diametrically opposed opinions correct? Three ways. First, I draw a broader boundary around the mystery field than Warren does. He says he writes "mysteries" for fun, but to make a living he writes "mainstream suspense novels." I, on the other hand, follow the lead of our Esteemed Publisher and think of a "mystery," at least in this context, as anything you could become an active member of MWA on the strength of having written. Secondly, I was talking about improvements in standards of living. This is all pretty inconspicuous next to what Warren is used to thinking of as a standard of living. Third, when it comes to the mystery field, I find it more cheering to look at the doughnut instead of the hole. Therefore, when Warren says, "The biggest publicity push in history squeaked [Elmore] Leonard's wonderful book onto the best seller list for a period of time best measured in milliseconds," I think, to hell with that, a publisher made the biggest publicity push in history for a *mystery writer.*

For me, it was going to be the television event of the year. I told everybody I thought would be remotely interested. I warmed up the tape machine and planted myself in front of the tube to watch it. *The Return of Perry Mason.* With Raymond Burr and Barbara Hale. The survivors from the original cast. They even had Richard Anderson in the show, for the benefit, I am sure, of devotees such as I, who remember him as Lieutenant Stonebreaker in the later years when Ray Collins could no longer continue as Lieutenant Tragg. By the time you read this, it will have been about seven months since the Fred Silverman production aired, but, just in case you missed it, and it's going to be rerun next week or something, I should warn you that I am about to reveal the solution. If you can't stand to know, skip ahead to the next white space.

Richard Anderson, this time, plays the killer, a lawyer and old friend of Mason's. He hires someone to bump off Patrick O'Neal, a millionaire who has decided to disinherit his worthless kin in favor of a big charitable institution to be run by Della Street. Della has been working for the millionaire ever since Perry Mason became an appeals court judge. Anderson wants O'Neal dead because he (Anderson) has been carrying on with one of the worthless daughters and plans to marry her. And her share of the dough. To make the chess more binding, Anderson has the hit man frame Della Street. Perry resigns from the bench in order to defend her. Aiding in the case is a scruffy, seat-of-the-pants private eye named Paul Drake, Jr., son of Perry's long-suffering associate, who is now deceased (as, of course, is William Hopper, the actor who played him). Drake, Jr. is appealingly played by William Katt, who is the real-life son of Barbara Hale. (His father is B-movie and television actor Bill Williams, who starred in *Assignment Underwater*). Hale and Katt have a lot of scenes together, and I could swear I saw motherly and sonly pride flowing between them.

Anyway, there's a courtroom scene (about fifteen minutes of a two-hour picture—much too short), and Perry opposes an ambitious young A.D.A., who, in a nice touch, happens to be a woman, and bluffs a witness-stand confession out of Anderson, and everybody lives happily ever after.

I really enjoyed it while I was watching it.

Then I started thinking about it. This guy is a lawyer. He's been a friend of Mason's for years. *What kind of moron does the guy have to be to try to frame Mason's best friend in the world for murder?* You might as well threaten to beat up William (The Refrigerator) Perry's baby brother or try to blackmail Generoso Pope. They don't come up with any explanation, however feeble—perhaps something like Anderson's having been jealous of Mason all his life, and wants, in addition to the dough, a chance to see his old friend humiliated in court. They don't even duck the question. Everybody concedes Mason's legendary status. The new D.A. as much as says that Hamilton Burger died of frustration over never having beaten Mason. But the frame has been set.

Once I spotted that, the whole show fell apart for me. See it, if you get a chance, but only for the performances of Burr and Hale and Katt. Don't go looking for any of the old mystery magic.

I get things free, therefore I am.
—Richard Meyers

Meyers's Law has put in a good week. Not only did I get the complimentary magazine, I got an advance copy of *"C" is for Corpse,* third in Sue Grafton's Kinsey Milhone series. Milhone is a private eye, one of a small but growing number of fictional female private eyes who are more than what a critic (Ric Meyers again) calls "Mannix with breasts." I like her for what she is, and even more for what she is not. Kinsey Milhone is not fearless; she is brave. She is not some sort of freelance social worker; she is a decent, concerned human being. She is not pent-up death; she is resourceful. And most important of all, *she is not a brooder.* The fact that an executive cheats on his wife does not constitute proof that capitalism is corrupt. She has had some bad experiences in her life (orphaned young, two failed marriages), but you don't get the impression from Milhone's first-person narration (as you do from, say, Lew Archer's) that she has to make a conscious effort to keep her lower lip from trembling.

The plot of *"C" is for Corpse* is Grafton's best yet, with lots of tricky little variations on the classic "client gets killed" motif. The mystery itself is sound, if a little tail-heavy,

with lots of information in the last chapters that might have more profitably been introduced earlier.

But that's a quibble. Sue Grafton writes the best hardboiled prose around today, for my money, and that includes everybody, even writers who have had their pictures on the cover of TAD. I'd give you a sample of it, but I'll do you a favor and tell you to read her stuff instead.

Social note:

About the time this is written, the Edgar-winning team of Warren Murphy and Molly Cochran have just produced their greatest collaboration yet—Devin Miles Murphy (by the time you read this, the kid will be entering Princeton). Molly tells me that during labor she diverted herself by reading a couple of my spy novels. I applaud this. Audiences should be trained young. □

What About Murder?

By Jon L. Breen

• BAKER, Robert A., and Michael T. Nietzel. **Private Eyes: One Hundred and One Knights: A Survey of American Detective Fiction, 1922–1984.** Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1985. 385 pp. Illustrated. Index.

In the introduction to *What About Murder?* I complained of the lack of "any book-length study of the private-eye novel that does not (a) have a special thematic ax to grind or (b) limit itself to a very small number of authors." Here is the first of two 1985 volumes to address that need. Baker and Nietzel, two university professors who write here in a fannish rather than an academic mode, are certainly thorough. The goal seems to be to mention virtually every American private eye to appear in even one novel, and the authors very nearly achieve it. They also make many sound critical points about their subjects. The dyed-in-the-wool mystery fan can hardly help loving this book, both for what it tries to do and what it actually achieves.

In their opening chapter, the authors present the results of a poll of private eye writers and critics, who were asked to rate a long list of past and present writers and characters on literary value, overall entertainment value, character development, plot, writing style, and Final Grade. Highest ranked among the old-timers in both quality and familiarity were (unsurprisingly) Chandler's Marlowe, Hammett's Spade, Macdonald's Archer, and Hammett's Continental Op. (At the bottom end were John Jakes's Johnny Havoc and Michael Brett's Pete McGrath.) Among the present-day, Spenser's Parker was the most familiar but rated only twenty-second, with James Crumley's C. W. Sughrue, though known to only half the respondents, rating highest in quality.

Then the authors offer chapters on Hammett and Chandler (the "King and Royal Heir"); the trio of Ross Macdonald, John D. MacDonald, and Spillane (the "Princes of the Realm"); the best of the old-timers (1930–1970); other old-timers; the best of the "moderns"; other present-day eyes; and finally individual chapters on female, humorous, and science-fictional private eyes. An appendix adds more names not covered in the main sections. There are omissions, to be sure, but not many—one that springs to mind is Day Keene's Hawaiian shamus Johnny Aloha.

The selection criteria are sometimes questionable. Stout's Nero Wolfe, Anthony Boucher's Fergus O'Breen, and Baynard Kendrick's Duncan Maclain are included, though they surely don't belong to the hardboiled private eye tradition. Since Ellery Queen and Philo Vance are not covered, one must conclude that Wolfe, O'Breen, and Maclain are here because they detect as professionals rather than amateurs, but so did Carolyn Wells's Fleming Stone and Lee Thayer's Peter Clancy, neither of whom is covered here. And how do Frank Gruber's book salesmen Johnny Fletcher and Sam Cragg, strictly amateur detectives, and George Harmon Coxe's "Flashgun" Casey, a newspaper photographer, qualify when tough lawyers such as Erle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason and Harold Q. Masur's Scott Jordan do not?

Unfortunately, this book brings forth the question so often inspired by Popular Press products: does anybody read these things before they get into print? If a good copy editor had smoothed out the contradictions, repetitions, and stylistic infelicities, and if a knowledgeable mystery specialist had vetted the manuscript for errors (which approach the Hagen or Barzun/Taylor level), this book would be twice as good as it is. (The section on Brett Halliday offers a particularly egregious example of bad editing.) The authors are sometimes careless in crediting their sources. Beginning on page 33, they quote David Bazelon at length and give absolutely no hint of where his remarks appeared. In their Michael Avallone section, they seem to lean heavily on Francis M. Nevins, Jr. but give him no credit.

A few of the many out-and-out mistakes noted: the authors imply that Michael Avallone's Ed Noon lives in a *literal* auditorium, rather than a metaphorical "mouse auditorium"; they state that Howard Browne "learned his trade" writing TV and movies, when he actually entered these fields when most of his books and stories already had been written; they seem to believe that Thomas B. Dewey, Bill S. Ballinger, and Bill Miller (of the Wade Miller team) are still alive—would it were so! They mistakenly award William Campbell Gault's *The CANA Diversion* an Edgar; they believe Brett Halliday (Davis Dresser) used the pseudonym Asa Baker *after* marrying Helen McCloy; they also believe Halliday personally edited the *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*, which he never did; they suggest that Talmage Powell has been a freelance writer since age twelve—possible but unlikely; they repeatedly quote Art Scott but unaccountably leave him out of the index; they don't make it clear that Marvin Albert's Tony Rome novels were published under the pseudonym Anthony Rome; their index has Lester Dent

writing under the name Paul Robeson(!); they refer to a Rex Stout novel called *The Case of the Frightened Man;* they state that Anthony Boucher "edited" the *New York Times Book Review's* "Criminals at Large" column—in fact, he wrote it all himself; and finally, they *still* think Englishman Miles Tripp wrote the private eye books signed by Michael Brett. Didn't Baker and Nietzel have a Hubin or a Reilly at hand to check these things?

Some of the critical judgments, admittedly matters of opinion, are also worth questioning. There's a bit too much puffery at times, an "every-writer-in-the-bookshop-is-lovely" approach. Much as I admire Ron Goulart's writing, I can't believe the most devoted fan would claim that Jake and Hildy Pace are "as crazy and as funny as the Marx Brothers at their zenith" (p. 351).

One of the best things about the book is the good, appreciative comment on such notable newer writers as Loren D. Estleman, James Crumley, Joe Gores, Stephen Greenleaf, Joseph Hansen, Richard Hoyt, and Stuart Kaminsky. The section on Roger L. Simon and Moses Wine is one of the few that is unfavorable on balance.

Bill Pronzini contributes a two-page introduction. The book is illustrated with photos of some of the writers. There is no separate bibliography, though many titles and dates are listed in the body of the work. There are indexes to names of authors and private eyes.

• CLARKE, Stephan P. **The Lord Peter Wimsey Companion.** New York: The Mysterious Press, 1985. 563 pp. Illustrated. Bibliography. Index.

Clarke's massive compilation provides for the Wimsey series what Jack Tracy's *The Encyclopaedia Sherlockiana* did for the Holmes canon: a dictionary of characters, places, and allusions keyed by abbreviations to the story or stories in which they appeared. There are 7,509 numbered entries presented alphabetically in the main section. The eight-page bibliography includes primary sources (Sayers's books) and secondary sources of information, mostly nonfictional. Wimsey and the other characters are treated as historical personages; thus, there is no entry in the main body for Dorothy L. Sayers, nor any listing in the bibliography of works strictly about mystery fiction. The index goes from story or novel title to numbers of references. Among the plentiful illustrations: photographs of buildings, streets, and other landmarks occurring in the Wimsey stories; maps; and three pages of diagrams to illustrate the extensive explanation of cricket.

In many ways, Clarke's book is an extraordinary achievement, a labor of love that must have taken years of painstaking research, and this reader at least could not fault its accuracy or clarity. But only the most deeply committed Sayers buffs will find it essential.

• DOVE, George N. **The Boys from Grover Avenue: Ed McBain's 87th Precinct Novels.** Bowling Green Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1985. 166 pp. Bibliography. Index.

The author of the first book-length study of the police procedural novel here offers a readable and welcome treatment of the longest-running and possibly best procedural series of them all. Taking a topical approach, Dove first describes the "Imaginary City" of the novels (obviously based on New York), then discusses the time frame of the books, including the way in which the characters age at different rates. (Meyer Meyer, for example, ages not at all, staying 37 throughout the series.) These early chapters may lose some readers with limited tolerance of Sherlockian-style nitpicking. More diverting, though, are chapters on the series' use of procedure, the relationships of the cops with the public and with the criminals they seek, thumbnail sketches of the major and minor recurring characters, and a discussion of McBain's distinctive style. In appendices, Dove presents a checklist of the novels, 1956–1983; some questions and answers about the "Imaginary City"; a description of the Precinct Station House; a chronology of the cases, not always the same as the order published; crime statistics of the 87th; and lists of police injuries and deaths. There are five pages of notes and a one-page index.

• GEHERIN, David. **The American Private Eye: The Image in Fiction.** New York: Ungar, 1985. xi+228 pp. Bibliography. Index.

In the second general study of the private eye to appear within a few months, Geherin offers a narrower focus than Baker and Nietzel in *Private Eyes: 101 Knights* (see above) but is generally more accurate and critically acute. Following a chapter putting the private eye in context with the earlier history of detective fiction, he covers 27 writers, chosen on the basis of influence, popularity, and general contribution to the "growth and vitality of the genre." Each writer is covered in a sketch of a few pages, long enough to whet the reader's appetite, capture the writer's appeal and the reason for his importance, without overburdening the account with too much detail and plot summary. The treatments are soundly critical rather than merely descriptive. Especially commendable are the accounts of writers and characters not widely covered elsewhere, e.g., Raoul Whitfield's Jo Gar, John K. Butler's Steve Midnight, Jonathan Latimer's Bill Crane, Bart Spicer's Carney Wilde, Thomas B. Dewey's Mac, and William Campbell Gault's Brock Callahan.

Inclusion of some characters who belong to the hardboiled tradition but are not private detectives by profession, e.g., George Harmon Coxe's "Flashgun" Casey (photographer) and Joseph Hansen's Dave Brandstetter (insurance investigator), leads to a question: if these characters belong, doesn't Perry Mason, whose early cases are solidly in the tradition of tough pulp stories? And, if not Mason, why not Gardner's genuine private eyes, Bertha Cool and Donald Lam, whose cases he recorded as A. A. Fair? Also, some readers will question the

lack of even one female private eye among Geherin's subjects. (He does manage to list a few in his concluding chapter.)

Generally, though, the list of selections is sound. Others discussed are Daly's Race Williams, Hammett's Continental Op, Nebel's Dick Donohue, Norbert Davis's Max Latin, Bellem's Dan Turner, Chandler's Philip Marlowe, Halliday's Mike Shayne (somewhat undervalued, I think), Howard Browne's Paul Pine, Wade Miller's Max Thursday, Prather's Shell Scott, Spillane's Mike Hammer (a very accurate assessment, in my opinion), Macdonald's Lew Archer, Michael Collins's Dan Fortune, Parker's Spenser (very briefly, since Geherin covered him at length in his earlier study, *Sons of Sam Spade,* WAM #41), Pronzini's "Nameless," Lewin's Albert Samson, Arthur Lyons's Jacob Asch, and Lawrence Block's Matt Scudder.

Usually meticulously accurate, Geherin occasionally refers to books by their paperback retitlings instead of the original title—and at least once he uses both titles at different points.

• SKINNER, Robert. M. **The Hard-Boiled Explicator.** Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1985. x+125 pp. Bibliography. Index.

This 626-item annotated bibliography cites secondary sources about Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald divided into four chapters: articles and essays, monographs, fugitive material (eight items cited wrongly or incompletely in other sources and not found by Skinner), and book reviews. A 24-page introduction offers an adequate summary of the three subjects.

The annotations, mostly descriptive but occasionally critical, are full and helpful if sometimes awkwardly written—for example, James Sandoe's hardboiled checklist is characterized as "rare and hard to find." The compiler aimed for comprehensive coverage and is hard to fault on that score, though he has included Ellery Queen's introduction to *A Man Called Spade* and omitted the introductions to the other EQ-edited Hammett collections. Most of the material in the first two chapters is duplicated in Walter Albert's *Detective and Mystery Fiction: An International Bibliography of Secondary Sources,* leaving the book review guide as perhaps the most useful feature. Skinner characterizes the reviews, usually as positive, negative, mixed, or noncommittal. (Could the late James Sandoe really have been "noncommittal" in his review of *Blue City?* Not his style at all.) Usually meticulous on names, Skinner twice cites someone called John *Dickenson* Carr.

Skinner provides a short subject index but, unfortunately, none to authors and critics.

• WINN, Dilys. **Murder Ink.** Revised edition. New York: Workman, 1984. xv+398 pp. Illustrated. Bibliography. Index.

In a way, this is more than a new edition of the handsome mystery miscellany first published in 1977 (see *WAM* #107). Though many items are repeated, enough are new to make one wonder why the compiler didn't come up with all-original material and make this *Murder Ink II.* Among the new features, balanced as before between the serious and the frivolous, the factual and the fictional: a playlet by K. C. Constantine that rather unfairly lampoons librarians; an article on the Canadian mystery scene by Eric Wright; a solid piece by Joseph Hansen on the image of the homosexual in mystery fiction; Julian Symons's account of his series sleuth, Bland (a police detective not to be confused with Mignon G. Eberhart's butler of the same name), and why he has shunned recurring detectives in his novels since; a lively annotated guide to mystery bookshops by the obviously pseudonymous Desdemona Brannigan; a nice tribute to Fred Dannay by Eleanor Sullivan; Baird Searles on s.f.-mystery hybrids; Clark Howard on the career of J. Edgar Hoover; Treasury agent Gerald Petievich on counterfeiting; and John R. Feegel on "Forensic Protocol" (chattily written: "While we're in the water, let's drown"). Other new contributors include such major names as Robert Barnard, Simon Brett, Dorothy Salisbury Davis, Edward Gorey, Martha Grimes, Tim Heald, Ed McBain, Warren Murphy, Thomas Perry, and Martha G. Webb. Among the more memorable contributing noms-de-plume: Iphegenia Burton-Mall, Naomi Buttermilk, Ebeneezer Nizer, and Ahab Pepys. Also new is *Murder Ink's* own illustrated whodunit, called "The Tainted Tea Mystery" and running throughout the book.

In *What About Murder?* I managed to misspell the last name of the compiler of this book and *Murderess Ink* (#108) as "Wynn," an egregious error no one ever pointed out to me. Is it premeditated revenge or merely poetic justice that my first name is misspelled "John" on two out of three opportunities? □

NOVEL VERDICTS

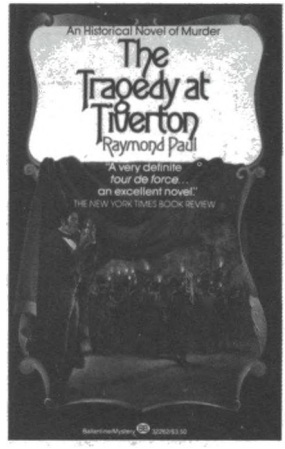
By Jon L. Breen

Explanation of symbols:

- **A** All or more than three-quarters of the book devoted to courtroom action
- **½** One-half or more of the book devoted to courtroom action
- **¼** One-quarter or more devoted to courtroom action
- **B** Relatively brief courtroom action; less than a quarter of the book

BRAND, Max, pseudonym of Frederick Schiller Faust (1892–1944). **Dr. Kildare's Trial.** New York: Dodd, Mead, 1942. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1944. (¼)

Young Dr. James Kildare, gifted but irritating know-it-all resident at Blair General Hospital, is first on the scene of a traffic accident and through conscientious and altruistic doctoring creates all kinds of trouble for himself. Right there on the street, he performs an emergency operation on beautiful dancer Estelle Courcy for a ruptured spleen, leaving her badly fractured leg unattended. As a result of the young woman's accusations, he is faced with a criminal malpractice charge, with future civil actions promised. Much about the story rings false. When Kildare is jailed, his crotchety, wheelchair-ridden mentor Dr. Gillespie chooses to let him sit there. Kildare won't tell the whole truth because of a Dread Secret not revealed until the end of the book. Romantic interest

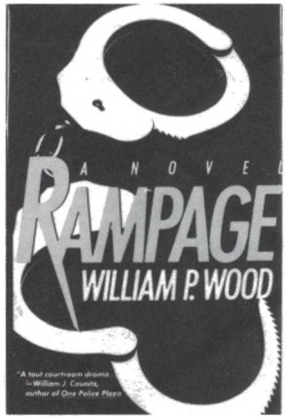


Mary Lamont is induced to deceive Kildare unconscionably for the greater good. Trial action is shaky. Hearsay evidence goes in without challenge, and witness Gillespie is allowed to take over the trial and make a speech on behalf of his protegé. The final scene gives new scope to the familiar phrase "extremely irregular." It must be added that Brand was a wonderful storyteller, that the reader's interest is maintained despite the slick-magazine heroics and posturings, and that the poet Faust wanted to be sneaks through in occasional sparkling sentences.

GILL, B. M. **The Twelfth Juror.** New York: Scribner's, 1984. (½)

TV personality Edward Carne is tried at the Old Bailey for the murder of his wife. Focus is on the jury, especially Robert Quinn, who knows (and is hiding) the defendant's daughter, potentially an important witness in the trial, and clearly should not be on the jury at all. In a second irritating small-world coincidence, Quinn knows and has reason to dislike another member of the jury, classics professor Thomas Leary. There is still another discouraging reflection on the system: one juror wears earplugs to shut out unpleasant testimony!

As in some other British novels, the jury openly discuss the case among themselves during the trial and break up into smaller groups during deliberations, activities that would be frowned upon (though still might happen) in an American legal setting. Gill has no special feel for courtroom procedure—her lawyers sneak in comments, argue in questioning, and otherwise act in ways more suggestive of other novels than of real trials—and her strained plot contrivances help to



render the novel a cut or two below her previous. She does offer an effective shock ending, however. (I should note that the prize-givers have disagreed with the negative slant of this assessment: the novel was nominated for the Edgar Award as best mystery novel of 1984.)

PAUL, Raymond (1940–). **The Thomas Street Horror.** New York: Viking, 1982. **(B)**

The murder of Helen Jewett, a *cause célèbre* of 1835 New York, is fictionalized as the first recorded case of colorful Irish defense lawyer Lon Quinncannon. Serving as Watson-narrator is *Sun* reporter David Cordor, who presents a vivid picture of his time and place and especially of the vicious newspaper rivalries of the day. The mannered period writing style may irritate some, and mid-way the fact-fiction interface is not handled as smoothly as it might be—see, for example, an interesting but somewhat dragged-in chapter about the history of police forces. But the climactic trial of Richard P. Robinson is excellent, with much interesting detail about the jurisprudence of the time, lively Q-and-A, and an in-court solution of the "sleuth's-theatre" variety. As is shown by the irresistible John Dickson Carr epigraph, Paul has as great an allegiance to the conventions of detective fiction as he does to history. Several reviewers quite aptly compared Quinncannon to Perry Mason. Trial action totals about seventy pages, including two brief court sequences prior to the murder trial: a British officer accused in police court of assaulting Helen Jewett and a dispute among journalists regarding a fraud perpetrated by Cordor.

PAUL, Raymond (1940–). **The Tragedy at Tiverton.** New York: Viking 1984. (¼)

The second Lon Quinncannon novel is really a "prequel," concerning an 1832 case alluded to in *The Thomas Street Horror:* the defense of Ephraim Avery, a Methodist minister accused of murdering a young pregnant woman. This real-life case was also the subject of a fine 1981 novel, Mary Cable's *Avery's Knot* (see NV #27). The novel opens in court, with Quinncannon's successful defense of a confidence man, and later includes both Avery's hearing before a panel of judges in Bristol, Rhode Island, and his jury trial in Newport. Narrator-Watson chores are handled by young lawyer Christopher Randolph, who handles most of Avery's defense, though Quinncannon calls the shots. The Perry Mason aura is stronger than ever when Quinncannon gleefully declines to refute evidence that *appears* fatal to his client. Trial action is again expertly handled, and overall this is a much richer and better controlled novel than its predecessor. (Note that both of Paul's books are currently available in paperback from Ballantine at $3.50).

ROTH, Holly (1916–1964). **Shadow of a Lady.** New York: Simon and Schuster; London: Hamish Hamilton, 1957. **(B)**

Is the red-haired woman whose decomposed body is delivered from King's Cross Station to the town of Banford, Norfolk, the missing Laura Bennington Selby, who disappeared while on a car trip on the Continent? Her fiance, stockbroker John Seton-Smith, first reports her missing, then winds up on trial at the Old Bailey for her murder. The trial offers some entertaining testimony and a dramatic sensation-in-court finish. The finale may have a shade too much coincidence, but on the whole this is a good specimen of the English mystery as written by an American author.

WOOD, William P. **Rampage.** New York: St. Martin's, 1985. (¼)

Every new novel of the Big Trial type automatically draws comparison with Robert Traver's classic *Anatomy of a Murder.* For once, the comparison is deserved. With this book, the new-style, prosecutor-as-good-guy brand of trial book has at last produced a milestone. The book begins with the utterly revolting description of a triple murder, one so vile and explicitly treated that it may lose squeamish readers. Wood then follows the case through the courts—from arraignment through Grand Jury hearing, a challenge of the judge, motions to suppress evidence, jury selection, and finally the trial itself, as prosecutor Tony Fraser stakes everything to see that blood-drinking Charlie Reece is put to death. Fraser's cross-examination of the defense psychiatrist is especially brilliant. The locale is Santa Maria County, California, and the author was himself an assistant D.A. in Sacramento. □

ALICE IN

The first part of this article, which appeared in TAD 19:2, examined the meaning of the Alice symbol, finding that it heralded the disappearance of an important person. Mr. McSherry discussed various real-life cases, then began an investigation into the use of the symbol in mystery fiction. Part Two continues the discussion of Alice and mystery fiction.

By
Frank D. McSherry

The influence of Carroll's *Alice*—its themes and characters and language—is apparently limited, in some mysteries, merely to passing references and punning titles—parts of a single sentence, say in a full-length novel. But let's look at these anyway.

She's a witch, nine-year-old Alice Wickershield says of old Mrs. Fleury, who has just given her a birthday party. She only looks like an old witch, says her smarter, more realistic friend, Elsie Grunwald, because she doesn't wear false teeth.

Mrs. Fleury has just given all her little guests a cracker bonbon, which, when snapped open, reveals a printed fortune motto. Open yours, she warns, only in a moment of great danger, for its fortune will be of great help to you in that moment. Sensible Elsie opens hers immediately. It contains part of a quotation from *Macbeth*: "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes. Open, locks, Whoever knocks!"

Two weeks later, Elsie disappears. She was last seen in the leaf-shadowed gazebo, sewing a dress for her doll. The dress is still there, lying on the floor. There's no sign of violence, but there's no trace of Elsie.

A random demand is made and paid, but Elsie is not returned.

Frightened, frustrated, and furious, the small town of Halycon, Florida, turns against Mrs. Fleury. Faced with a whispering campaign and a wall of cold and growing hatred, she sells her home at a loss and moves away. There's "Malice in Wonderland," in Rufus King's effective short story from EQMM (October 1957).

The years pass. Alice, who believes in fabulous wonderlands, keeps Elsie's doll dress and her cracker bonbon, and watches Mrs. Grunwald wander at night over Mrs. Fleury's land, looking for a clue, a note, to tell where Elsie is—even a small, grave-sized mound of grass would satisfy her. Alice grows up, to find that the malice has not died. On a night of terror, when murder strikes again, she receives a phone call from almost-forgotten Mrs. Fleury—Open the bonbon, read the fortune, *now* is the time of desperate danger!—and finds the forgotten clue from the past that leads to a crazed killer.

"Malice in Wonderland," winner of a Second Prize in Ellery Queen's Twelfth Annual Contest, is one of Rufus King's better tales of dark doings in the sunny climes of Halycon, Florida. It became the title story of a collection of twelve of them, published in 1958.

The party for Sergeant "Pop" Holland, who's retiring tonight after fifteen years on the San Francisco Police Force, is going great guns—but where's the Guest of Honor? In *Deadline: 2 A.M.* (1976), by Robert L. Pike, Leutenant Jim Reardon of the Homicide Department, in charge of the party, finds out when he's called to the phone. A gleeful voice tells him, We've got "Pop" Holland! Keep it out of the papers. You'll get further instructions in a cassette in tomorrow's mail.

Oddly, the kidnappers do not want cash; they want to trade Holland for a petty thief held on a minor charge, a man apparently of no interest to anyone. Holland's voice is on the tape, briefly arguing with his kidnappers, and the experienced Reardon feels sick as he recognizes an undertone in the voice: Holland is in pain.

Hurry with the trade, the voice advises—this guy's a bleeder. . . .

MURDERLAND

Part Two

Read Me: Recommended Reading for a Mad Tea Party

The department refuses to trade. Give in, even once, and we'll have to do it again and again; no cop will be safe—that, the department says, is policy.

All very high-minded and probably quite right—but what about Holland, who's paying in blood and pain for that policy?

Angry, Reardon and his assistant, Sergeant Dondero, decide to disobey orders and make the trade. But it won't be the prisoner they'll hand over—it'll be Dondero in the prisoner's clothes. In two-in-the-early-morning darkness, in a roaring rainstorm, Reardon lets the muscular Dondero, noticeably dressed without a raincoat, out of his car onto the middle of a bridge, drives to the other end, turns—and gets a bad shock. Despite the fact that no car or person has passed him, coming or going, on the long, straight, rainswept street, open to view for blocks, Dondero has simply disappeared. . . .

Desperately, with lives, as well as his own career, hanging in the balance, Reardon begins a personal search for the murderous kidnappers, who may be too smart for him, who have been a step ahead of the police all along, who—seemingly—have made not a single mistake. It's almost too late when Reardon starts to really think about something pointed out to him earlier—how did the kidnappers know he was in charge of the retirement party? It wasn't top secret information exactly, but neither was it known to the general public.

Not one of the best novels of Pike (a pen name for Robert L. Fish), with Reardon not in top form until near the end, *Deadline: 2 A.M.* rushes to a satisfying finish when standard police routine gives Reardon the answer in a swift and believably short time. The only reference to *Alice* is part of a sentence spoken by a police informer, who deliberately misquotes a well-known phrase, saying he can talks of ships and shoes and pool cues, and dollar bills with wings, but nothing else, as a sort of code to indicate he's not where he can speak freely. References to Carroll's *Alice* are slightly, but only slightly, more extensive in our next example.

In *The Mad Hatter Mystery* (1933) by John Dickson Carr, someone in London has been running around stealing the hats of respectable people, the more respectable—and, perhaps, the more pompous—the better. Policemen have lost their helmets, distinguished members of the Stock Exchange their elegant pearl-gray toppers. One prominent barrister loses his wig. Later it is found by police, carefully arrayed on the head of a horse pulling a hansom cab.

"HAT-FIEND STRIKES AGAIN!" cries freelance journalist Philip Driscoll in a series of articles that has all London laughing. "Not since the days of Jack the Ripper has this city been so terrorized by a mysterious fiend who strikes and vanishes without a clue, as in the exploits of the diabolical criminal genius known as the Mad Hatter. . . [challenging] the best brains of Scotland Yard. . . .This is the seventh reported outrage in the last week."

Scotland Yard and Chief Inspector Hadley, who have other things to do besides chase practical jokers all over town, are not amused. They are even less amused when, a few hours after his latest column appears, young Driscoll is murdered, stabbed through the heart with a crossbow bolt and found lying in fog and rain near Traitors' Gate at the foot of the Tower of London. It is only when they learn that

the too-large opera hat jammed down on Driscoll's head is one of those stolen by the Mad Hatter that the police realize that the two cases are somehow connected.

Hadley asks Dr. Gideon Fell, lecturer in history, old friend and colleague, to aid in the investigation. Fat, red-faced Dr. Fell, eyes twinkling behind beribboned glasses, stalks majestically in caped cloak and black shovel-hat through a case involving a British general, a lady jewel thief turned private eye, an illicit love affair, and one more death by violence. He comes up with a neat and surprising solution to the problem of the Mad Hatter's identity and tracks down a lost, genuine Poe manuscript, a short story featuring C. Auguste Dupin written before "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"—the world's first detective story.

Long, intriguing, complicated, this popular work by Carr is a fine example of the novels of the Golden Age of detective fiction.

Equally intricate and trickily plotted, *Hare Sitting Up* (1959) by Michael Innes is almost a parody of the Golden Age story.

During a train trip, a pretty British college student named Alice and her three friends involve a much older fellow passenger named Juniper in their discussion about the possible destruction of the whole human race in an appalling atomic Armageddon:

> "We've been talking about the dangers of concentrating power—and far more potential destructive power than has ever existed before—in the hands of old, sick men. . . . Would there really be any tendency in an old, sick man—an unconscious tendency, I mean—to take the whole outfit with him?"

Jean, another student, thinks the answer is yes: "There are people obsessed with a violent pathological loathing of the whole human species. I have one in my own family."

A third student recalls a character of D. H. Lawrence's who tells his girl that "things would be better if every human being perished tomorrow. He asks her. . . whether she doesn't find this a beautiful clean thought. No more people. Just uninterrupted grass, and a hare sitting up."

Biological warfare is more likely to do the job, unfortunately, says Juniper, whom they recognize as a schoolmaster. There's someone in my own family who knows a bit about that. . . .

The conversation seems idle, but it comes sharply back to Juniper a few hours later when Sir John Appleby of Scotland Yard tells Juniper that his identical twin brother Howard has disappeared. While Miles Juniper had become a schoolmaster, Howard, the genius in the family, had gone in for science and is a major figure in a government biological warfare research laboratory so secret that the government doesn't want to admit it exists—nor to admit that an important scientific figure has vanished from it. "He walked out—without a word, it seems, and without so much as a brief-case. The earth might have swallowed him." And he might have taken with him, from a locked lab refrigerator, a culture of incredible virulence.

Would you consider impersonating your brother for the next few days? asks Appleby. We need time to determine why he left—amnesia, kidnapping, treason—or, more frightening still, possible madness. . . .

The brothers, like most twins, have frequently impersonated each other in childhood and even

later— "Brothers Through the Looking-Glass," they call it—so Juniper agrees, and steps into a world of intrigue and danger.

Appleby, assisted by his wife Judith, carries out an utterly top secret investigation that takes him by helicopter to a guarded island—and a vital clue—far in the frozen North Sea; to a search for a huge, man-sized, wingless bird from the past that may have survived somewhere in the world's fastnesses today; to a religious cult apparently long vanished; and to the vast estate and bird sanctuary of Lord Ailsworth, Jean's grandfather, who loves birds and hates men. He discovers a master criminal named Grindrod and a crazy scheme for the destruction of all humanity that might, just possibly, be workable.

Readers interested in the symbolism of Vanisher novels will find this to be a fascinating book; readers interested largely in a good detective story will not find this either Innes's or Appleby's finest hour. Indeed, Appleby saves the day mostly by sheer chance.

Innes's novel has only three references to Alice—unless one includes the presence of a character named Alice—two phrases and one sentence. Peter Lovesey's *Mad Hatter's Holiday* has even less—the title, seemingly, is the sole reference.

"By the sea, by the sea, By the beautiful sea..." Albert Moscrop, the young owner of a profitable London shop selling the finest in optical instruments, takes his annual vacation at Brighton-on-the-Sea. Filled with elegant hotels, restaurants, shops, conservatories, health clubs, museums (including a huge indoor enclosure filled with live crocodiles!), scientific exhibits, boardwalks, and bandstands by the golden sands of its magnificent beach, Brighton is Victorian England's most popular vacation spot.

Moscrop trains his binoculars on the beach scene—a widespread Victorian hobby—and suddenly the face of the most bewitchingly lovely young lady he has ever seen swims into his view.

Somewhat against his own will—Moscrop is a proper Victorian, but that face!—Moscrop manages to make her acquaintance and discovers that several things about her disturb him, each for a different reason. She is married, to a Dr. Prothero, has a fifteen-year-old stepson, and is subject to an intense nervous strain the origin of which she cannot or will not discuss, so much so that her husband must give her drugs to get her to sleep every night.

Of course, there's nothing *wrong*—her husband is a doctor—but could kindly Mr. Moscrop have this sample of the drug analyzed at the chemist's? She's often wondered what was in it. . . .

Of course, the smitten Mr. Moscrop would, the more so since he's learned that she is the fourth wife of Dr. Prothero, whose other three wives, all well-to-do ladies, died tragically young but most profitably and conveniently for Dr. Prothero.

Brighton, and Mrs. Prothero, enjoy a parade—a British regiment in full-dress scarlet, drums booming, fifes squealing, home from the war in Egypt—and the next night, while another splendidly theatrical performance, a giant fireworks display, occurs, Moscrop gives Mrs. Porthero's maid a note for the lady, containing the chemist's analysis of the sleeping potion.

Moscrop does not see Mrs. Prothero the next day, and it is several days before he realizes that no one else has either. Mrs. Prothero has disappeared.

Worried, Moscrop goes to the police—and the gruesome discovery they make in the crocodile pit leads them to call in Scotland Yard.

Sergeant Cribb and Constable Thackeray investigate, proud and confident that the advanced techniques of Victorian science will soon provide the solution of a case involving the son, who knows more about women than a fifteen-year-old boy could be expected to; Brigid, the bouncing, impertinent maid with the sly and knowing look; something buried beneath the sands; and, finally, an almost undetectable murder method.

Though well written, the novel is badly flawed. The first half is told from Moscrop's point of view but, to keep him as a suspect, the author has to shift viewpoint halfway through, to that of Cribb and Thackeray, from whose vantage the second half is told. The result is a bit jarring, as if the printers had accidentally bound the first half of a romantic historical novel together with the second half of a Victorian police procedural.

Nevertheless, the book has its good points. The description of Brighton in the 1880s is detailed, informed, and authentic, and the characters behave in accordance with the customs, prejudices, and mores of their times, not those of a century later. Best of all is the underlying impression of England in the 1880s, when God was in His Heaven, Victoria was on the throne, and everyone knew that Utopia was only a few months away.

"Rumpole and the Dear Departed" by John Mortimer takes us into modern times as rotund, poetry-loving, zooming-past-middle-age British barrister Horace Rumpole gets the kind of case that seems to land on his desk all too often—one that seems as smooth and easy as a new highway but without warning develops some unexpected and jolting chuckholes.

Take his latest case—please! Miss Beasley, Matron of the Sunnyside Nursing Home, wishes to contest the will of the late Colonel Roderick Ollard, M.C., D.S.O., C.B.E., etc., etc., who died there six months ago. He has left his entire fortune, a cool half-million pounds no less, to three relatives, none of whom has bothered to even visit him since they left him in the

Home years ago. The will is an old one, and there doesn't seem to be a later, thought she's looked and looked.

Surely, she asks Rumpole, it's only fair that the money should go to the one person who took care of him during that time and was his sole consolation and companion—herself?

Well, it all seems open and shut. Rumpole accepts the brief, hearing in his mind a variation of an old, familiar speech—this gallant warrior of Great Britain... forgotten, coldly abandoned... the loving care of a tender angel of mercy, etc., etc. And there is also a fine legal point to add spice to the problem. Since Miss Beasley is not related by law or blood to Colonel Ollard, she has no legal standing in this matter and cannot bring suit to contest the will.

Oh, I knew you'd take the case! says Miss Beasley happily. Colonel Ollard told me you would last night!

Last night? asks Rumpole, experiencing a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. But—I believe you told me Colonel Ollard died six months ago?

Oh, he did! Miss Beasley replies. But I talk to him every night at the séances with my Ouija board!

And of course the defense will pick this up. "Oh, my ears and whiskers!" Rumpole mutters, like the White Rabbit. Nor is he cheered when his client tells him that Colonel Ollard, now perhaps happily discussing military strategy with Winston Churchill, Josef Stalin, and the Duke of Wellington, will interrupt those talks to give him guidance from time to time on the conduct of the case.

With bulldog determination, Rumpole fights his client's case in court, hampered and harassed by a clever defense attorney whose polite but scalpel-sharp jokes about his client have a telling effect on the judge, and by his own eerie uncertainty about whether or not his client's odd advice comes from someone—or Something—in another world.

Rumpole is a welcome addition to the ranks of the great lawyer-detectives. Kindly and witty, sometimes losing, more often winning, occasionally brilliant, a fan of Sherlock Holmes and the *Oxford Book of London Verse*, Rumpole is bulldog British to the core. A sort of Charles Dickens version of Perry Mason, Rumpole appears in three volumes of longish short stories and one novel, tales well-peopled and well-characterized, running the gamut from hilarity to tragedy, packed with insights into British life and institutions. All achieve a strikingly high level of quality and all are recommended. "Rumpole and the Dear Departed," a Janus Resolution-type story, first appeared in the U.S. in *Rumpole for the Defense* (1984), a paperback original.

The only *apparent* allusion to Carroll in this story is the brief quote mentioned. There are more, but not many more, apparent references in the next work, a book as different from Mortimer's as night from day, in every way save quality.

Mark Twain once remarked that the difference between a man and a dog is that when you do the dog a favor it is grateful. Matt Helm, who works for an agency the U.S. government hopes you know nothing about, does a small favor for Colonel Jimenez of the army of Costa Verde, a Latin American state. The head of Costa Verde's brutal regime, President Avila, asks for American aid in dealing with a General Santos, whose revolution is on the verge of success, and the agency sends Helm into the jungles. Helm reasons with General Santos, from about three hundred yards, ejects the .300 Holland and Holland cartridge from his expensive, long-range express rifle, and generously makes a present of the gun to Colonel Jimenez.

A few months later, Helm reads in the papers that someone, alas, has shot President Avila from long range—about three hundred yards—and that Colonel Jimenez is now the ruler of Costa Verde.

Unfortunately, a good soldier is not necessarily a good president. Jimenez's regime dissolves in graft, corruption, and, finally, a successful revolution. The reform government is even worse, however, specializing in fear, thought control, and police torture behind the grim stone walls of La Fortaleze—the Fortress.

In the U.S., the exiled Jimenez family plots a return to power, and in *The Annihilators* (1983) by Donald Hamilton they think they have found the way: kidnap the woman Helm loves and threaten to

kill her unless Helm and his super-secret agency agree to assassinate Costa Verde's current president.

Elly Brand, the pleasantly homely lady reporter who loves Helm but hates the work he does and the way he does it, is seized, and the offer is made. Helm automatically refuses—the agency never, but never, lets itself be used by terrorists—and Elly's dead body is thrown out of a speeding car almost at Helm's feet.

The girl meant much to Helm and he wants revenge—a view frowned on by the agency and its grim leader, a former Navy officer code-named "Mac." "He always worked on the theory that we were a practical organization...and that the sword of retribution was not our weapon. He had never accepted an assignment that involved killing a man just because he was a louse, perhaps because once you get into that racket it's hard to know where to stop."

On the other hand, the agency strongly objects to attempts to control and manipulate it by threats or violence. If one terrorist group gets away with this, every terrorist group will try the same. To prevent this, the agency decided long ago to make an object lesson of the first group attempting it—*pour encourager les autres*—via a simple but chilling policy: annihilation, the total destruction of every single member of the group, without exception.

Helm gets the assignment—and an identifying code name, "Lewis Carroll"—and sets out for Costa Verde, a green and unpleasant land where everyone looks over his shoulder before saying a word and where the U.S., the government of which supports the sadistic regime of El Presidente Rael and his chief torturer, Echevarria Rojo—"Red Henry"—is not popular.

Helm's campaign for vengeance is threatened by the opposition, three dangerous espionage agents who have been sighted there—what are *they* doing in Costa Verde?—and by the discovery of an ancient underground religion dating from the days before the Spanish Conquest, headed by an aging priest who seems to have genuine telepathic powers. The old religion believes in human sacrifice, the Aztec way—removing the living victim's beating heart—which accounts for the mysterious disappearances over the years of natives, tourists, and a scuba diver who entered the black waters of an underground pool and was never seen again. "The local theory [is] that the old gods simply punished him, vanished him—poof—for trespassing on their forbidden domain."

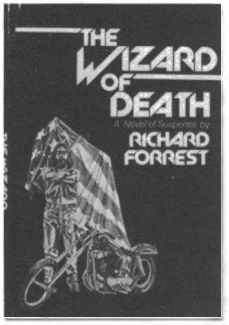
Helms joins an archeological expedition as cover

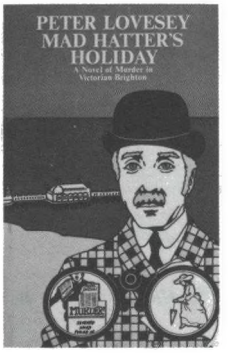
for his entry into Costa Verde. Its leader, the beautiful and highly intelligent Dr. Frances Dillman, is seeking the answer to a mystery that may be more than merely historical: what caused three great Central American civilizations, which had risen for centuries to ever greater heights of culture and art, to die out *literally* overnight?

Years ahead of time, their priests had known the date of doom, when the stars were right and the cycles of evil things had come together. The wall paintings on jungle-covered ruins show the people gathering on that day in the great squares of their cyclopean stone cities—and show them dying there, *en masse,* wholesale, falling and writhing in their death agonies while a few survivors flee into the jungles to start the whole cycle over again.

Oddly, none of the writings or paintings tells what causes the mysterious death. The people knew, years before—why were they unable to avoid it? What was the cause?

The question is more than academic, for, by the priest's calendars, the evil cycles are combining now, the stars are gathering in the night skies, and, perhaps, Western civilization is facing its own doom. Unless the expedition can find the cause of the strange death that so suddenly destroys an entire people, leaving the vast stone cities empty of all living things...Helm himself faces death when the expedition is captured in the jungle and held hostage





for ransom by a band of the rebel army. His efforts to organize an armed escape are blocked by some of the very pepole whose lives he is trying to save—conformers, who follow blindly the orders of anyone in authority, even illegal authority, although they know intellectually that their captors will kill them the moment the ransom is paid, people who do not believe in violence even when it is the only way of saving their lives and the lives of others. For, as Helm points out, if even one soldier escapes to warn the rest of the rebel army, jungle-trained and jungle-equipped and able to move far faster through the tangled growth of the rain forest than the expedition, it will be Custer's Last Stand all over again. Our breakout must leave nothing living behind us, Helm warns—no cripples, no prisoners...no survivors.

Worse, it soon becomes apparent that at least one member of the expedition has turned traitor and is informing their captors of everything Helm plans.

Well, that's poker—you get some lousy cards and some good. And Helm does have some good ones to play. The expedition members include a Vietnam veteran, trained and experienced in jungle warfare, court-martialed and broken in spirit for machine-gunning a Vietnamese woman whose bundle, it turned out, was not a bomb but a baby; a retired Army general with a bad heart but lots of know-how; and their gutsy and loving wives, who have their own views. As the general's wife says:

"...[I]n all these years...that's the first time I got to see him in action....[B]efore...he'd go away and be gone for weeks or months, sometimes years, and come back all shot up or at least so tired he could hardly stand, and they'd hang another pretty on him and tell me what a hero he was; and I'd have to settle for what I could find to read about it because he'd never tell me how it had been....I suppose it's heartless of me, but I can't help being glad about the way this has turned out. He's having himself a hell of a time, the old warhorse; and there aren't going to be too many more

for him. We were figuring this was probably the last trip we'd get to make together.

I looked at her quickly. "That bad?"

She nodded and said quietly, "They gave him one year five years ago. He fooled them, but it's catching up with him now. I don't know what the hell I'm going to do with myself when he's gone. We women just live too damn long." She found a Kleenex in her capacious purse and blew her nose. "Pay no attention to the mushy old lady. She always gets depressed when her feet hurt."

The tension builds as Helm waits—waits for a change in the weather, a night wind that rustles treetops and grasses and hides little sounds such as the pad of feet and the crack of a breaking neck.

Helm's task is made incomparably harder by the fact that he does not seek revenge alone. It must be a certain kind of revenge, not just pointless, mindless massacre. His girl wouldn't have wanted that. She would have wanted the world to be, somehow, a better place after the revenge than before it. And how is that to be managed?

At first Helm isn't sure. But, finally, working with the material Fate hands him, he shows, when he gets the answer, that he is far more than just a trigger man. One of the best scenes in the book involves, not knives and burp guns at midnight, but a quiet, diplomatic talk on a hot summer morning between Helm and the dictator of Costa Verde. Helm, with a

skill that Machiavelli would have envied, sets up an entire régime for the fall, without once telling an out-and-out lie.

But there's plenty of tense action in a gripping climax, as Helm sets out to make the world safe for democracy—or a little safer, anyway—just as Elly would have wished, in a job that's a memorial for Elly Brand. Of course, Helm has his own methods of doing it.

Helm has been working for the agency for more than twenty years now—*The Annihilators* is his twentieth published assignment. He is a senior operative now, high up in agency ranks. Is ole Matt getting soft in his old age?

Waal, not hardly, pilgrim. Not so's you'd notice it.

In *The Annihilators*, Helm races to the aid of an old priest being tortured in an underground temple by three armed men, only two of whom Helm can see in the dim light. Despite the aged man's cries of agony, Helm deliberately holds his fire until he has located the third man—the weapons specialist of the team.

When the expedition is captured by the rebel band, one of its members angrily demands, "Who the hell do you think you are, anyway?" of the rebel colonel, and gets a rifle butt slammed in his face for his effort. Helm's reaction: "[I]f I seem unsympathetic, it's because that kind of loud-mouthed bravery always seems so damn pointless to me; even if you've got courage to burn, why not save it until it counts?"

Helm is always practical, professional. Never mind the heroics—get the job done. Indeed, the entire series is basically a hymn to professionalism—"There's nothing like a pro, in any line of work," Helm says—stressing as it does, over and over again, the immense advantage which the educated, trained, experienced man has over the amateur. It's not only talk; the theme motivates the plots and the actions of the characters. Pragmatism and professionalism are among the great themes of American literature, and few have sung their praises as thoroughly as Donald Hamilton.

A previous Helm novel, *The Terrorizers* (1977), was the low point of the series, and the only one to receive generally negative reviews. After an interlude and one non-Helm novel, Hamilton returned triumphantly with two of the longest and best of the series, *The Revengers* (1982) and, next year, *The Annihilators,* which may well be the best of them all.

Only six sentences of the long novel refer to *Alice*—the assignment of "Lewis Carroll" as a code name and the use of his works as a means of identification between fellow agents, when one introduces himself to Helm:

"Remember that crazy trip we took on that ancient... freighter we called the *Snark*? "

Lewis Carroll, the Mexico City contact had said. One word. I said, "Yeah, that sure was a jabberwocky operation, wasn't it?"

The *Alice* references in R. A. MacAvoy's novel *Tea with the Black Dragon* (1983) are even less—part of a single sentence.

Martha Macnamara, fifty-year-old violinist, arrives in San Francisco in response to a phoned invitation from her daughter Elizabeth, a blonde Viking type who has recently graduated from Stanford with a degree in computer science. Though Liz did not say so specifically, something is seriously wrong—a mother can *tell.*

Liz has reserved rooms for her at one of the city's most elegant and expensive hotels—goodness! how can a systems analyst afford that? Liz must have come into a *lot* of money recently—where she is introduced to a fascinating man, a slim Eurasian of indeterminate age whose name in Mayland Long. A cultured man, with a vast knowledge of obscure works of ancient philosophy from many lands, Long is enthralled by human creativity and admires and recalls in detail her performance of a violin solo on a record made years ago.

Don't get involved with him now, the bartender who introduced them warns her. Once, when he was drunk, he told me he had once been a dragon—and lady, *he wasn't kidding*!

Mrs. Macnamara is amused—but Long does have surprising strength for one so slender. His hands are odd—long, with a wide finger span and long, curling thumbs—and there's the hippie with a lengthy police record found dead outside Long's locked hotel door a year ago. He died, apparently, of a broken neck—but how can a man fall on this hotel's thick, rich carpets and break his neck? And there's the striking, lacquered bronze statue of a dragon in his room, reminding Mrs. Macnamara "of the caterpillar in *Alice*." His way of speaking of ancient Chinese philosophers as if he had known them personally is also disturbing.

But Long does know computers, another aspect of human creativity that fascinates him, and, when he offers to help search for Liz when the girl fails to meet her, Mrs. Macnamara gratefully accepts.

For Liz seems to have disappeared. Financial Software Systems, where she works, claims to have no record of anyone with that name. Her roommates have lost track of her. Dr. Peccolo, who worked with her on a computer security system for a major bank, hasn't seen her in a year. Former classmate Fred Frisch, owner of the Friendly Computers shop, has no idea where she might be, nor does FSS head Floyd Rassmussen. The morning has produced no results.

As they leave the tea shop after lunch, Long turns his head for a moment—just a moment, no more—and, when he turns it back, Martha Macnamara is gone. Vanished, in broad daylight on a San Francisco street—silently, in the midst of a great throng who saw nothing.

Long, who has become romantically attracted to Martha, continues the search, this time for her as well as for her daughter. His amateur detective efforts get him involved, almost fatally, in gunfights, torture, computer crimes, and, finally, hand-to-hand combat at sea, aboard a cabin cruiser under a glorious dawn just off the California coast.

This, Miss MacAvoy's first novel, is well written, in a feminine but not gushy style, and received excellent reviews; it went into a second printing within months of its first appearance. Despite the large amount of

attention paid to crime and detection, as well as a finishing touch of fantasy, *Tea with the Black Dragon* is basically a love story, and a charming one at that.

By now, the reader will have no difficulty in seeing the strange pattern present in these stories, nor in understanding why I have included, along with those stories in which Carroll's *Alice* is a major theme, those in which it is merely mentioned in passing and any reference is apparently minor.

Such a reference is only *apparently* minor, however, for in all these stories in which Carroll's *Alice* is mentioned, either as a major plot device or in a passing phrase, there are mysterious disappearances of people and/or things.

Or to put it another way—when Alice appears, someone else disappears.

In some of these stories, the disappearance is the central puzzle of the plot. A millionaire vanishes, strikingly dressed as the Mad Hatter in Queen's "The Mad Tea Party"; a guest dressed even more strikingly as the White Rabbit vanishes from a Long Island mansion in Grant's "Jabberwocky Thrust." Scientists and engineers disappear in *Tea with the Black Dragon, Hare Sitting Up,* and (along with a nursemaid named Alice) in *Mysteriouser and Mysteriouser.* A pilor and his colorfully painted plane vanish in *Death Through the Looking Glass,* and a murderer disappears from a locked and watched room in "The Theft of the Venetian Window." Other Vanishers include a policeman in *Deadline 2 A.M.,* a Victorian lady's maid in *Mad Hatter's Holiday*, a modern little girl in King's "Malice in Wonderland," a wealthy restauranteur in "The Theft of the Overdue Library Book," and a mocking hat thief in *The Mad Hatter Mystery.* Objects—a roomful of furniture, a roulette wheel—vanish in "The Theft of the White Queen's Menu."

In other stories, the disappearance of people and things is merely a minor subplot or a reference—but it is there. An eccentric hermit vanishes from his woodland haunts in Blake's *Malice in Wonderland,* a car with two men and a payroll vanishes from a lonely backwoods road at night in "The Jabberwocky Murders" *(Night of the Jabberwock)*, and a scuba diver disappears in *The Annihilators.* The people of an entire city, a whole civilization, and even a world vanish in such stories as *Hare Sitting Up, The Annihilators, Death Through the Looking Glass*, and "Communications."

The two remaining stories may seem to be exceptions. Actually, they contain a telltale characteristic of Vanisher cases, in fact as well as in fiction. Confirmation of this point, however, would take another article about as long as this one. A careful study of these and other Vanisher stories will yield to the reader a pretty fair idea of what was in that letter Lieutenant Charles Taylor received, the one his roommate said "considerably agitated him," just a few minutes before he led his five Avenger torpedo bombers into the air on that flight from which they never returned.

As is suggested by James's science-fiction story "Communications," this connecting of *Alice* with disappearing persons is found in science fiction and fantasy fiction as well. Since this article is concerned with mystery fiction, it will not go into great detail about sf or fantasy examples, but the appendix will give an annotated list of such works, showing that each contains this missing persons theme.

It is almost as if there is some strange law of the unconscious which states that you cannot mention Carroll's *Alice* in one part of a work of fiction without mentioning a Vanisher case in some way in another part of the same work—as if Carroll's *Alice* has cast a symbolic shadow. Nor would I be surprised if this were true of nonfiction, too.

If this is in fact so, why is it so?

I don't know.

And yet—there are some odd coincidences here. Probably coincidences are all they are—

An unfindable Alice occurs in the real-life case of Lieutenant Charles Taylor and the missing Flight 19. Two years after the disappearance, Taylor's mother and aunt took a pathetic, unsuccessful trip through Florida and the Everglades, hoping to find traces of Taylor or the wreckage of the aircraft. "Discouraged," says Kusche in *The Disappearance of Flight 19,*

> they spent the rest of the time on a sentimental journey—seeing the places Taylor had lived—Key West, Miami, Fort Lauderdale—and visiting people he had known. In Miami Beach they met "a beautiful girl named Alice," who asked for a picture of Taylor. They were later told that Alice had cried "when Charles went" and that her house was for sale because she would no longer live there.
>
> "Charles," Miss Carroll [Taylor's aunt] wrote in her notebook, "had stumbled into the family by chance, Alice had been taken with him and then saddened by his tragic fate. I wept bitterly over it back at the hotel."[9]

In a later paragraph, Kusche says that at least one of the people who had told them "heart-warming" stories about Taylor had confused him with another Charles Taylor, now living in Texas. It isn't clear if this were Alice or not.

And, as has already been pointed out, a mysterious Alice appears in another real-life disappearance—that of West Point cadet Richard Colvin Cox. A week before he vanished, Cadet Cox woke from a brief doze, rushed suddenly to the head of the barracks stairs, and called down into the darkness, "Is Alice down there?" What was perhaps the world's most thorough police investigation into a disappearance found no trace of any Alice in Cox's life.

Who was "Alice"?

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people disappear? Perhaps with someone at her side, a shy little clergyman who stammers?

Nonsense. Mrs. Alice Hargreaves lies buried in an unmarked grave in the Hargreaves family plot in Lyndhurst, England, where she died in 1934. The "Alice" name in Lieutenant Taylor's history is pure coincidence, as is his mother's maiden name being Carroll.

And yet. . . .

When Carroll's Alice appears, someone or something else disappears, at least in fiction.

Why? What causes this unaccountable connection between Alice Liddell Hargreaves and Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll)? Who was Cox's Alice, unfindable Alice?

Alice—are you down there?

ADDENDUM

The following science fiction and fantasy stories involve *Alice in Wonderland* to some degree.

In "The Red Queen's Race" by Isaac Asimov, first published in *Astounding Science Fiction* (January 1949), a scientist travels backward in time, hoping to change today's world by taking modern scientific knowledge back to the days of early Rome, advancing progress, and destroying the world we know. Government, which knows better, claims that the scientist has disappeared. The investigator-narrator waits tensely for his world and its people to disappear. This is a novelette, and an excellent one.

In "All in a Golden Afternoon," a fantasy short story by Robert Bloch in the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* for June 1956 movie star Eve Eden wakes from a dream of a book she has never read, *Alice in Wonderland*, to find under her pillow a bottle labeled "DRINK ME." Some dream worlds of literature are real, and a friend of Lewis Carroll's can—for a fee—let you live in them forever. Eve disappears from a watched room containing only a mirror. This is one of Bloch's better fantasies.

Alice Liddell Hargreaves herself is a character in several novels by Philip José Farmer, part of his Riverworld series. Here a colossal, empty world with a single giant river is suddenly, inexplicably populated by all the people who have ever lived on Earth, one of whom is Alice. Alice, along with such people as Sir Richard Burton, Mark Twain, and Cyrano de Bergerac, appears as a prominent character in *To Your Scattered Bodies Go* (1971), *The Dark Design* (1977), *The Magic Labyrinth* (1980), and *Gods of Riverworld* (1983). This theme of an empty world in which people suddenly appear is the mirror-equivalent of the filled world from which people suddenly disappear, and it symbolizes the same thing. The human mind often does this in creating dreams, as well as works of fiction, as Freud pointed out in his *Interpretation of Dreams*. The same twist occurs in ordinary speech as well, as when a short man is nicknamed "High Pockets" and a fat man "Skinny." Similarly, we often refer to a difficult day as "great—just simply *great*" or to a visit from a mother-in-law as "just what I needed" when we mean the exact opposite—and our hearers understand our meaning easily. The unconscious knows no negatives.

"The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag" by Robert A. Heinlein, writing as "John Riverside" in *Unknown Worlds* for October 1942, and appearing in the 1959 collection of the same title, tells of a pudgy little man calling himself Jonathan Hoag, who has a problem for Ed Randall and his wife Cynthia (Randall & Craig, Private Investigators). Hoag sleepwalks; he wakes in the morning, dead tired, with dirt on his shoes that wasn't there when he went to bed and a thick, red, gummy stuff under his fingernails. I have to know, he whispers—that red stuff—is it, can it be, Mr. Randall—*blood*?

Randall suspects that the man is unbalanced but agrees to check, and he soon learns several disturbing things about his client. Hoag doesn't leave fingerprints; the fine dust on the arms of the chair he used is unmarked after he leaves. . . .

Also, someone doesn't want them on the case. Someone who, anonymously, sends them a large, beautiful mirror. At night, Cynthia admires it—so clear, like an open window—you could almost walk through it, like Alice Through the Looking Glass. In the morning, she is gone, disappeared, dressed only in her pajamas, the door locked on the inside.

Desperately, Randall searches for her, encountering that sinister organization known as the Sons of the Bird and learning at last the dangerous and unsettling profession of Jonathan Hoag, in a gripping and unusual short novel which effectively blends fantasy with the detective story.

When the Red King Wakes (1966) by Joseph E. Kelleam tells the adventures of two students, a boy and a girl, who vanish from the campus of an Oklahoma college and are transported into a world on an alternate plane of existence. The world contains medieval castles, cavalrymen riding giant cats, and conflict between the supporters of its ruler, an alien being from the stars called the Red King, and those opposed to him, who believe that, when he wakes, the world and its people will disappear.

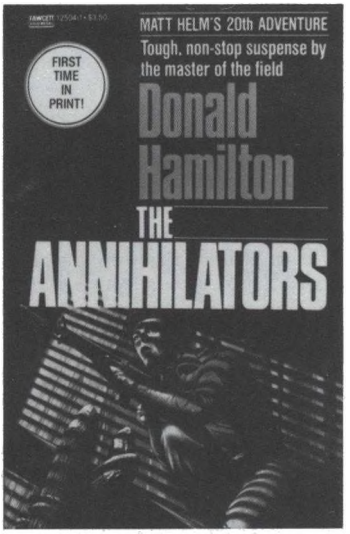
Another story is "Mimsey Were the Borogoves" by Henry Kuttner, first published in *Astounding Science Fiction* (February 1943) under the pen name of "Lewis Padgett." To test his time machine, a scientist of an incredibly far future sends two children's toys—educational toys, but education for living in *his* culture—back in time. One is found on the bank of the Thames by a little girl named Alice, who tells her clergyman friend the stories the magic box tells her, while he writes them down, not realizing that they are mathematical formulae of an odd kind. The other lands in the twentieth century, in the hands of Scott Paradine, son of a college philosophy

instructor, who, with the help of his smaller sister Emma, solves the equations and vanishes with her, "like movement in a distorting mirror." This short story is a modern masterpiece of science fiction and is often reprinted.

In "The Portal in the Picture," a short novel by Kuttner in *Startling Stories* for September 1949, nightclub singer Lorna Maxwell tries to aid her career by attracting rising actor Eddie Burton, who can't stand her. Performing a sample dance routine in his apartment, below a picture of an imaginary world about which Eddie's Uncle Jim told him, she screams—and Eddie, unbelieving, sees her vanish into thin air.

The cops don't believe it either, and Eddie escapes through the portal in the picture— a hop, skip, and jump ahead of an arrest for murder—into the strange world of Malesco, where history took a different turn at the time of the death of Caligula, and alchemy, not Christianity, rules an alternate Earth. This is not absolutely top-flight Kuttner, but it is well written and entertaining.

The *Alice* references consist of a paragraph in which Eddie, while searching for Lorna, the only proof of his innocence, compares his experiences in the world beyond the glass-covered picture with those of Alice in Wonderland.



Also worth noting is "The Lion and the Unicorn," another novelette by Henry Kuttner (as "Lewis Padgett") in *Astounding Science Fiction* (July 1945). This novelette is part of the Baldie series—later collected and slightly rewritten, with some bridging material, as *Mutant* (1953), a novel by "Padgett." The Blowup, a worldwide atomic war, almost destroys the human race and creates a mutant strain of hairless, telepathic humans called the Baldies. Feared and hated because no secret can be kept from them, the Baldies are often the victims of pogroms and lynching as humanity struggles to rebuild civilization after the Blowup. The Baldies, under leader Barton, have achieved an uneasy *modus vivendi* when Barton discovers a greater threat—an insane, paranoid strain of Baldies who believe themselves to be supermen, who can transmit their thoughts to each other on a wavelength sane Baldies cannot intercept, and who are plotting to trick humanity into wiping itself out in another and last Blowup, removing mankind from the face of the Earth and leaving only the super-race of paranoids to take their place. Barton and Baldie scientist McNey work frantically to find a secret method of communication for the sane telepaths, before the pograms and the Holocaust begin. This is a good novelette in a superior series—better as separate novelettes than as a novel—and is among Kuttner's best.

Again we see the theme of humans being removed—disappearing—from Earth and being replaced by a non-human race—Procyons in James's story, birds and rabbits in Innes's, paranoid telepathic mutants in Kuttner's and scientifically advanced humans in Asimov's. In Forrest's novel, the morally superior People of the Blossom will take over the earth after the inferior rest of humanity have destroyed themselves in an atomic Armageddon.

The themes of vanishing people and their reappearance to fill another world are both found in

Harlan Ellison's vivid short story about Alan Juste, who finds himself "Chained to the Fast Lane in the Red Queen's World" (1983). Alan, like all of mankind, lives in an infinite number of alternate worlds, each strikingly like, but not identical to, the others, moving from one to the next when the pain and frustration of one life becomes too much to stand, in a vast game, not of musical chairs, but of musical lives. Alan's difference is that, unlike nearly all humanity, he remembers those alternate lives and vows that somewhere, somehow, he will find a better world. Once he finds it, he will stay there, despite the pressure of the multitude of Alans in all the infinite worlds behind him, pushing him toward and through an invisible membrane into the next.

Alan vanishes from an elevator dropping from the fifteenth to the fourteenth floor, passing into an existence dominated by a dying mother kept nightmarishly alive by miracles of medical science, disappears from a boat on the Thames into the world of a paranoid factory worker, and so on and on, until he reaches the perfect world in which he feels himself to fit—and faces a duplicate Alan who refuses to leave it.

Alan attempts to kill the present owner but is stopped by a horde of other Alans who have also stopped in this world, slowly filling it up with Alan Justes who have found the perfect place.

"The Terrible Answer" by Paul Gallico, a short story in the *Saturday Evening Post* for September 1, 1950, is about Professor Haber, a mathematical

theorist who has ruined the lives of his wife and his assistant in his neurotic but successful drive to surpass his famous father. Tonight, Haber is using his own invention, the world's most advanced computer, to finish a mathematical theory the applications of which will have disastrous consequences for mankind but will make his name immortal: "No one in the world that survived the era that would begin with his discovery would ever forget the name of Professor Haber."

Haber is thrilled when the machine succeeds. He loves it, talks to it, calls it "Liebchen"—and tonight, in the top-secret goverment lab, it talks back to him. Why not use me, it says, to learn if your wife is runnlng away with your assistant? You can put it in equation form. . . .

Harber does, and, when he receives the terrible answer, he reaches for his gun.

His fellow scientists are shocked by what they find the next morning. Among other things, there are two equations, one a masterpiece of scientific genius, the other, the last printed out by the machine, gibberish—pure "mathematical Jabberwocky," making no sense at all.

Though the allusion to Carroll's *Alice* is the slightest here of any story listed in this article—just one word, "Jabberwocky"—we see the same accompanying reference to human life being removed from a world.

Seabury Quinn's novelette, "The Chapel of Mystic Horror," from *Weird Tales* of December 1928, begins with occult detective Jules de Grandin and his friend and colleague, Dr. Trowbridge, listening to an odd tale from a fellow guest at a weekend party held at a former chapter house of the Crusaders. The edifice was shipped, stone by stone, from Cyprus by an eccentric millionaire and reassembled in the United States.

Lovely, red-headed commercial artist Dunroe O'Shane confides fearfully that she can't make a happy Christmas card Nativity scene come out right. The stable keeps turning into a stone vault with grotesque statues, pillars carved into stone feet pressing human heads; Joseph becomes a cloaked figure of a man in Crusader garb, the red cross reversed; the manger becomes a stone altar with the Child on top and a nude woman with long, red hair much like Miss O'Shane's kneeling before it—with a curved French butcher's knife in her hand.

Some invisible force seems to take over and alter the drawing, Miss O'Shane says—it's like Alice in Wonderland, when she stood, invisible, behind the Red King and moved his pencil for him.

When a three-year-old baby boy is kidnapped by a gang of cloaked night riders in Crusader garb, de Grandin remembers the story and is alert when Miss O'Shane, following a theatrical performance—a séance—sleepwalks, clad only in a thin silk nightgown, despite the snow and freezing cold outside, stalking through the old house where Crusaders practiced black magic centuries ago. She steps into a bedchamber. When de Grandin and Trowbridge open the door, there is no trace of Miss O'Shane in the stone room, which has no other visible door and whose two windows are cemented to their frames.

Armed with the weapons of both superstition and science, de Grandin and his friend, hoping to save a kidnapped child from a hideous death, battle a band of ghostly Crusaders whose shadowy swords can kill, in a house that brought its haunts with it from the Old World to the New. Somewhat old-fashioned, but effective, this is one of the better tales of Jules de Grandin, ghost-breaker extraordinary. Again we see that, when Alice appears, someone or something disappears, often in the classic Vanisher form. □

Variations on a Mystery-Thriller: Paul Bowles' UP ABOVE THE WORLD

By Ellen G. Friedman

Paul Bowles's *Up Above the World* is a variation on the mystery-thriller, a vehicle which provides Bowles with at least two rich metaphors—that of victim and criminal—with which to spin a story exposing some of the delusions by which the middle class lives. The victims in this novel, Dr. and Mrs. Slade, do not suspect they are victims. They go about their travels as if they were simply ordinary travelers and guests. Unfortunately, they suffer the fate of victims. The obvious criminal, Grove Soto, believes

he is an artist whose life and crimes are perfectly constructed and therefore admirable. He, too, however, suffers the fate of his true identity, that of criminal. Whether out of desperation and hubris or stupidity and self-delusion, the characters who dominate this novel mistake their relationship to the world.

The Slades give little evidence of their roles as travelers and guests. Despite the fact that they are on an annual holiday, they take only one small boat ride during the course of the novel. Rather, they spend most of the novel as the prisoners, not the guests, of Grove Soto. Although Bowles explores some ideas of the artist through the characterization of Grove Soto, Grove is more murderer then artist. These attempts to maintain a false relationship to the world court failure; indeed, Bowles suggests that any attempt to maintain a stable relationship to the world is futile and invites disaster. His novel teaches the dangers of feeling secure, safe, complacent. Thus it teaches the lesson of the most powerful of mystery fiction.

Like a good many thrillers, *Up Above the World* opens on a scene of seemingly ordinary domesticity, progresses leisurely to deep obfuscation, proceeds through a sudden series of disclosures to clarification, and closes in ironic resolution.

The book opens with Dr. and Mrs. Slade at breakfast concerned about "missing the boat"—a metaphor for their insufficient grasp of reality throughout the book. They are about to embark on the second leg of their anniversary expedition, from La Resaca to Puerto Farol. The rather sluggish rhythm of this opening is broken by the first mystery in the book, Mrs. Agnes Rainmantle. A huge woman with "matted and stiff hair," she is broke, missing her I.D. card, without her letter of credit, and waiting for her son to rescue her. At Puerto Farol, Mrs. Rainmantle is given the last room in the hotel, a storeroom. In a gesture of generosity, Mrs. Slade offers to share her room with Mrs. Rainmantle, relegating her husband to the storeroom. During the night, Mrs. Slade is plagued by nightmares and awakens with the impression that there has been a third presence in the room. As she leaves the dark hotel room, in which Mrs. Rainmantle is still sleeping, to catch an early train, she shines a flashlight inside the bedroom and imagines that Mrs. Rainmantle's eyes are open.

Bowles has written a mystery-thriller in angst but gets physical peril. Lives,

When the Slades arrive at the Capitol, Mrs. Slade orders a separate room for herself to catch up on her sleep. The next morning, Dr. Slade reads in *El Globo* of a hotel fire, occurring shortly after daybreak, that has killed Agnes Rainmantle—news he keeps from his wife. Meanwhile, Mrs. Slade, an American, is picked up by a handsome young man who offers to drive her to an English-language bookstore. After their visit to the bookstore, he insists, despite her earnest protests, on taking her to see the view from his apartment. As he brings her back to her hotel, he introduces himself as Soto and invites her and her husband to dinner.

In Book Two, Bowles shifts the scene from the Slades to Grove Soto's apartment. We learn that Grove has gone to Puerto Farol because his mother has been killed in a hotel fire. We enter the consciousness of Grove, a man plagued by nightmares and obsessed with control, who hates his mother, is neurotically preoccupied with his child-mistress, and is often stoned on pot. Into this decadent atmosphere walk the Slades, versions of Henry James's innocent Americans. While at Grove's apartment, the couple become ill with what Grove insists is Newbold's disease, a symptom of which is hallucinations, recounted at length in this section.

In Book Three, which shifts back to the point of view of the Slades, they are recovered, though with gaps in their memories, and reunited, after having lived in separate quarters as Grove's "guests" during their illness. They feel well treated and contemplate remaining with Grove for a San Felipe fiesta to which he invites them. On a walk, Mrs. Slade discovers some scraps of paper with "scaffolding" on them. Shortly after this discovery, Dr. Slade has a relapse, and, when his wife checks on him, she finds that he is missing from his bed. Desperate and finally suspicious, Mrs. Slade bribes Thorny, a man working for Grove, into taking her to San Felipe, where she hopes to find a doctor. Searching for Dr. Solero at a pension, she is surprised by the entrance of Grove.

which the reader expects Existential not their meanings, are at stake.

Book Four, the section of disclosures, shifts to Thorny's point of view, opening with his observation that Grove has done everything wrong. Thorny then reveals "everything" to the reader. Grove recently handed Thorny a sheaf of papers outlining his plan to murder his mother for her money. Thorny did the job by shooting her full of curare while she slept in the hotel room at Puerto Farol. He was the third presence whom Mrs. Slade sensed during the night. After Mrs. Slade left, he set the room on fire to destroy evidence of his deed. Mrs. Slade's presence in the room worried Grove. Thus he lured the Slades to his apartment, where he fed them LSD and injected them with truth serum and morphine, a treatment he hopes will erase Mrs. Slade's memory of the night. Thorny judges Grove's machinations as infantile and self-indulgent. When Grove discovers that Mrs. Slade has seen some pieces of the papers on which he outlined his plans, he decides to murder the Slades. He and Thorny sedate Dr. Slade and throw him off a cliff.

Book Five shifts back to Grove and Mrs. Slade at San Felipe. A short section, it ends with Grove revealing his revolver to Mrs. Slade. In the last section, Book Six, Bowles returns to Thorny's point of view. Sensing Grove's vulnerability, Thorny examines Grove's apartment with "proprietory interest" and claims an elegant bedroom for himself. The novel ends with Thorny cutting his fingernails before taking a bath.

In the intriguing guise of a mystery thriller, the novel is vintage Paul Bowles, presenting an exotic world moved by the logic of madness and dope, suffused with hallucination and nightmare, and populated by the decadent, the corrupt, and the dense. The narrative ends resolutely, but without relieving the pervading sense of menace. In the end, we are left with a leaden and discomfiting irony. The reader waits for Grove to fall, expecting his fall to redeem a nasty universe and restore our optimism, but he falls only after the Slades are dead, thus too late for redemption. The order that replaces him, represented by Thorny, is certainly not better in moral terms. Moreover, Thorny has less imagination and no interesting delusions. The book ends in diminishment. There is justice, but it is a weak justice—mean and merely poetic.

The novel denies its readers some of the ordinary pleasures of the thriller. In fact, a story filled with bizarre characters, drugs and murder, *Up Above the World* refuses to excite, to redeem evil with excitement and intensity. One of Bowles's techniques is to treat the extraordinary as routine. Moreover, he manages to infuse a sense of instability into the ordinary. It is a method that undermines a reader's sense of what is normal, producing uneasiness rather than excitement. Indeed, it makes the reader feel somewhat neurotic.

In the ordinary mystery-thriller, threatening imagery and characters' suspicions are not always

realized in imminent action, but are often enough to excite the reader each time such imagery or suspicions occur. In Bowles, such hints are nearly never fulfilled immediately. Thus the reader feels repeatedly vexed. For instance, as Dr. Slade sits contemplatively rocking at his Puerto Farol hotel, he notes a buzzard on the veranda, observes a skeletal and nearly furless cat, and hears a cockatoo screaming with the "voice of a demon." Nothing extraordinary happens to Dr. Slade at this point, however. Similarly, on an after-dinner walk, suddenly finding themselves on a boardwalk above a swamp, the Slades are tormented by mosquitoes, fearful of bats, aware of the sound of their footsteps. The atmosphere is charged and ominous, but again, nothing happens. Eventually, the imagery is seen to fit into the novel's scheme. In Book One, Bowles makes a point of Mrs. Rainmantle's "matted and stiff" hair, but this detail seems merely curious until much later when we learn of her death and remember the description of her hair that presaged it. Similarly, the feeling of danger which the plant and animal imagery imparts makes sense when we learn the Slades have been killed.

Like many writers of mystery-thrillers, Bowles toys with the reader, but his teasing unsettles rather than titillates. In addition to the seemingly gratuitous imagery, the shifting point of view contributes to a sense of disorientation. Bowles uses the limited omniscient, but he moves from character to character. Unlike, say, Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," there is no central voice for the reader to evaluate and judge and thus no fixed position from which to view the events. When Grove insists on driving Mrs. Slade to his apartment, the reader suspects his intention is to rape or murder her. Instead, Grove acts the gracious host, inviting the Slades to dinner. The reader's understanding of the characters is undermined, and one does not know what to make of the incident.

Bowles's criminal is a variation on a type that frequents the thriller. A sophisticated and more interesting version of the psychotic killer, Grove, like some of his kind, has mother and father problems. Although he has been neither mistreated nor overprotected, he has been the object of rivalry between his divorced parents, with each parent trying to outbribe the other to win Grove's allegiance if not affection. He responds by manipulating them and finally by murdering his mother for her money so that he will not have to be dependent on either parent.

The shape of Grove's madness, encouraged no doubt by his parents' doting, is narcissism. He wishes to reduce the world to a dimension small enough for him to control absolutely: "What he had in mind when he fitted together the various possibilities that would maintain his present life was an eternally

empty schedule in which he would enjoy the maximum liberty to make sudden decisions." He wishes to exclude chance and bar the accidental, but it is a wish that denies life, which includes the drama of the unpredictable.

Bowles uses Grove to criticize a type of artist. As a criminal, Grove resembles an artist in that he stands apart from his society, shapes a plot, and brings it into being. That Bowles intends this role for Grove is suggested by the manner in which he plans not only his crimes but also his meetings with his mistress, Luchita. He prepares for a discussion with his perpetually stoned mistress by writing a script, rehearsing both parts with a tape recorder, and determining a setting for the event. In addition, the murders are acted from scripts that are complete with descriptions of scenery.

Grove represents the aesthetic as opposed to the moral artist. He takes pleasure in imagining the police surveying his belongings and concluding, "This kind of genius for achieving total perfection has no application in an era of collective consciousness." He expects to be judged by an aesthetic measure, his murders admired for the beauty of their planning and execution. In order to maintain this delusion of perfection, he attempts to divorce himself from the stream of life. He practices auto-hypnosis to convince himself that the present is already past, objectifying himself to shed the burden of living in time. He suggests the Flaubertian artists, enamored with formal beauty and perfection, disdainful of the bourgeois obsession with morality.

Bowles explores the limitations of this attitude toward art through Grove's nightmare and through the novel's ironic ending. Like most dreams, Grove's is filled with images in transformation. A paranoic, obsessed with control, Grove dreams he is in a narrow cot poised about an "illimitable" city. Attached to the cot is an enormous Easter egg with a television screen and a hall full of spectators. A middle-aged woman on stage in the hall turns into his mother, who pursues him down the corridor of an asylum to which she has him committed. Suddenly he feels terror, feels that by touching a button he has put all the wrong forces into motion. The world of the egg—which at first he imagines he controls by pushing buttons as easily as he controls a television screen—turns into an asylum from which he cannot escape. A product of his guilt over his mother's murder, the nightmare also presages the future. Grove, who attempts to destroy that which he cannot control absolutely, finds himself at the end in the power of the hired assassin, Thorny. Although, by reducing his life to a play which he writes, he attempts to contain the consequences of his actions, the consequences, like the forces in his dream, escape his command. The plot escapes the confines of his script.

Thorny, whose point of view closes the novel, better represents Bowles's idea of the artist. In the novel's last paragraph, Bowles describes Thorny preparing for his bath, a ritual appropriate for the initiation of a new order:

> [He] wiped the steam from the enormous mirror on the wall; it had a wide beveled edge that played tricks with the image. He ducked his head back and forth a few times, watching his face change. Then he moistened a grifa, lit it, and partially undressed. Taking a pair of curved scissors from the cabinet, he began to cut his fingernails.

The allusion to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* suggests that Thorny has usurped the role of artist from Grove. Bowles also implies that the artist who, like Grove, is a machinator, insisting on narrowly shaping and controlling his plot, has yielded to another type of artist who, like Thorny, is without pretension, who is a shameless opportunist and improviser, and who can maintain an identity separate from his work.

As a victor, Thorny is typical of Bowles. A practical and greedy man, uninhibited by ethics, free of conscience, liberated from ideals, suspicious of elegant ideas, he is equipped to recognize and grab the main chance. Noting the "confusion in Grove's voice" after Mrs. Slade is murdered, Thorny understands that it is "the right moment to move for an establishment of a new status." Previously impoverished and dependent on Grove, he now makes himself comfortable in Grove's house and gives the servants orders for his dinner.

Bowles presents an exotic world moved by the logic of madness and dope, suffused with hallucination and nightmare, and populated by the decadent, the corrupt, and the dense.

It is impossible for a middle-class reader to identify closely with any image of the characters. They are amoral, like Thorny, maddeningly deluded, like Grove, or perversely blind, like the Slades. The Slades, in fact, represent a type of American prevalent in Bowles. Innocent to the point of stupidity, they are not so stupid, however, that they completely alienate us—enough to evoke disgust, but not enough to eliminate self-recognition. They persist, for instance, in maniacally trusting their victimizer. As the Slades suffer the effects of the drugs Grove feeds them, they believe his lie that they have a rare virus. In fact, when Grove releases them from the drugs, they come to consciousness grateful for their host's kindness, somewhat embarrassed by the gaps in their memories. Their credulity is especially frustrating since Dr. Slade is a physician. One of their few complaints is that Grove tends to make drinks a bit strong. Indeed, readers of mystery fiction are used to victims being somewhat dumber than their murderers. An overly gullible victim is a comfort to the reader, whose sense of safety is confirmed by his own superior intelligence.

The naïveté of the Slades, however, like that of some other of Bowles' protagonists, at times strains our ability to suspend disbelief. Dr. Slade shares the assumption of the Professor in Bowles's well-known story "A Distant Episode" that the right words and moves make one safe. As with the Professor who walks to his doom suppressing his suspicions and denying his danger, Dr. Slade, in the grip of drugs and assassins, summons an insane complacence and confidence. He believes that if he is "completely obedient" he will not be harmed. "At the first sign of divergency of opinion, or behavior on his part, their attitude will change. He has always known the world is like this. There is no way of escaping. They come and get you and quietly lead you away." The Slades simply do not have the imagination for danger—a lack, Bowles suggests, that may identify the middle class. Indeed this lack also implies an arrogant egocentricity, though "arrogant" is perhaps too strong a word for the timid Slades.

Bowles uses the Slades' unwillingness to admit danger to manipulate the reader. Since the novel's long first section is narrated from the point of view of the Slades, the reader at first feels menace, but not danger. The universe of this novel feels wrong; it sits as uncomfortably as in a novel by Camus. There seems to be an odd disjunction among characters, as well as between the characters and their surroundings. The reader reconciles the conventional Slades with the unexplained Mrs. Rainmantle, the overly insistent and too handsome Mr. Soto, the ominous vegetation, and the threatening birds with difficulty, suspecting, in the first section at least, that Bowles's point is this disjunction. Thus, with a deft, ironic hand, he has written a mystery-thriller in which the reader expects Existential *angst* but gets physical peril. Lives, not their meanings, are at stake. If the reader expects a climax in which the familiar and by now comfortable notion that the universe is absurd is again proposed, he will be shaken by the novel's blunt physical brutality, the torture and murder.

In Bowles, characters are always miscalculating the degree of their safety and others' capacity for evil. Moreover, this miscalculation is sometimes fatal. Bowles's genius is in keeping his narrative from being driven to final illumination and redemption. Indeed, in his fiction, it is the forces we admire least which prevail. □

By T. M. McDade

Real Life Cases

CRIME HUNT

Generally, there is no precise time by which a murderer must have dispatched his victim. A day more or less means little; it is more important that the job be well done. Sidney Harry Fox, however, had no such latitude. His mother had to die before midnight on October 23, 1929, or the insurance policies on her life would expire for nonpayment of premiums, and he had no funds with which to pay them. It would, perhaps, be a strain on the language to say that he "succeeded," though he finished the job with but twenty minutes to spare. More particularly, he strangled his mother in the Metropole Hotel in Kent, England and then set a fire which gave off a great quantity of smoke to make it appear that she had been suffocated by it. As Fox was hanged for the deed, however, we can only count him another victim of the life insurance delusion: namely, that if you are determined to kill someone, you might just as well place a small bet with an insurance company that you can get away with it.

In that delightful book on rural and outdoor homicide called *Murder Out Yonder,* Stewart Holbrook characterizes an ambitious assassin as being well-versed in "What a Man Contemplating Murder of a Policy Holder Ought to Know." Because Holbrook does not enlarge upon the fascinating possibilities of this subject, we are left to conjecture what matters of vital concern might be included in a course of study in life insurance for the murder-minded. My own sketchy researches have disclosed some of the suggestions, hints, and cautions which are to be found in the cases of the past. There is undoubtedly a need for more careful study of the whole subject; some gentlemen with a curious turn of mind might well make it the subject of a monograph. What I have to report will be only enough to show that it is a matter for careful consideration by anyone "contemplating murder of a policyholder."

At the very outset it must be noted that if I, the beneficiary, murder the person insured, and am found out, I cannot collect on the policy. Presumably, this is done to discourage murder, though how it can have this effect is hard to see, for, if I am discovered, collecting the policy will do me little good, and if I am not, I'll collect anyhow. In any event, if you expect to collect on a policy as beneficiary, it is clearly desirable that you not be connected in any way with the cause of death. Even when the beneficiary murders the insured, it usually will not profit the insurance company because it might still have to pay the proceeds of the policy to the heirs of the victim. This could mean that, by murdering your wife, you could make your mother-in-law rich, for if they catch you, the proceeds might go to her.

A short time before he died, Mr. William F. Udderzook wrote regarding the disposition of his remains:

"It is my desire that my remains will rest in Baltimore, if not in the same lot, at least in the same cemetery with those of Mr. W. S. Goss, a friend ever dear to me, that our bodies might return to mother earth, and our spirits may mingle together on the bright sunny banks of deliverance where pleasures never end."

INSURAND AND MURDER

This seemly, if slightly excessive, feeling for a brother-in-law has less point when we learn that Mr. Udderzook wrote these sentiments only a few weeks before he was hanged for the murder of brother Goss. There is a further uncertain point as to which of two disputed corpses he intended for this sentimental co-mingling. The confusion arose when a small cottage burned outside Baltimore and a body, alleged to be that of Winfield Scott Goss was found in the scarred ruins. Reputedly, Goss was using this remote building for experiments on developing a substitute for India rubber. On the evening of February 2, 1872, he was in the building with his brother-in-law, who had the Dickensian name of William Udderzook, along with a neighbor, Louis Engel, when the oil lamp failed. Udderzook and Engel went to the latter's house for a lamp, tarried there a while, and, returning, found the building in flames. So encompassing was the fire that the building was not entered, and later, when W. S. Goss was unaccounted for, a charred body was removed from the ashes.

The local coroner readily accepted the identification of the corpse by Mrs. Goss, but the insurance companies which carried $25,000 of insurance on the life of Goss, including a $5,000 policy issued less than a fortnight before, were more skeptical. There was no one thing to justify their suspicions, but an accumulation of minor inconsistencies enhanced their natural reluctance to part with such a large sum. What had prevented Goss from getting out of such a simple, barn-like building? Why had Udderzook waited so long after arriving at the fire to tell others who thought the building empty that Goss might still be in there? Also, A. C. Goss, the brother of the alleged deceased, in trying to account for his movements at the time of the fire, told a story contradicted by a number of people. And then there was the junkman. In many a carefully contrived scenario, there arrives on the scene an actor for whom no part was written and whose unrehearsed role destroys the plot of the story. J. C. Smith was such a person. Remembering that Goss had possessed a fine gold watch and ring, he poked through the ashes the next day but failed to find those articles. When the victim's brother heard of this, he made his own search, which oddly enough turned up the missing items of jewelry.

The insurance companies refused to pay, and the family brought suit on the policies. The trial of one of the cases did not come on to be heard until May 1873, now more than a year after the event. While the insurers were able to raise a strong doubt as to the identity of the body (a cadaver from a medical school seemed a strong possibility), the jury, as

juries will, resolved their doubts, if they ever had any, in favor of the plaintiffs. The victory, however, was an empty one, for the judgment was appealed and the companies let it be known to all that their line of attack would now be directed to finding the live W. S. Goss.

For Udderzook, victory had proved most elusive, and now he faced the threat of catastrophe. He had, in fact, been concealing the living Goss since his brother had driven him off in a buggy on the night of the fire. Under the name of A. C. Wilson, Goss had been spirited to Philadelphia, then to Cooperstown, Pennsylvania, finally spending seven months in a boarding house in Newark, New Jersey. Three weeks after the jury verdict and the insurance companies' redirection of their efforts, Udderzook decided to convert the fiction of Goss's demise into one of fact. If the insurance company insisted that he be dead, well, then dead he would be.

Reputedly moving Goss to a new hiding place, Udderzook by buggy took him to some woods in Chester County, Pennsylvania, where he murdered him, dismembered the body, and buried it in the woods. There was now no question that the insured was dead, but Udderzook was in no position to prove this to the insurer. Moreover, he was quickly undone by his sloppy work. Twelve days after he had dug the shallow grave in Baer's Woods, a farmer, curious about the numerous buzzards in the area, discovered the body, and there was very little problem identifying this corpse.

In October, Udderzook was tried for Goss's murder, and, though it took the jury two days to reach a verdict, the delay was more an expression of their reluctance to send him to the gallows than a doubt about his guilt. On November 12, 1874, he was hanged in Chester County, another victim of the insurance delusion, for, in taking on the insurance companies, he faced very powerful adversaries. Much of the investigation in the case was financed by insurance company money. Public prosecutors are overworked, underpaid, and must divide their limited time and resources among many cases. And, unfortunately for Udderzook, plea-bargaining was little practiced at the time.

Had things turned out slightly differently than they did, the case might have raised the theoretical problem of double jeopardy with which murder students love to play. Briefly stated the rule of double jeopardy is that a person may not be twice prosecuted for the same offense. Suppose, then, that the first trial had been a criminal prosecution of Udderzook for the murder of Goss, while Goss was in fact still alive. Suppose further that the jury had acquitted him. Thereafter, if he had killed Goss, could he have claimed successfully that he had already been tried for the crime?

In the Udderzook case, the insurance company paid no one, as the original policies had been procured by fraud. It is only when the policies are innocently procured in the first place that the company must pay the other heirs of the deceased. Where the policy is procured originally with the intent to defraud the insurance company, it need not pay on the murder of the insured, if the insured were a party to the scheme.

It might be suggested that the Udderzook case is exceptional, that it happened long ago and that one swallow does not make a summer. But the law reports are replete with similar cases, and the conclusions of many of them seem to be the same—for example, just as it was for Harry Hayward. This young man had insured his mistress and business partner, Katherine Ging, and then arranged for another to murder her. Like Udderzook, he ended up on a gallows—in Minneapolis—a gallows, incidentally, which an accommodating sherriff had painted a bright red at Hayward's request, but he drew the line at doing the same for the rope. For the doubtful, I offer one more example.

In 1927, Joe Lefkowitz, a 30-year-old East Side merchant, decided to play the insurance game with Ben Goldstein, a 22-year-old neighborhood youth. The plot, once again, was for Goldstein, heavily insured, to disappear under circumstances suggesting that he had drowned. Over the course of a year, Goldstein had contracted $70,000 worth of life insurance with two companies on which premiums of $1,706 had been paid—the money supplied by Lefkowitz, who had also maneuvered to make himself beneficiary. The scenario called for Goldstein to go out in a boat and not return, having been spirited away in a motorboat and sent out West while the insurance companies were pressed into paying.

If the plot were worn and hackneyed, the players cast for the parts were ludicrous, particularly as Lefkowitz's secret script did not provide for Goldstein to survive his boat ride. At least Lefkowitz was realistic enough to know that insurance companies would require a body—not merely some clothes in a boat. The part of First Murderer was played by Irving Rubinzahl, a nineteen-year-old ex-con and whilom boxer, introduced to Lefkowitz by another youth, Harry Green, an eighteen-year-old moron with a mental age of eight. Whether the plotters had cast Green in the role of Second Murderer is not clear, for the youth, protected by his moronic simplicity, saved himself from the fate which befell his companions.

On August 26, 1927, at about 8 A.M., Goldstein, Rubinzahl, and Green left Al's Boat House at the foot of West 30th Street and Neptune Avenue in Coney Island in a rented rowboat for a row in Gravesend Bay. Was a crime scene ever more appropriately named? About 300 yards from the dock, Rubinzahl, who sat in the bow with Goldstein rowing, suggested changing seats. When Goldstein rose and straddled the seat, Rubinzahl pushed him overboard and then, taking the oars, rowed out of the reach of the struggling Goldstein. There were brief shouts of help from the drowning man as well as from Green, and one witness, a Captain Hinman, started to the rescue, but by the time he arrived Goldstein had disappeared.

It took but a few days for the police to uncover the sordid details of the plot and

charge the inept trio with murder. The wheels of justice moved faster in 1927 - in ninety days the defendants were on trial for their lives; today, more than a year would pass. The prosecution was buttressed by Rubinzahl, who, turning State's evidence, involved Lefkowitz as the "master mind" of the plot. As a result, only the latter and Green went to trial; Rubinzahl would later plead guilty and receive a twenty-years-to-life sentence.

The trial itself provided few dramatic moments but should be a lesson to the ill-advised. Max Fellner, the insurance agent through whom the policies had been obtained, told how Lefkowitz had sought an additional $25,000 in insurance on Goldstein and himself jointly, which the company refused to sell, as well as double indemnity on the original policies. Lefkowitz testified in his own defense, denying any role in the "accident," but the simple arithmetic of the policies made any explanation laughable. Green was defended by Samuel Leibowitz, one of the great trial lawyers of the period, and, while his answers made clear his limited intelligence, his struggle to articulate the simplest facts or ideas also conveyed an air of truthfulness which was convincing. According to Green, Rubinzahl had warned him just before they entered the boat not to interfere when he pushed Goldstein overboard. He then described how Rubinzahl did that and rowed away from the struggling swimmer.

Lefkowitz, who testified on his own behalf, urged that he was the victim of his own plot to defraud the insurance companies by Goldstein's disappearance and that the drowning was no part of the scheme but an independent venture by Rubinzahl to get money from Lefkowitz for his girlfriend, who was in trouble.

The whole trial took a week, at the end of which time the jury acquitted Green and found Lefkowitz guilty of first-degree murder. A few months later, the Court of Appeals affirmed the conviction, and Lefkowitz perished in the electric chair at Sing Sing shortly thereafter. Surely the critical reader will see that there is no money to be made in this way. Bank robbery, once thought a highly dangerous enterprise, is now successfully practiced by housewives who intimidate bank tellers with a jar of salad dressing, claiming it is an explosive, and walking out of the bank with thousands of dollars. The Lone Ranger against the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company is an unequal battle. Don't try it. Goldstein's family tried to recover when it sued the New York Life Insurance Company, to no avail, as the courts held that the policies were fraudulent from the start.

For the man or woman who still likes to wager on his prowess in homicide and follows the principle of "in for a penny, in for a pound," there are a few further observations about policies in general. Among the many clauses in fine print in the standard life insurance policy is one relating to suicide. The man who hopes to simulate suicide in the death of the insured should know that most policies are not payable if the insured commits suicide within a year or two after it is taken out. This may require long and fretful waiting, or it may suggest the possibilities of an "accident." Accidents have several advantages. Not only are they quick, but the policy can be made to provide a double amount for death in that manner. The insurance companies (and the law courts), however, have different notions about what is an accident, as the language of the policy usually calls for death "by external, violent and accidental means." The reader will do well to study the amazing differences in the decisions on this point.

For instance, an overdose of liquor (drinking oneself to death) has been held not to be an accident, but an overdose of chloroform in an operation has. Then again, an overdose of veronal, resulting in death, when taken to relieve pain was not an accident. In another case, it has been held that, when a man was struggling to take a gun from his wife and she was fatally shot in the struggle, it was not accidental. Where, in another case, the insured pointed a loaded gun, which he thought safe, at himself and pulled the trigger, his death was deemed accidental and entitled to double indemnity. There is also a whole body of law on the meaning of the word "external," which is of particular significance to those contemplating the use of poison.

Our young man will be glad to know that death due to wood alcohol (when used as a beverage), ptomaine poisoning, drowning, and carbon monoxide (by car) are all accidental. But if the insured is shot to death by an enraged husband who discovers him sleeping with his wife, his death is not accidental under the double indemnity clause. Of course, even if the death is held not technically to be accidental under the policy, the company must still pay the primary value of the policy. It is usually only the double indemnity or jackpot feature which fails to apply in these cases.

Some policies pay larger amounts for death while traveling by common carrier (a feature to reassure wives of traveling salesmen), but a person falling down an elevator shaft is not traveling in such a conveyance so as to collect the greater amount. So too, where a policy dated January 24, 1968 provided that it would pay double the amount should the insured die before the tenth anniversary date, if the insured died at 3 A.M. on January 24, 1978, his estate would not receive the double benefit, as it was not "before" the anniversary. Of such minutiae does the law of insurance consist, and you will ignore these little differences at your peril.

Perhaps I have said enough to make our hypothetical young man extremely wary of introducing the insurance element into his homicidal plans. Insurance companies are particularly suspicious of persons with $2,000 incomes who die shortly after taking out $100,000 policies. There is one point, however, on which our young man may rest his mind. Any policy on *his* life will be paid — even if death is due to hanging. He will be glad to know that in this case the policy is payable to *his* relatives. □

TAD ON TV

By Richard Meyers

Who's had time to watch television? As soon as I returned from a nine-month jaunt "special media consulting" for CBS-TV's new version of *The Twilight Zone,* I had to go from Happy McCann's Smoke Shop in Manhattan to a penthouse apartment in the shadow of the 59th Street Bridge, back to Century City offices, then off to 221B Baker Street in London.

From there I had to track a driving private peeper from New York to California through his phone answerer, headed back to Park Avenue South and Twenty-Third, then used the Twilight Zone to reach Mother's Jazz Club near the waterfront. Getting back wasn't easy, but finding 77 Sunset Strip was. Of course, once there, I had to head to Hawaii and then back to Miami. From Miami it was back to the mean streets of L.A., and the offices of Intertect to talk to their one Armenian operative.

It still wasn't over. I then had to visit both the Charles Townsend Agency and Blue Moon Investigations. From there I was invited to a gourmet dinner by a dieting private eye who only watched as I ate, then was sent to the offices of the California Meridian Insurance Company to chat with their best operative. Exhausted but game, I headed to the San Diego beach, only to discover that *The Answer* was now docked in Malibu. So while I was in Malibu, I visited a good old buddy in his mobile home.

Finally, I had to go back to San Diego, first to an apartment near a canal, then to a new office building. At long last, I combined business with pleasure at the Robin's Nest back in Hawaii. In other words, I finally put the finishing touches on my long-awaited (at least by my publisher) Harmony Books volume, *TV Private Eyes.* (And if you can name every character alluded to in the previous paragraphs, in order, you'll get an autographed copy of the book when it's finally published. Send all guesses to me in care of *The Armchair Detective.* I will pull the winner from a hat containing all the correct answers upon the volume's release.)

It was quite a trip, but an enlightening one. I was greatly aided by my dear associates Francis M. Nevins, Andy Jaysnovitch, Chris Steinbrunner, Bill Palmer, William L. DeAndrea, and Max Allan Collins (who, by the way, are void where prohibited by law from the above contest—sorry fellows) and greatly impressed by those media veterans who kindly made themselves available to my overtures.

The great thing about interviews is that they allowed me to include the tenuous information called "common knowledge." These aren't facts. This is the stuff Howard Rodman, the creator of *Harry O,* personally defined with: "I don't know if it's true. . . I just know I believe it." It made for a colorful manuscript, filled with the kind of material my patient editor, Douglas Abrams, wanted.

"You know," he said, "the 'Mannix jacket' kind of stuff." Yeah, sure, the Mannix Jacket stuff. You know, not just the cut and dried facts, ma'am, but the inside stories, the backstage machinations, the coincidences, the ironies, the wacky tinseltown tales. As a minor "for instance," *Mannix* executive producer Bruce Geller eschewed light fabric suits for Joe Mannix: he insisted on heavy tweeds with rather strong patterns. By the end of the series' eight-year run, that sort of sports jacket was *de rigueur* for the TV P.I. Harry O wore it. Jim Rockford wore them. Even Remington Steele has one—and all these guys toil in L.A., where the median temperature is 75 degrees!

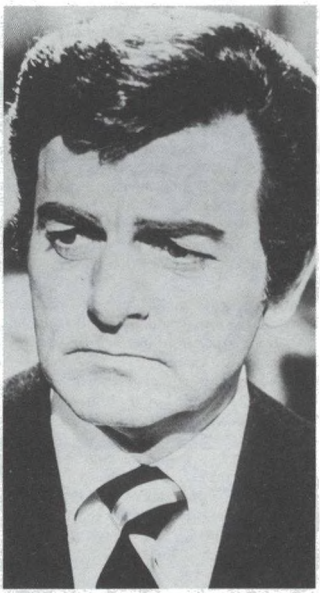
At any rate, I'm glad it's finally finished (only a year and a half late), but I am slightly misty-eyed now that the major effort is over. There are worse jobs than tracking down writing, directing, producing, and acting talents to get their side of creation—especially in a mostly overlooked, generally denigrated genre. It was especially gratifying in that several of the people I interviewed were in their seventies and eighties. It was fairly certain that, if I didn't get this stuff, no one would.

It was thrilling to see the 82-year-old Ralph Bellamy's eyes light up when I mentioned Mike Barnett, *Man Against Crime.* His memory of the hectic live broadcasts in the late '40s was still clear. He was on Broadway at the same time in *Detective Story* and would rehearse the TV show every day, perform on stage every night. And, on the day of telecast, the stage curtain would be held a half hour and he'd go roaring across town (from Grand Central Station, where *Man Against Crime* was first produced, to the theatre) in an ambulance or a squad car.

I was fascinated how veteran television producer Roy Huggins's career was shaped by Columbia Pictures' retitling the movie version of Huggins's first novel, *The Double Take.* "I could not believe they were changing the title to *I Love Trouble,*" he said. "I said, 'The essence of the hardboiled private eye is that he doesn't love trouble. You can't call it *I Love Trouble!*' And [they] said, 'Oh, who knows from all that shit? We're calling it *I Love Trouble.* People will like that.'"

Throughout his career, creating *Maverick, 77 Sunset Strip, The Outsider, City of Angels,* and *The Rockford Files,* Huggins would always delightedly trumpet: "And they don't love trouble!" His trouble-hating characters made for some of the most beloved series in the canon.

Oh, by the way, the nice thing about having a column (especially in this periodical) is not just being able to plug your books, but revealing some things I wasn't able to put in the book—for reasons which will soon become readily apparent. Take, for example, Huggins's vocal contention that his programs were made or broken by the star. While the producer speaks highly of James Garner and Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., he was less than complimentary about the others. In fact, he said that. . . well, I think I had better let him tell it:



"Darren McGavin is one of the world's worst actors. Darren McGavin can't sit still. It's not that I don't like the guy. That's not true. We get along fine, [but] it was very, very tough to edit the guy. He looks great in the pilot of *The Outsider* because we took out all the shit factor. We didn't let him pick his nose or pull his ear or tug his tie. We just cut away."

Now, I thought that was rather tough, but wait, he hadn't gotten to *City of Angels* yet. "[Wayne Rogers] is the only actor I've ever worked with that I dislike personally. He is a repulsive human being." Ahem. But that wasn't why the series failed, in Huggins's estimation. Among other things, it was a classic case of actor *versus* producer. "First of all, because [Rogers] had director approval, he had director control. So he could get the director to do anything he told him to. He could make changes and did so right on the set."

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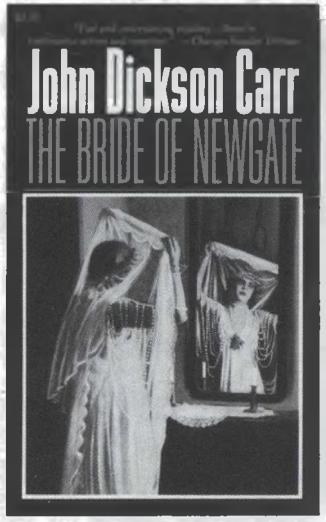

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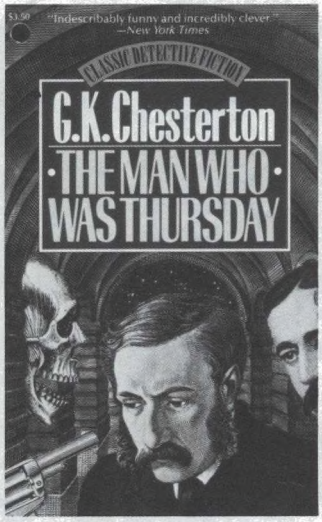

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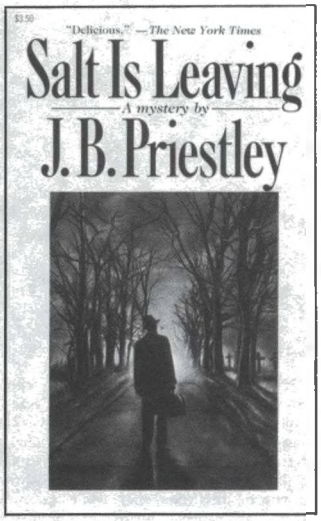

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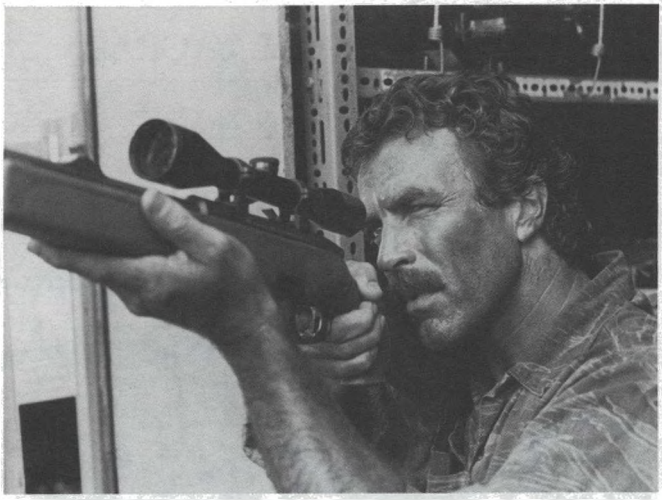

Whew! I'm glad I got that off my chest. After Huggins, the others were a breeze. I especially enjoyed the gentlemen actors. You can probably guess who they were. While I'm certain that certain gents working on series still in production would have enjoyed discussing their roles, they didn't have time. But it was a rare pleasure to face Peter Gunn, Joe Mannix, and Barnaby Jones. Craig Stevens gave most of the credit for *Peter Gunn's* success to creator, writer, and producer Blake Edwards, but told an illuminating story concerning the subsequent 1966 film version's failure.

"I'll never forget when I returned to New York, expecting a lot of publicity. I was prepared to go on promotion tour and had a lot of ideas, so I called Paramount. They said, '*Who* is this?' They had no idea who I was or what the film was about!"

Mike Connors, meanwhile, also told an interesting story on the killing of his first successful series, *Tightrope*. "Somebody at *TV Guide* wrote that in one season we had twenty-two buckets of blood, twenty-seven machine-gunnings, so many switchblade killings—all false! When that article hit, no matter how much we denied it, our goose was cooked by the anti-violence drive." In addition, he revealed that the network was then willing to telecast *Tightrope* at a later hour but that the sponsor wouldn't hear of it.

Connors also clarified the reason why *Mannix* was the longest-running P.I. series and resurrected the then dying genre. "Before that, all the private eye characters were cynical. I think that's one of the reasons it didn't work on television. Week in and week out, you want to like the person. You want to get to know him. You want to feel that he cares."

One of my favorite chapters was on *Barnaby Jones*. As far as I'm concerned, that program was a wonderful live-action version of those old MGM "Droopy the Dog" cartoons, with some aspects of the Road Runner mixed in. While the heinous criminals ran around like Wile E. Coyote, trying to kill off all their loose ends, there's good old hound dog Barnaby loping along, nonchalantly tripping them up with what the desk clerk at the motel across the street said or what the cleaning lady found in the wastebasket.

"The desk clerk!" the criminal would shout. "*The cleaning lady!*" they'd scream, and off they'd go again.

The great thing about Buddy Ebsen, the man who played Jones, is that, not only does he have a twinkle in his eye, he's got one in his voice too. It was readily apparent when he talked about Fred Silverman's third-season plans to kill the show (which were foiled by

its continuing success and Silverman's move to ABC) and the six times Gary Lockwood guest-starred as different characters. "He was a no-good heel every time," Ebsen grinned. "Every time I saw him, I'd say, 'Didn't I put you in jail once?' "

As much as I liked talking to the actors, they knew far less about their own shows than the creators and executive producers. I'm fairly certain that David Janssen didn't know that *Harry O* was originally named Nick and was written for Telly Savalas! And it was better than even money that neither Janssen nor Savalas knew that Harry or Nick Orwell was an extension of an incidental character in *Day of the Locust* by Nathanael West.

"I'm certain there's a page or two about this salesman walking up Sweetzer Avenue, that slope between Sunset and Santa Monica Boulevard, on a very very hot day," said creator Howard Rodman. "That trek went on forever, always uphill. It was stopped in time. That was the image I used to create Harry O." The rest of the creation and production story was worthy of a Harold Lloyd or Buster Keaton movie.

This seems like a good time to mention that I was very impressed with how upfront and honest these people were with me. It appeared that they'd say things for book publication that they'd never reveal for magazines. In addition to the already-mentioned character slurs, the good folks at *Remington Steele* readily admitted that their series has been schizo the last few seasons.

"Always entertaining," said Supervising Producer Jeff Melvoin, a Harvard graduate and ex-*Time* magazine reporter, "but inconsistent." I was really intrigued by what he and the Executive Story Consultants revealed about how the show is presently written and produced. It finally ranks as one of my favorite series, and that had nothing to do with having free access to their sound stages and sets (although it didn't hurt).

Getting the straight poop on *Magnum P.I.* and *Simon and Simon* from their creators was equally edifying, but the real treat was discovering the characters' origins. Magnum was a combination of Glen Larson's James Bond–like private eye created simply to plug the hole left by *Hawaii 5-0* and Donald Bellisario's unproduced pilot script *H. H. Flynn* (about a fancy P.I. on Rodeo Drive who hangs out with his Vietnam vet buddies at a San Pedro bar after work).

Incredibly, Rick and A. J. Simon came from equal dollops of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and Travis McGee. Creator Philip DeGuere readily admitted that Rick Simon was a clear knockoff/homage to McGee as originally envisioned in their first, failed, TV movie-pilot *Pirate's Key*. Finally, it was just great getting all the trivia, as well as the facts. Like, how's this? Gerald McRaney, who now plays Rick, was originally cast as T.C., Magnum's copter pilot pal, until Tom Selleck suggested a black be auditioned for the role. Well, then, how about this? T.C. stands for Theodore Calvin and A.J. stands for Andrew Jackson!

Yup, the road to *TV Private Eyes* was a great trip. I now have the home addresses of all my favorite characters and terrific memories of my visits with them. I hope you enjoy the tour book I wrote about it. □

The Radio Murder Hour

By Chris Steinbrunner

Although he pursued far more investigations on the screen—Charlie Chan was second only to Sherlock Holmes in the number of his movies—the Honolulu detective was no stranger to radio. In 1932, two short years after Fox Studio began its celebrated film series, Walter Connolly starred as Chan in a weekly half-hour radio show which lasted nearly six months. Four years later, a Monday-to-Friday quarter-hour series also lasted half a year. In the 1940s, Ed Begley portrayed the detective in a five-day-a-week stint, and, when the show moved to another network, Santos Ortega (who earlier had also been Nero Wolfe) took over in a half-hour format. None of these series lasted as long as a year apiece, and very, very few individual programs have been preserved to contemporary times.

Happily, however, with their usual historical zeal, the people behind the Radiola Crime Series have issued two consecutive fifteen-minute episodes on an LP record, **The Adventures of Charlie Chan: The Adventure of the Eye of Buddha** ($6.45, plus $1.75 postage and handling; Box C, Sandy Hook, Conn. 06482). Alas, the two shows neither begin nor end a story, but they provide an interesting opportunity to compare the more familiar screen interpretation of Biggers's sleuth with his radio version: as the latter depends solely on dialogue, we get a happy fill of spouted aphorisms and "Chinese" proverbs.

As the program starts, Chan has gone undercover as a Chinese cook at a Hawaiian ranch on the island of Maui (the situation is from Biggers's *The Chinese Parrot*), searching for a stolen ruby called "The Eye of Buddha." Unfortunately, he has just been unmasked and captured.

When the villain snarls that Inspector Chan will be found with his fingers around his own revolver, and powder marks on his own forehead, the Confucian instinct goes into overdrive. "Regretfully cooked own goose," Chan admits, but he is resigned. "When jig is up, why tire feet with additional dancing?" However, "many who send regrets to sick man will die before he does."

This warning is unheeded by the major villains, who leave a trussed-up Chan in the charge of a nervous stooge. Here an extraordinary scene occurs. The detective describes in detail the bungled hanging of a murderer he once witnessed, an "unfortunate wretch"—in a wise, fatherly, mystical way. ("Oriental wisdom is a wisdom far deeper than ours," is an astute earlier observation by one of the bad guys.) The stooge is literally psyched out by Chan's droning words. "Cap is placed over head . . . Hanging noose made of heavy coils . . . bungles job . . . strangles slowly, face distorted, limbs twitching . . . Hanging most terrible end of all." It is a different Chan from the humble, courteous screen image, and a powerful scene. The shaking stooge soon releases a grateful captive: "Only animal who has known relentless grip of trap truly appreciates freedom."

At the start of the following episode, we share a humorous moment with a grunting Chan as he with great difficulty mounts a horse—"like toil for full day with pick and shovel." The scene then shifts, though, to an elegant dinner party in Waikiki. The host, Honolulu's commissioner of police, and his guests are all worried about the disappeared Chan, off on his own to recover the Buddha ruby. Bursting into the room, Number One Son Lee tells the commissioner that *he* has overheard the whereabouts of the ruby—in a pool hall, even though his father has forbidden him to visit such places. Lee is somewhat less silly than in the movies; "bright as a steel trap," the commissioner whispers behind his back. But the offspring certainly has acquired period Americanisms—for instance, he calls his Pop "the antelope's adenoids."

As the chapter closes, Chan makes a surprise appearance; the adventure is winding down to its end. It's quite frustrating not to follow it to the conclusion. Fortunately, the flip side of the record has a very gratifying *other* Oriental detective: **The Radio Adventures of Mr. Moto.**

The Japanese secret service agent/investigator, created by John P. Marquand, was played—with very little facial make-up, in a series of nine films—by Peter Lorre. Moto was revived, younger and Bondian, for a single 1965 movie starring Henry Silva. Marquand's postwar *Stopover Tokyo* novel, which brought back Moto, was filmed without him. But in 1951, NBC Radio sustained a brief series of Moto half-hour dramas complete in themselves. Radiola has backed the Chan episodes with a Moto adventure called "The Cariloff Papers." It is surprisingly fast-moving and very good, with all the ingredients of a top-notch espionage yarn.

Of course, Moto, who started literary life as after all a pre-war Japanese spy, must have shifted political allegiance during a turbulent career, and NBC's introduction to the show carefully spells out the new agent. "NBC presents the world's greatest international detective-philosopher, Mr. I. A. Moto, a man of mystery, of culture and sensitivity, who, while hating violence, fights Communism ruthlessly at home and abroad with his courage, his brains and his fabulous knowledge of international persons, places, and things!"

Believe this, the show that follows fully lives up to this bravura intro.

It starts in a Yokohama cemetery. A coffin is being dug up by night. But, "In Yokohama, even graveyards have eyes." There are secret papers hidden in the heel of the corpse's right shoe, revelations about a new petroleum which can permit submarines to cross the Pacific, bomb our West Coast, and return across the Pacific without refueling. Moto and his friend Major Grant are doing the disinterring.

The two are very much the odd couple. Grant marvels over Moto: "In my book you're the bravest little guy I've ever worked for." In his turn, when encouraging the Major to romance a mysterious Russian spy (whom Grant has called "Garbo, Irene Dunne, and Ilona Massey all rolled in one; half lioness, half tigress, and all TNT"), Moto returns the compliment: "You are thirty-three, good-looking and strong. She is after all only a woman." (Bad judgment: she soon has Grant overpowered and imprisoned.) We note with slight surprise that Moto is now an American citizen, an American agent, and has a credit line for authorized negotiations of a million dollars!

Without spoiling all the twists and turns of the plot—which travels to the International Settlement of Hong Kong and to a remote village on mainland China, with Moto swimming over a mile from a ship to Hong Kong harbor with a self-deprecatory "life is cheap in the Orient"—one must remark that the nemesis of the drama is no less than Wu Li Foo, "one of the most evil men in the world," who plots to tilt "the entire balance of power in the Pacific." And even Wu has cute schtick, for he is allowed to say about Major Grant: "To touch him makes me ill. Even the smell of him is disgusting." And, aside from the beautiful Russian spy (can she secretly be on our side?), there are even more villains: the "big mute Chang," whose ancestors for centuries have guarded the Imperial Palace and who is known as "the man with a thousand eyes."

But most intriguing of all is Moto, a philosophic, diminutive ("It is good to be small"), and totally non-aggressive superspy. "Men die for faith who have never been inside a church," he says at one point. (James Monk plays him, and the prolific Harry W. Junkins both wrote and directed.) At the end, it will not shock you to learn, noble self-sacrifice furthers the cause of peace. But it *might* raise an eyebrow or two to hear the final words, Moto's solution to the world crisis: "Meditation and prayer is the best way to solve our problems."

The Charlie Chan episodes on this Radiola release are naturally a traditionalist's delight, but the Mr. Moto adventure is a wondrous surprise. Rarely has a radio murder hour been so satisfying. □

The Burden The Living Bear

By Louis Phillips

In *The Trouble With Harry,* Shirley MacLaine (playing an attractive widow) offers her friends and her son lemonade; in *The Trouble With Harry,* Alfred Hitchcock is offering us the cinematic equivalent of lemonade, a lemonade that is a little bit too sweet for most of Hitchcock's fans. The film certainly lacks the richness, the substance, the suspense and terror which we have come to associate with his finest works. Bosley Crowther, reviewing the film for the October 18, 1955 *New York Times* was less than enchanted:

> It is not a particularly witty or clever script that John Michael Hayes has put together from a novel by Jack Trevor Story, nor does Mr. Hitchcock's direction make it spin. The pace is leisurely, almost sluggish, and the humor is frequently strained. The whimsey inclines to be pretentious, such as Miss Natwick's cheery reply to Mr. Gwenn's expressed hope that her father's death was peaceful, "He was caught in a threshing machine." Or again, when the two are out exhuming the freshly buried corpse, she says, "After we've dug him up, we'll go back to my place and I'll make you some hot chocolate."

Indeed, what can any of us say of a film in which a pair of red-toed socks (shown in close-up) provides the most memorable filmic image and where the photography of New England fall foliage eclipses the direction?

François Truffaut, one of Hitchcock's greatest fans, in his book on Hitchcock, disposes of *The Trouble With Harry* in slightly more than one page of text and even in that short space gets one minor plot detail wrong. Truffaut says, "Toward the end of the picture each of the characters has a chance to

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Essays by Louis Phillips have appeared in THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE, THE JOURNAL OF POPULAR CULTURE, THE WEST COAST REVIEW OF BOOKS, EMMY, LEARNING, *and many other publications.*

make a wish, and since Shirley MacLaine whispers her request into someone's ear, there's no way of knowing exactly what it is, but one guesses it must be something very special. Then, at the very end, we find out that what she wanted was a double bed."

In point of fact, it is not Shirley MacLaine who makes the secret request, but her artist boyfriend, Sam Marlove[1] (played by John Forsythe). This is a minor academic quibble, of course, but, since Truffaut is a careful student of details in Hitchcock's film, the slip shows Truffaut's lack of interest in the work. Hitchcock, however, was quite fond of his movie in the way that many artists are fond of material that extends them or shows off little-known aspects of their personality. Persons who were hired to write the funny introduction to Hitchcock's television show were treated to screenings of *The Trouble With Harry* to give them a feel for the Hitchcockian sense of humor.

Reading the whimsical novel which the movie closely follows, one can see right away the ingredients that attracted the master of suspense to the material: the matter-of-factness about death, the trouble of getting rid of a corpse (the trouble with Harry is Harry), and the delicate blend of humor with the macabre. There is one passage in J. Story's novel which particularly strikes to the heart of the Hitchcockian sensibility:

> Now look Sammy. You got the wrong end of the blooming stick. It's not me conscience that's worrying me. I haven't got a conscience. If you'd been the places I'd been and seen the things I've seen you wouldn't have a conscience, neither. And it's not Heaven that worries me, for I don't suppose I'll ever have to face it. And it's not his mother or his father neither, which I don't suppose he ever knew. And it's not any of the fine things you've been talking about. It's not nothing like that. It's me what's worrying me. Me and my neck. I know the police and their suspicious ways. I had a brother in the police and he told me that everybody they has anything to do with is guilty till they're proved innocent —and I don't want nothing to do with 'em. Bury him, I say, and have done with him. He's no good to no one now, not the way he is. Lay him to rest. Put him under the sod. Forget him. You never saw him and I never done it.[2]

In the above passage, Captain Albert Wiles (in the novel, he is a retired lighterman of the Thames barges; in the film, he is a retired New York City tugboat captain) confesses his feelings, or lack of feelings, to Sam the painter. The Captain has not actually killed Harry Worp of Eighty-seven, Eastfield, Fulham, but he thinks he has. Captain Wiles thinks that, while hunting for rabbit, he has accidentally brought down a human being, but the accidental slaying of a man brings on no remorse, no pangs of conscience. No wonder Hitchcock is delighted with the material. The body of the crime quickly becomes bodiless, and, in no short order, the thematic concerns of the book and film illuminate aspects of other Hitchcock movies. How easy murder would be: if (a) we did not possess a conscience; if (b) we could get rid of the corpse or corpses without any fuss or bother (no doubt some eager doctoral candidate in film studies is, at this very moment, doing a detailed analysis of how Hitchcock gets rid of the bodies); if (c) innocent persons were not suspected of crimes they did not commit; and if (d) there were no law enforcement officers hell-bent upon bringing our crimes to light and bringing the guilty parties to justice.

John Forsythe and Shirley MacLaine in *The Trouble with Harry*, a Universal re-release © 1983

In "The Trouble with Harry," Alfred Hitchcock is offering us the cinematic equivalent of lemonade.

"You can stuff him for all I care."

Lack of conscience. Human beings, for the most part, are guilty creatures by nature. Indeed, we have a lot to feel guilty about. The loss of Eden, for one. For being a part of a world in which murder exists. We feel guilty for our good luck (we don't deserve it) and for our bad luck (we have committed a sin and that explains our fall from grace). Time and again, Hitchcock exploits those feelings of guilt, but in *The Trouble With Harry* the main characters feel no guilt, no remorse, no sin. Harry is dead. And that's all there is to that. Harry is a log in the path of life. Three, possibly four, persons (there is a tramp

hovering in the background, and at least he gets some good from Harry; he steals Harry's shoes) who could have bumped Harry off. (The term *bumped off* is almost literal here, since it is Harry's wife, Jennifer, who has hit her husband on the head with a milk bottle—"I hit him on the head with a milk bottle and knocked him silly"—sending the poor man staggering off into the woods and to his less-than-heartbreaking doom.)

But does Jennifer feel remorse for killing her husband? Not on your tintype. The no-good rat deserved it. She talks about the killing of Harry Worp with the same ease and consideration with which she discusses lemonade. She tells Sam, the new love of her life: "You can stuff him for all I care. Stuff and put him in a glass case—but I should have frosted glass" (p. 57). The line is identical in the film and novel.

Or how about Miss Gravely, the spinster (played touchingly by Mildred Natwick)? She may well have bumped off Harry Worp. (Again the term *bumped off* is accurate; Miss Gravely hit Harry on the temple with her hiking shoe—"The man you thought you'd killed," Miss Gravely explains, "was the man I hit on the head with my ice-calf brogue.") And yet, she too shrugs off her accomplishment, indeed takes a bit of pride in acknowledging her competence and strength:

"I won," said Miss Gravely, not without some pride. "My shoe had come off in the struggle. I hit him. I hit him as hard as I could—on the temple, where David hit Goliath."

"And you killed him!" Looking at the middle-aged spinster, the Captain found the fact difficult to assimilate.

The lady shrugged. "I must have done. I was annoyed, Captain. Very annoyed."

"Naturally," said the Captain.

"I don't think I've ever been so annoyed. Consequently, I didn't realise my own capabilities."

"Whew!" murmured the Captain, looking at her with a new admiration. (p. 85)

The lady shrugged. Miss Gravely indeed can plead self-defense. Harry Worp, knocked silly by his Jennifer, confused Miss Gravely with his wife and attempted to force his attentions upon her. But still there is no grief. No conscience. Corpses are annoying things to have around. That's that.

In the realm of horror stories, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" reminds us once and for all that conscience is difficult to quiet and that corpses are not easily disposed of. The anonymous madman of Poe's tale is undone by the beating of the victim's heart:

"Oh God! what *could* I do? I foamed—I raved—I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder—louder—*louder!* And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected—they knew!—they were making a

On the set of *The Trouble with Harry*, a Universal re-release © 1983

mockery of my horror!—this I thought and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die!

Bad consciences have given the world a host of tales. There is a story in Jewish folklore which relates the problems Cain experienced when he attempted to bury Abel's body. Cain had a dead body on his hands and *did not know what to do with it.* After all, Cain had never seen anyone bury a dead body, had never witnessed a funeral service.

THE BURDEN THAT THE LIVING BEAR

Steeped in the blur of Death's wing,
I was the first to die,
So Cain did not know
What to do with me.
Completely overlooking
The ground beneath his feet.
There were so many robes to choose from
I did not know what to wear.
I wore the changes of the day,
And still Cain,
More naked than before,
Did not know what to do with me.
Earth said, Put him here.
No one listened.
Fire said, Burn him.
Air said, Cast his ashes to the wind.
Everywhere I was carried,
I was greeted with astonishment.
Who held up my legs
To see them fall like stone?
I was so alone.
No other spirits to speak with,
I talked to myself.
It was all whispers.
Involved with decay,
I could find comfort there,
But poor Cain, my brother,
Did not know what to do with me.

But whereas the Bible and Edgar Allan Poe and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* remind us of the serious presence of corpses (as does Hitchcock's serious work—who can forget Paul Newman in *Torn Curtain* pushing his victim into an oven and then having to bury him?), *The Trouble With Harry* presents us with the reverse side of the coin. Harry is buried, then unburied; buried, unburied. The more

the characters have to deal with Harry, the more we sense the absurdity of the situation. Why can't Harry be buried and be done with?

Cause and effect. That's one reason Harry can't be done with. If there is a murder victim, there must be a murderer ("If it's murder," said Captain Wile, "who done it?"). One of the chapters of Story's novel is called "My Crime on Your Conscience." How appropriate. How succinct. In more than one Hitchcock film does one person's crime fall on someone else's conscience. It is perhaps the major theme of Hitchock's work, and it is very much in evidence even in *The Trouble With Harry,* light-hearted romp that it is. Here too characters trade potential suspects with the same ease with which a widow might set out glasses of lemonade or a young boy trade a dead rabbit for blueberry muffins.

Captain Wile, for example, since he takes a semi-courting interest in Miss Gravely, attempts to shift responsibility for the corpse back toward the young widow (Jennifer), whereas Sam the artist, being in love with Jennifer, tries to shift responsibility back to the spinster. *The Trouble With Harry* presents a gentle tug-of-war over the body of Harry Worp:

"Who done it? Apart from Jennifer, who would want to kill him?"

"Apart from Jennifer. . ." Sam murmured.

The Captain studied him. "You don't think — "

"Don't be ridiculous," Sam told him. "You said yourself she was surprised to find the body."

"You said she hit him on the head," the captain accused. "I've heard of a case where a bloke bumped his head on a brick wall and fell dead two days later."

"Probably knocked down by a bus," Sam said. "No, it wasn't Jennifer. Look here—what does it matter who did it—he'll be best buried and out of the way."

"I don't think!" said the captain. "I'm not burying someone else's bad habits."

"Suppose it was Miss Gravely," Sam suggested. (p. 76)

If persons were not suspect to crimes they did not commit, the film work of Hitchcock would dwindle to almost nothing. *The Wrong Man,* starring Henry Fonda, takes a hard and serious look at that problem, as do so many other Hitchcock films.

In the world of Hitchock, the innocent, wrongly suspected, flee, and we flee with them, but, in *The Trouble With Harry,* the innocent do not flee. They sit at home and band together, raising, if only so gingerly, the notion of communal guilt. When a corpse turns up in the garden, perhaps all of Eden is to blame. (And there is an Eden-like quality to the film. Hitchcock told Truffaut, "With *Harry* I took melodrama out of the pitch-black night and brought it out into the sunshine. It's as if I had set up a murder alongside a rustling brook and spilled a drop in the clear water."[3] What is society's responsibility

in the creation of murderers? In *Harry*, the corpse is discovered one by one by one by one, but eventually the main characters (the Captain, Sam, Jennifer, and Miss Gravely) begin to act in concert. All four eventually go back to Harry to bury him ("Sam and the captain carried the body toward the grave while the women walked behind like a pair of indifferent mourners"—p. 94). In most Hitchcock movies, the feeling of guilt isolates a person from his or her

Edmund Gwenn and Shirley MacLaine in *The Trouble with Harry*, a Universal re-release © 1983

neighbors; in *Harry*, the lack of guilty feeling for the victim brings people together. Love blossoms over and around the corpse. If they do not share guilt, they at least share fear—fear of being found out by the police.

If there is a major difference to be found between the novel and the John Michael Hayes scenario, it is the addition of a deputy sheriff who suspects that foul play is afoot. What is merely hinted at in the novel ("I know the police and their suspicious ways. I had a brother in the police. . .") is made concrete and dramatic in the movie with the addition of a character—Mrs. Wiggs's son Alfred (played by Royal Dano), who works on and off as a small-town and small-time deputy sheriff.

Of course, Hitchcock's own fear of the police has been well documented. Donald Spoto, in *The Dark Side of Genius*, states that "Throughout his life, Hitchcock insisted that his brief boyhood jailing scarred him for life with a terror of the police," and Truffaut records the well-worn anecdote, told by Hitchcock himself, of the time, when he was a little boy, that his father had him locked up in a jail cell:

> I must have been about four or five years old. My father sent me to the police station with a note. The chief of police read it and locked me in a cell for five or ten minutes, saying, "This is what we do to naughty boys."[4]

This telling anecdote has been explored and re-explored to explain much of the substance of Hitchcock's work. Fear of the law is what keeps many a Hitchcock protagonist running at breakneck speed. Police and detectives are paid to suspect the worst. In the movie, Captain Wiles says to Sam, "If you an artist suspect the worse, what will the police do?" Well, we know what the police will do. If you are innocent and cannot prove your innocence, it will do no good at all to fall into the hands of the law. Captain Wiles makes it quite clear that he wants no traffic with the law:

> "Come and help me, Sammy," the captain pleaded. "I don't care if I killed him or not, as far as that goes, but I'll get the willies everytime I see a policeman and it's no good saying I won't." (p. 74)

In a Hitchcock movie, if we don't get the willies every time we see the police closing in on an innocent victim, we haven't got our money's worth. Hitchcock himself got the willies every time he saw a policeman and once claimed that he refused to drive an automobile for fear that he would one day be picked up by the police for speeding or for a minor traffic violation. Thus, fear of the police, in the person of the less-than-bright Alfred Wiggs, is the true concern of the film version of *The Trouble With Harry*. The trouble with Harry is not just Harry; the trouble is compounded by the presence of the law hovering nearby.

Thus, it is possible to understand why Hitchcock became so attracted to Story's novel. It is still lemonade, but it is a bit tart, set off by a kind of *deus ex machina* ending—Harry was not killed after all! We laugh at the troubles experienced by a small community dealing with the body of an unsavory character. We laugh because our expectations are completely upset. A dead body is treated with matter-of-fact sleight-of-hand, and, in the end, all our consciences are cleared. But suppose Harry had been murdered? Ah, but that is another film. Alas, Hitchcock is no longer around to make it.

Notes

1. In the novel, Sam's last name is Marlow. The film credits for *The Trouble With Harry* list Sam's last name as Marlove. No doubt, Hitchcock and his screen writer did not wish to confuse their Sam Marlow with Sam Marlowe the fictional private detective.
2. J. Trevor Story, *The Trouble With Harry* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1950), p. 47. All quotes from the novel are from this edition.
3. François Truffaut, *Hitchcock* (Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 169.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 17. □

The Mean Streets of Madrid

By Patricia Hart

IN A POLICE STATE, it's pretty hard to publish a novel in which the cops are the villains, in which corruption infects governmental and private institutions, and in which the only constitutional rights a streetwise private dick is entitled to are the ones he can defend with his fists or his wits. That's why Spaniard Juan Madrid had to wait for dictator Francisco Franco's death to publish his first book, *Un beso de amigo* (*The Kiss-Off,* Sedmay, 1980).

His hero, Tony Romano, is an ex-boxer and ex-cop who shows us around a Madrid you never see in the American Express tours—aging drunks who spend the night singing the Fascist anthem to the statue of Philip the Third in the Plaza Mayor; prostitutes "and other peripatetics" who get drunk "with insuperable dignity"; neo-right-wing gangs who swing chains through the hippified flea market, and some big businessmen who make the Spanish tradition of the bullfight look like an SPCA meeting. Through Madrid the writer, we see Madrid the city as it becomes part of the West after nearly half a century of isolation, plunging dizzily into problems other European capitals had decades to grow into: drugs, crime, unemployment, and most of all a deep, widespread, public ambiguity of values and traditions.

It is with this ambiguity that Madrid is at his best, showing us the growing pains of a Spain into whose lap democracy has suddenly fallen, and showing us, along with this, his hero's danger in being a straight-shooting, straight-thinking man in crooked times. Tony Romano is unabashedly macho in the face of thugs, but bewildered as a child at the invasion of his city by Wendy's salad bars and restaurants that serve quiche and light wines. But don't get the idea that the author spends his books waxing philosophical. *The Kiss-Off* and its 1982 sequel, *Las apariencias no engañan* (*Seeing Is Believing*) are action-packed thrillers in which Madrid gleefully embraces the conventions of the genre, narrating with zest the crunching of bones, the spurting of blood, and the reports from .45's, and the reader cannot help feeling —yes—a little proud at being strong enough to look on these scenes with a man's man like Romano.

Madrid enjoys an enviable popularity within Spain, having quickly sold out the two novels named along with a third which does not star Tony Romano. His stories have appeared frequently in the Spanish edition of *Penthouse* and were also regulars in *Gimlet,* a magazine dedicated to things detectival, which formerly appeared in Barcelona. Early in 1985, a collection of his stories was published in Madrid by Alfa, and he has also collaborated on several screenplays.

"I'm a friend of Isaac." Juan Madrid leans into the peephole in the door of El Poncho, a live porno club in Madrid's Chueca and mutters the password.

The door swings open and lets us in: the free-wheeling novelist and the timid *gringa* interviewer. Isaac himself strides forward to greet us, and he leads us to a table near the large video screen whereon a pair of lymphatic Swedish girls are carrying on an unusual relationship with some bananas and a kiwi fruit.

"Do you like Tony Romano's Madrid?" Juan Madrid asks the question and then gestures around the room proudly. At this moment, Lino, an Argentine exotic dancer whom some consider the Pavlova of Porn, joins us at the table as a flurry of Japanese tourists armed with cameras and excited grins descend on the club. All the while, I am asking myself how the heck they knew Isaac?

After Isaac brings us a couple of complimentary gimlets—what else?—we settle down to talk about Madrid's passion for detective fiction.

"It's a relatively new love," Madrid admits, his eye on the stage. "I never liked the traditional detective novel, Agatha Christie and the vicar dies and all that. I always thought it was too far removed from reality. But I loved Hemingway from boyhood, and also Hammett, Chandler, and Chester Himes. Of course, I also know the Spanish picaresque tradition well."

Madrid is a newspaperman and book reviewer as well as a novelist, and, in a piece on another young detective novelist's book, he wrote: "Thank goodness that Spanish readers and publishers are finally finding out that for marvelous detective novels they don't need to go outside of the country." Is that really so important?

"Yes, I think so," he says. "But it was something we couldn't have without liberty. The kind of crude, truthful portrait of urban society that I aim for was impossible under Franco. It was after his death that the *roman noir* could flourish. Now there are seven or eight of us working seriously. In Eastern Europe,

behind the Iron Curtain, you don't find any tradition of the *roman noir* either. They have mystery stories about a crime that involves a Venetian jar and a traitorous butler, but no cold, hard looks at murder in our times."

"How are we doing?" Isaac hovers over the table for a moment, ordering new drinks from the scantily clad waitresses and asking how we like the show so far. "It used to be a lot more earthy," he admits, "but now we try to provide an atmosphere where couples can feel comfortable." With that he is off, and I steer Madrid back to the crude, truthful portrait of society he mentioned. Where did the author do his research?

"Well, in the first place, like all the militants who protested against Franco in this country, I've been in prison."

For how long?

"Months at a time. In those days, they arrested you for demonstrating, for carrying signs, for organizing. It's the history that my generation has lived through. I'm not the only one."

But this was not his only point of vantage. "In my present work, I have a lot of contact with the police. I'm an investigative reporter for the news magazine *Cambio 16,* similar to your *Time* or *Newsweek*. Of course, before Franco's death, we all thought the police were a totally odious body, without any single redeeming factor. But afterwards, I discovered that there were and are professionals, good men, and many of them horrified by the corruption around them. We can talk and exchange ideas, and some of them are my friends. But in my novel, I keep caressing the idea of police corruption because it exists and we have to talk about it."

What makes Madrid's books different from their American predecessors?

"More than anything else, the life in the streets that they show. In Spain, people live on the streets, and Tony Romano and his friends are constantly in the streets at cafés, in bars, in taverns. When I was a boy, you could sleep in the street and nothing would happen to you, if you didn't freeze to death. But that life is ending now, with the new industrial society. So my protagonist, Tony, and his people represent that old way of living, those old virtues: friendship, loyalty, respect."

On the stage, a bountifully endowed redhead in a clown outfit sings a strangely innocent song, and I shake off meditations on the possible erotic implications of red bulb noses to ask Madrid if there is anything he does *not* really write about realistically.

"Actually," he grins, "what I've never been very good with is writing about sex. I know it's ironic in this setting, but it's true. Tony Romano is a man's man, but he's respectful, so he just wouldn't want me to tell all the details. I've been publishing stories in *Penthouse,* and the editor always says that if I put a little sex in them they'll publish more, but it just doesn't seem right. Tony Romano wouldn't kiss and tell, so how can I do it for him?"

A repressive education was *not* the reason behind this attitude. "I had a secular education, and my parents, early labor organizers, were atheists who never told me sex was a sin. To the contrary, they were very disappointed in me when I made bourgeois gestures like getting married."

But if Madrid cannot write erotic material, he writes plenty of other things, from screenplays to new novels and stories. He tells me that he writes quickly, finishing the first draft of a novel in a matter of months, aided by his journalistic training. That explains *how,* but what about *why*?

"As a boy, I realized I wanted to be a writer when I worked sweeping the floors in a publisher's offices. I used to watch the writers come in and out, and all the secretaries thought they were wonderful – handsome, intelligent, and so on. I decided right then that the best way to get on with women might be to become an author."

One is tempted to ask how successful the ploy has been, but one resists and asks if he believes that deep down all writers share this desire for attention.

"Deep down, no. I think it's right up there on the surface, as plain as it can be. It's not deep down at all."

El Poncho has been filling steadily as we talk, and I have reached my limit of complimentary gimlets. So we bid farewell to Isaac and make our way up the dark stairs to the Calle San Lorenzo. Just as we reach the sidewalk, an extremely malodorous drunk trips into our path and tries to sell us a chunk of *chocolate* (hashish).

"Hello, Chamber, old friend!" Madrid exclaims, and slaps the man heartily on the back. "Long time no see!" "Chamber" does not seem to recognize the author and staggers away, muttering insults when he realizes that he is not about to make a sale. Wait a minute, though. The name has triggered a memory of the *Cambio 16* articles I read before interviewing Madrid. Wasn't that drunk the same "Chamber," the "King of Pickpockets" whom Madrid has described in a local color article as an elegant gentleman thief?

"Exactly."

But, I protest, he hardly seemed to match the description in the article. After all, one rather expects an elegant gentleman thief to at least wear socks.

"Oh, he's drunk now." Madrid waves aside my objection. "But you should see him sober! That guy has a real gift of gab. The nickname 'Chamber' is from that, short for 'Chamberlain'."

Maybe.

Madrid shrugs. "Can I help it if I have a gift for fiction? Anyway, Miss, this literal-mindedness of yours can be the road to perdition. You'll see." Saying that, he extracts a cigar from his shirt pocket and turns, whistling, to leave El Poncho behind. □

PAPER CRIMES

By David Christie

Quiller by Adam Hall, Jove, 1985, $3.95. **The Moving Finger** by Milton Bass, Signet, 1986, $3.50.

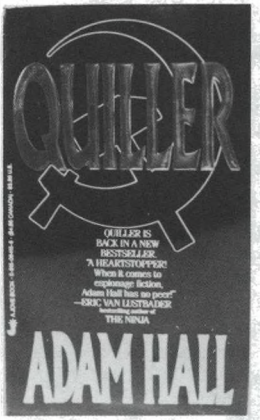
In **Quiller**, a flawed but still pleasing espionage novel by Adam Hall, an American nuclear submarine has exploded and sunk off of Murmansk. The Soviets claim publicly to have had nothing to do with it, but a British intelligence agent in Murmansk has traced direct responsibility to a Soviet naval officer who may have acted without consulting Moscow for orders. A second agent is transporting evidence of that responsibility—a tape recording of the officer ordering an attack on the sub and confirming its sinking—to Berlin. An American-Soviet summit conference, of enormous value to both sides, would be wrecked by public disclosure of Soviet culpability; with the evidence privately in its possession, however, the West may be able to force important concessions at the summit.

Quiller, a "shadow executive" for an elite, ultra-secret branch of British intelligence, is sent first to Berlin to retrieve the recording and, when it is subsequently destroyed, on to Murmansk to retrieve the agent who produced it. He finds himself behind the Iron Curtain, engulfed in the gloom of an Arctic winter, taking direction from a controller he does not trust, racing not only with the KGB but also with a third, unidentified group of agents to find a man whose behavior he cannot predict.

The novel is written in the first person, as if told by Quiller himself, and Hall is particularly good at developing Quiller's character both overtly—by telling what he does—and more subtly, through the language which is ostensibly Quiller's. Although capable of hyperbole—"It was the darkness of not existing, bringing with it the knowledge that you have arrived somewhere unfamiliar, not where it is dark but where there has never been light"—Quiller is impatient with literary pretension, catching himself every now and again in the midst of an allusion and cutting himself short: "theirs but to do or die, so forth." By and large, his language is descriptive but straightforward, just as by and large he is direct and analytical, concentrating on the facts that affect his situation. He is also a man who tries, not altogether successfully, to suppress his emotions, and, as that suppression fails under extreme stress, his language changes, tending more toward hyperbole or toward the vivid evocation of fear or outrage.

Characters other than Quiller are developed in considerably less depth, but nevertheless graphically enough that one remembers them. An example: "A man of no conscience. Ferris is very sinister beneath the owlish looks and the silken tone. They say that when there's nothing on telly he strangles mice."

In a book packed with action scenes, Hall is also good at conveying the excitement of the action as well as describing it clearly. Once again, he uses language effectively, for



instance, constructing short, terse sentences fairly bristling with tension until the action breaks, when everything seems to happen all at once in deliberately run-on sentences. Hall pays close attention not only to the meanings of words, but also to their sounds and rhythms—a skill that is regrettably unusual.

Obviously, the plot, or at least the opening situation, is credible; it was modeled after the actual Soviet attack on a Korean Air Lines jet. As it develops, it becomes satisfyingly complex and involves a genuinely surprising twist. Unfortunately, it also loses some of its credibility, simply because Quiller's ability to survive what's thrown at him is not so much professional as miraculous. One might be willing to believe him capable of escaping any one, or even a few, of the close situations in which he finds himself, but not all of them.

Regrettably also, Hall over-uses one specific technique for creating suspense. Often, he ends a chapter by placing Quiller at peril, then begins the next chapter after some time has passed, only gradually working his way back to the point at which Quiller escaped the previous chapter's danger. The reader's curiosity to know how Quiller got off is supposed to be intensified by impatience, but the device loses its power with repetition, and the reader, having become conscious of the technique, finds it intrusive.

Even with these flaws, however, *Quiller* remains an enjoyable book.

Benny Freedman appears to be a born sufferer. A homicide detective with the San Diego police force and the principal character in **The Moving Finger**, he has just lost his beloved wife to cancer. In his past, his father, a violinist, committed suicide after contracting a crippling disease, and his mother drank herself to death. His wife has left him six million dollars, but he manages even to agonize over that: Why did she never tell him she had that kind of money? Will accepting the money somehow cheapen his memory of her (although, at six million dollars, *cheapen* may not be precisely the right word)? And how will it look to the world if a cop suddenly comes into a lot of unexpected money?

And so perhaps it's just as well that Freedman is assigned, in *The Moving Finger*, to the Dienben murder case. A Vietnamese used-car dealer has been found murdered in one of his cars, one of his fingers severed and placed on the car seat alongside him. Before Freedman can dig at all deeply into the case, the car dealer's son is abducted, *his* finger severed and left behind on the same car seat. His investigation leads Freedman to suspect a fanatical group called the Church of the Holy Avenger, and, when he attends one of its services, its members abduct him as well and transport him to a camp in a remote wilderness. There, being accustomed to suffering is a decided advantage, as Freedman tries to escape and to bring out the son with him, and as the Church subjects him and others who come in after him to increasingly violent punishment.

Unfortunately, Freedman's propensity for suffering is about the only connection one can make between the portion of the novel devoted to his private life and that given over to his professional life, and that connection is tenuous to say the least. Because the details of Freedman's private life do not really inform his behavior as a cop, they seem more like padding than characterization. And talk about indulgence: he gets to be noble but modest, he gets to be rich, he gets to be intensely desirable to women, and he even gets to sleep with one of them without, somehow, compromising his mourning for his wife. The only thing he doesn't get is to

touch base very often with anything like real life, but then he doesn't seem to miss it much.

Unfortunately also, the police department for which Freedman works is meant to be seen as professional but does not make the grade. Not only does Freedman enter a potentially dangerous situation without any backup and end up abducted as a result, but so does another officer, and, before the novel ends, a sizable contingent of the police force is held captive by a group described as violent-minded but amateurish, clearly crazy, and even a bit stupid.

Even San Diego doesn't fare all that well, since the city described in the novel bears no relation to the actual place. San Diego is not a unified urban area, as Bass tends to describe it, but instead a collection of small neighborhoods with names their residents tend to use in preference to the city name, places such as Pacific Beach, Ocean Beach, North Park, or Hillcrest; no such names appear in the book. You might not know how the city is composed without having lived there, but you would at least know that San Diego is a coastal town, and there is very little sense even of that in the book. The San Diego in *The Moving Finger* could just as easily be Topeka or Akron.

Fortunately, the Church of the Holy Avenger has attracted worshippers who are somehow both menacing and entertaining. How can one not be entertained by characters with names like the Reverend Phil and the Reverend Billy Bob? The Church of the Holy Avenger believes that the day of judgment, in the form of nuclear holocaust, is imminent, and that when it comes only church members will be left alive to take control of the world. It got into the abduction business because it happened to be in need of money, and now that it has been discovered it is fighting without compromise to preserve its sacred mission. The Reverend Clive Barrow, its leader and a former baker, combines just the right amounts of common sense and outright lunacy to end up in charge of such a group.

The Moving Finger, then, provides some entertaining reading, but contains too many flaws to be recommended.

In Brief: **The Big Picture** by Michael Wolk, Signet, 1985, $2.95. **Precinct: Siberia** by Tom Philbin, Fawcett, 1985, $2.95.

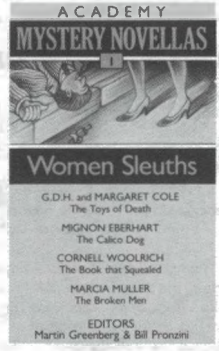
Early on in *The Big Picture*, Michael Wolk writes: "Liquor bottles and other litter indicated the alfresco vestibule had provided temporary harbor for many itinerant souls." Anyone who can write such a sentence is too fond of hearing his own voice. Skip this one.

No doubt the author and publisher of *Precinct: Siberia* expect that if you like *Hill Street Blues* you'll love this book. Like the TV show, the novel revolves around a particularly tough police precinct; tells the stories of widely varying police officers; gathers those officers together in roll calls in which a pithy cop offers survival advice; and so forth. Actually, though, if you like *Hill Street Blues*, you'll realize that *Precinct: Siberia* is a shoddy imitation, and even if you don't care for the TV show you'll find the novel to be flat and vacuous. Another one to avoid. □

Minor Offenses

By Edward D. Hoch

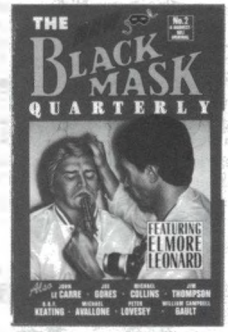
Some minor classics among short-story collections reappeared during the final weeks of 1985. Dover reprinted Robert Barr's *The Triumphs of Eugene Valmont* (1906), best known for "The Absent-Minded Coterie," and it was good to have it available for the first time in decades. Barr has probably not worn so well as a few other turn-of-the-century mystery writers. I was pleasantly surprised, for example, to discover that some stories in Fergus Hume's *Hagar of the Pawn-Shop* (1897) are still quite readable. And I was even more pleased with H. Hesketh Prichard's *November Joe: The Detective of the Woods* (1913). Prichard's first-person narration, short paragraphs, and frequent use of dialogue give the stories a distinctly modern pacing, and the plots at times are unusual and quite clever. Both of these hardcover reprints are in the Vintage Crime Classics series published in England by



Greenhill Books and distributed here by Ingram Book Company. Also available in the series are Arnold Bennett's *The Loot of Cities*, Edgar Wallace's *The Council of Justice*, and two real rarities, *The Memoirs of Constantine Dix* by Barry Pain and *Dorcas Dene, Detective* by George R. Sims. They're all worth seeking out.

Closer to the modern period, Southern Illinois University Press continues to publish original collections in its "Mystery Makers" series. *Darkness at Dawn* collects the first thirteen suspense stories published by Cornell Woolrich in pulp magazines of 1934-35. Some are surprisingly good, and the introduction by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. provides an interesting view of Woolrich's early writing days. But the book reminds me of two pressing needs—a full-length Woolrich biography, preferably by Nevins, and a definitive collection of the best of Woolrich.

The second and third issues of *The New Black Mask* (*Quarterly* has been dropped from the title) have appeared and clearly demonstrate how much the publication is improving. Its scope has been widened to



include non-private eye mysteries, and several British authors are included. The second issue contains a brief television sketch by John le Carré, a Peter Lovesey variation on Christie, a nice Dan Fortune novelette by Michael Collins, an exciting excerpt from a new Joe Gores novel, an Elmore Leonard interview, and reprints by William Campbell Gault, H. R. F. Keating, and Michael Avallone. With the third issue, *New Black Mask* really hits its stride, featuring a good Donald E. Westlake interview, an excerpt from his new caper novel, a very good story by Linda Barnes, and solid entries by Michael Gilbert, Clark Howard, Isak Romun, and others. *New Black Mask* is priced and distributed as a trade paperback rather than a magazine, which seems to be limiting its readership, but it's shaping up as the most exciting new mystery publication in the last

quarter-century. Upcoming features include an unpublished novelette by Dashiell Hammett, written as a preliminary screen treatment for the MGM film *After the Thin Man*.

The Peter Lovesey story mentioned above is one of sixteen collected in *Butchers & Other Stories of Crime* (Macmillan London), which I'd rank as one of the best collections of 1985. Included are a trio of fine Lovesey stories from recent issues of EQMM, "Private Gorman's Luck," "The Staring Man," and "Vandals," as well as several from earlier years. One of the best stories in the book is "The Secret Lovers," which also appears in *Winter's Crimes 17*. We hope an American publisher brings out *Butchers* soon.

Another collection published only in England thus far is *Mrs. Craggs: Crimes Cleaned Up* (London: Buchan & Enright), containing eighteen stories about H. R. F. Keating's unique cleaning lady sleuth. They're worth sampling.

Graveyard Plots (St. Martin's Press) contains 23 of Bill Pronzini's best stories, including an Edgar nominee and several stories from annual *Best* collections. There's also a new Nameless story, "Sanctuary," published for the first time.

Pronzini remains one of our most dependable mystery anthologists, and with Marcia Muller he has put together a fine collection of circus and carnival mysteries, *The Wickedest Show on Earth* (Morrow). With an equally busy anthologist, Martin Greenberg, he has launched a twelve-volume series of Academy Mystery Novellas for Academy Chicago. The first two volumes contain four novellas each on the themes of *Women Sleuths* and *Police Procedurals*, with forthcoming volumes to cover private eyes, locked rooms, humor, historical mysteries, unusual detectives, etc. It's good to see a publishing program devoted to the novella length, too often overlooked by magazines and book publishers alike. The Police Procedurals volume is especially welcome, with standout entries by Ed McBain, Hugh Pentecost, Georges Simenon, and Donald E. Westlake.

Another recent collection worthy of note is *The Return of Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector*, Lillian de la Torre's first new Dr. Sam collection in 25 years. Six of the seven stories are from EQMM, and all were originally published between 1947 and 1978. The publisher, International Polygonics, has already reissued the first two Dr. Sam collections and plans to complete the series with a fourth one, *The Exploits of Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector*. Ellery Queen once called this "the finest series of historical detective stories ever written," and it's still true.

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine has announced the winning of its first annual Readers Award by Clark Howard for his story "Animals" in the June issue of EQMM. Second in the voting was Lawrence Block's "Like a Bug on a Windshield" (October), while third place went to another Clark Howard story, "McCulla's Kid" (September). The Mid-December issue of EQMM was an especially good one, with Joyce Harrington's "A Letter to Amy" leading a list of notable tales. Josh Pachter continued his Mahboob Chaudri series with "The Tree of Life" in the Mid-December EQMM and "The Qatar Causeway" in the January issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*.

The second in Ron Goulart's series about Victorian adventurer Harry Challenge, "The Monster of the Maze," appears in the February issue of *Espionage*. I must confess to liking these better than Goulart's futuristic tales in the same magazine, and I hope we see more of them. □

This Pen for Hire

By Raymond Obstfeld

There were four of them. Identical business suits and briefcases. Sitting in the airport lounge, sipping drinks the color of tea. They never spoke, never looked at each other, but when I walked by they all got up at the same time. One threw down a twenty-dollar bill. All four of them followed me.

I didn't think much of it at the time. In an airport, nothing seems strange, especially in Los Angeles. Four guys of roughly the same build and age, all wearing matching suits and carrying identical briefcases. Could've been a musical group. The Think Tank. The MBAs. The Yuppie Connection.

I ignored them and went into the little convenience store where they sold the books and magazines and candy. I bought a large bag of honey-roasted peanuts because the airlines never give you enough food. I also cruised the book racks, though there wasn't anything there I wanted to read. They stood in a knot by the magazines, pretending to thumb through the *People* and *Us*. But they were watching me. I realized that immediately.

When I left, they followed. I glanced over my shoulder and saw them practically running after me. I picked up speed, heading for the Eastern Airlines check-in at Gate 74.

A large hand gripped my arm.

"Can we have a word with you?" the owner of the hand asked. His friends had formed a crude circle around me and I thought it best not to argue.

"What about?"

"Books. You are a reviewer, aren't you?"

"Yes." Pride easily beat back fear. "How did you know?"

"I recognized you from your picture."

"They don't run a picture with my column," I said.

"Oh?" he replied as if it weren't important.

Somehow the five of us moved through the lobby like a flock of gulls combing the beach. When we neared the men's room, I felt myself being shoved through the doors, the four of them pouring right in after me.

Inside there was one guy at the urinal and another drying his hands.

"Beat it," one of the suits said to the dryer. The man balled up the paper towel and ran out the door. One of the suits went to the guy at the urinal and said, "Beat it."

The guy at the urinal gave him a funny look.

"Get lost," the suit rephrased.

"Oh." The guy at the urinal finished, zipped, and left.

They checked the stalls, made sure we were alone.

We were.

"Who are you guys?" I asked.

They exchanged steely looks. The head suit, Suit #1, said, "Commuters."

Suit #2 nodded. "That's right, Mr. Reviewer. We travel almost every day of the week. We take the red-eye flights, the supersavers, the commuter specials, the nooners. We spend half our lives on our way to somewhere or coming back from somewhere."

"Gee, I'm sorry," I said, meaning it.

"We don't need no stinking sympathy," Suit #1 spat. "What we need is..." He glared straight into my eyes. "...decent books."

"Books?"

"Yeah. What do you think we do during those dull hours on the plane, in the cab, at night in the hotel room? We read."

Suit #3 joined in passionately. "But do you know what it's like to buy a book at the airport convenience store only to climb on the plane and discover at forty thousand feet that the book sucks? What are we supposed to do for the rest of the flight, huh? You ever wonder, Mr. Reviewer?"

"Not really."

"Well, you should. We read reviews, we try to be informed, but sometimes nothing works. Now the four of us are getting on a very long flight and we want to take some reading with us."

"And you want my recommendation?"

"Right."

"For example," Suit #4 said, "what about that new Stephen King book, **Thinner**, the one he wrote under the other name."

"Richard Bachman."

"Yeah. Airports always have a lot of King's stuff. So what's the poop on *Thinner?*"

I cleared my throat, hoisted a haunch on the sink for comfort. "Well, boys, I've got

good news and bad news. The good news is that the book has many of King's brilliant touches, particularly characterization. I don't think there's a writer around who so consistently establishes character and tone so solidly right at the beginning of each novel. You read the first page and you are suddenly transported to the world he's created. The details are so lush, the style so textured. And the voice is always of someone who's been around, as comfortable with rock 'n' roll as he is with mortgage payments. It is the perfect literature of the middle class. It is populated with our objects and friends.

"And yet," I continued, "it 'touches a wound that opens to our richest horror.' That's a line from a poem by Karl Shapiro, but it applies. What is more frightening than the same symbols of our comfort and safety —car, family, food—turn against us and become our demonic foes?"

"Huh?" Suit #1 said.

"Okay. *Thinner* is about this average family man who was in a car crash that killed a gypsy woman. The father of the dead woman puts a curse on him, saying only, 'Thinner.' Soon the man begins to lose weight. And can't stop. The rest of the novel is him trying to get the curse removed. As I said, it benefits from many of King's considerable strengths, but it also suffers from his perpetual flaws: it's padded and tends to drift apart halfway through. The scenes in which he investigates the other men involved in the cover-up of the accident are gratuitous, lacking suspense. They seem to be there only to add pages.

"His friendship with the gangster who helps him is intriguing, though the connection between them is flimsy. And the technique of having the gangster tell us what he's done in flashbacks is awkward, a contrivance to avoid using his point of view."

"Yeah, but—" Suit #2 said.

"And the ending," I went on, refusing to be interrupted, "is too damn predictable. King's vision is so monochromatic, so Cujoesque, so Salem's Lotish, so—"

"I was thinking about taking **Pet Sematary** with me on the Atlanta flight," Suit #4 said. "What do you think?"

"Save your money," I said. "It echoes *The Shining* in its portrayal of the unlikable father figure, the man poised on the brink of self-destruction and the destruction of his family. The demons within lurk barely beneath the thin façade of civilization, just waiting for a little push. Nice idea, dull book."

Suit #2 looked crestfallen. "Gee, I always liked the guy."

"Me, too," I said. "But he's so good that he has to be judged by the standards he himself has set in previous books. For example, if you want to read an excellent King book, read **Rage**, also written as Richard Bachman. It's about this kid who shoots his teacher and takes over the class. It's *Lord of the Flies* in Suburban America. Sure, some of the psychology is a bit simple and muddled, but that's minor compared to the brilliant style, energy, and freshness. It's never dull, never predictable. Completely fascinating."

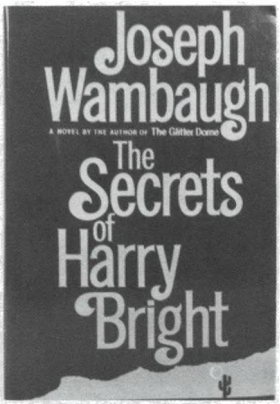
A man in a white suit and red bow tie entered the bathroom, saw me half-sitting on the sink, the four Suits standing around me. He looked longingly at the urinal, thought better of it, and left.

"How about that new Joseph Wambaugh?" Suit #4 said. "**The Secrets of Harry Bright.** You read it?"

I nodded.

"So?" He tapped his briefcase impatiently.

I shrugged. "To be honest, it's the only Joseph Wambaugh novel I've ever read. I've always had trouble getting into his books, but I was in a Waldenbooks last month and I picked up this one and began reading. It had one of the best prologues I've read. I was hooked. I had to buy it.



"I took it with me on a plane, a flight from L.A. to New York, reading the whole book in one sitting. Was it good? Hard to tell. His style is unusual: he tends to ramble about, spending a lot of time on characterization of minor but colorful characters. This is usually an amateurish technique. Every writer loves to introduce and develop new characters throughout their novels because it's fun and uses pages. But you have to be careful not to forget the main story of the central characters. Which Wambaugh does.

"The story's about a couple LAPD cops who go to Mineral Springs to investigate a year-old murder of a wealthy man's son. The main cop has also lost a son, so he's especially sympathetic. All the residents and cops in Mineral Springs are eccentrically exotic, losers who have filtered down through society like silt. This is sharply contrasted with the wealthy opulence of nearby Palm Springs. The characters are wonderful, the manic energy and good humor are compelling. By all means, read it. But beware: the plot is a flimsy device for some pretty obvious and melodramatic observations."

Suit #1 flushed the urinal. I hadn't noticed him drift over to relieve himself. He stuck his hands under the tap water in the sink. "I don't give a damn about King or Wambaugh. I want something short, but with punch."

"**Rumble Fish,**" I said.

"It wasn't me," he said. "I just took a whiz."

"No, no," I said. "The book by S. E. Hinton."

"Oh, yeah, like the movie with that Dillon kid."

"Right."

"That's a kid's book," Suit #2 said.

I shifted haunches. "Yes, you'll probably find it in the YA section. But it's as much a kid's book as *Catcher in the Rye* or *Lord of the Flies*. It's the story of a kid named Rusty-James, not-too-bright streetwise boy living in the shadow of his older, smarter, tougher brother, the Motorcycle Boy. There's some fighting, but mostly there's beautiful writing. The style is powerful, yet subtle. It's easily on the level of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler; it shares their understatement, their depth. There are lines so good you just want to quote them."

"And it's short?" Suit #1 said.

"It's short in pages," I nodded. "But long in the memory."

"As long as I can finish it between here and Fresno," he said.

"Just in case, how about me recommending a short story?"

He seemed skeptical. "How long?"

"Short," I assured him.

"That's even better. I got a quick hop to Vegas next week. A short story should just cover it."

"The story is by Andre Dubus, called 'Land Where My Fathers Died.' It originally appeared in *Antaeus* and is currently in **The Best Short Fiction for 1985: The Editor's Choice, Vol. II.** The story is dedicated to mystery author James Crumley. While reading this, I couldn't help but wonder about the Edgar Awards, how most of the nominated and winning stories come from the same old sources, the same three or four magazines, the only ones those on the panels seem to read. What a shame that a story this good, this *outstanding*, is overlooked. It's a simple murder investigation story: lawyer hired by innocent man to find real murderer. But the characterization is so sweetly rich, the levels of investigation so subtle, that the reader feels the kind of satisfaction of having read an entire novel. This is short story writing at its best. Don't miss this story."

"Eastern Flight 1127 now boarding for Anchorage."

"That's my flight, boys," I said, hopping off the sink. "Gotta run." I had my hand on the door and was pulling it open when Suit #1 called my name.

"Hey, Mr. Reviewer."

I turned.

He looked a little dewy-eyed, a little, yes, humbled. It was one of those slice-of-life situations, the five of us gathered in a men's toilet, talking literature, tossing around ideas, craft, the meaning of it all. He looked straight at me and said, "Just what the hell were you talking about, all that reviewer mumbo-jumbo? Did you like the damn books or not?"

Go figure. □

ERRATUM: In issue 19, No. 2, the title of Raymond Obstfeld's new book from Gold Eagle/Harlequin should have been *Masked Dog*, not *Naked Dog*.

THE 1986 EDGAR AWARDS

BEST NOVEL

CITY OF GLASS: THE NEW YORK TRILOGY, PART ONE by Paul Auster (Sun & Moon Press) *nominee*

A SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM by Simon Brett (Scribner's) *nominee*

★THE SUSPECT by L. R. Wright (Viking Penguin) **WINNER**

THE TREE OF HANDS by Ruth Rendell (Pantheon) *nominee*

AN UNKINDNESS OF RAVENS by Ruth Rendell (Pantheon) *nominee*

BEST FIRST NOVEL

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ECTOPLASMIC MAN by Daniel Stashower (Morrow) *nominee*

THE GLORY HOLE MURDERS by Tony Fennelly (Carroll (Graf) *nominee*

SLEEPING DOG by Dick Lochte (Arbor House) *nominee*

★WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS by Jonathan Kellerman (Atheneum) **WINNER**

BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL

BLACK GRAVITY by Conall Ryan (Ballantine) *nominee*

BLUE HERON by Philip Ross (Tor) *nominee*

BROKEN IDOLS by Sean Flannery (Charter) *nominee*

★PIGS GET FAT by Warren Murphy (NAL) **WINNER**

POVERTY BAY by Earl W. Emerson (Avon) *nominee*

BEST SHORT STORY

★"Ride the Lightning" by John Lutz (AHMM) **WINNER**

"There Goes Revelaar" by Janwillem van de Wetering (EQMM) *nominee*

"Trouble in Paradise" by Arthur Lyons *(New Black Mask) nominee*

"What's in a Name?" by Robert Barnard (EQMM) *nominee*

"Yellow One-Eyed Cat" by Robert Twohy (EQMM) *nominee*

ROBERT L. FISH MEMORIAL AWARD: "Final Rites" by Doug Allyn (AHMM)

BEST EPISODE IN A TV SERIES

★ "The Amazing Falsworth" from AMAZING STORIES, written by Mick Garris, from a story by Steven Spielberg (NBC) **WINNER**

"The Dream Sequence Always Rings Twice" from MOONLIGHTING, written by Debra Frank and Carl Sautter (ABC) *nominee*

"Wake Me When I'm Dead" from ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS, written by Buck Henry, from a story by Lawrence Treat (NBC) *nominee*

GRANDMASTER
Evan Hunter (Ed McBain)

READER OF THE YEAR
Sen. Suzi Oppenheimer

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Senator Suzi Oppenheimer, representing Gov. Mario Cuomo, read a proclamation from the Governor declaring May "I Love a Mystery Month" in New York State.

BEST FACT CRIME

THE AIRMAN AND THE CARPENTER: THE LINDBERGH KIDNAPPING AND THE FRAMING OF RICHARD HAUPTMANN by Ludovic Kennedy (Viking Penguin) *nominee*

AT MOTHER'S REQUEST: A TRUE STORY OF MONEY, MURDER AND BETRAYAL by Jonathan Coleman (Atheneum) *nominee*

THE MURDER OF A SHOPPING BAG LADY by Brian Kates (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) *nominee*

NUTCRACKER: MONEY, MADNESS, MURDER: A FAMILY ALBUM by Shana Alexander (Doubleday) *nominee*

★SAVAGE GRACE by Natalie Robins and Steven M. L. Aronson (Morrow) **WINNER**

SOMEBODY'S HUSBAND, SOMEBODY'S SON: THE STORY OF THE YORKSHIRE RIPPER by Gordon Burn (Viking Penguin) *nominee*

BEST CRITICAL / BIOGRAPHICAL WORK

AGATHA CHRISTIE by Janet Morgan (Knopf) *nominee*

THE AMERICAN PRIVATE EYE: THE IMAGE IN FICTION by David Geherin (Ungar) *nominee*

★JOHN LE CARRÉ by Peter Lewis (Ungar) **WINNER**

THE LORD PETER WIMSEY COMPANION by Stephan P. Clarke (Mysterious Press) *nominee*

PRIVATE EYES: 101 KNIGHTS: A SURVEY OF AMERICAN FICTION by Robert A. Baker and Michael T. Nietzel (Bowling Green State University Popular Press) *nominee*

SPECIAL AWARD – DETECTIVE AND MYSTERY FICTION: AN INTERNATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SECONDARY SOURCES by Walter Albert (Brownstone Books) *nominee*

BEST JUVENILE / YOUNG ADULT NOVEL

LOCKED IN TIME by Lois Duncan (Little Brown) *nominee*

ON THE EDGE by Gillian Cross (Holiday House) *nominee*

PLAYING MURDER by Sandra Scoppettone (Harper & Row) *nominee*

★THE SANDMAN'S EYES by Patricia Windsor (Delacorte Press) **WINNER**

SCREAMING HIGH by David Line (Little Brown) *nominee*

BEST MOTION PICTURE

BLOOD SIMPLE, screenplay by Joel Coen and Ethan Coen (Circle Films) *nominee*

FLETCH, screenplay by Andrew Bergman, from the novel of the same title by Gregory Mcdonald (Universal) *nominee*

THE HIT, sareenplay by Peter Prince (Island Pictures) *nominee*

JAGGED EDGE, screenplay by Joe Eszterhas (Columbia) *nominee*

★WITNESS, screenplay by Earl W. Wallace and William Kelley, from a story by William Kelley, Pamela Wallace, and Earl W. Wallace (Paramount) **WINNER**

BEST TELEFEATURE

DEADLY MESSAGES, written by William Bleich (ABC) *nominee*

DOUBLETAKE, written by John Gay, from the novel *Switch* by William Bayer (CBS) *nominee*

★GUILTY CONSCIENCE, written by Richard Levinson and William Link (CBS) **WINNER**

LOVE ON THE RUN, written by Sue Grafton and Steve Humphrey (NBC) *nominee*

PERRY MASON RETURNS, written by Dean Hargrove (NBC) *nominee*

Special Play Award given to Rupert Holmes for THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD, currently running on Broadway.

BOOK REVIEWS

A Note to the Reader:

Beginning with this issue, we have attempted to group current reviews by type. Remember, a label (cozy, thriller, etc.) is just that and sometimes will seem to have been applied arbitrarily. We ask your indulgence while we try to perfect this system.

GENERAL

Out of the Blackout by Robert Barnard. New York: Scribner's, 1985. $12.95

Admirers of Robert Barnard's intricate plotting will not be disappointed with his latest work and its unexpected, almost exasperating conclusion. With typical Barnard fairness, the reader is presented with neatly progressive facts and is set on his way, perhaps stumbling nevertheless, in this excellent tale of a search for a lost identity.

It is historical fact that, during World War II, at the height of the London Blitz, thousands of children were evacuated from the city to rural areas for safety. In Barnard's newest mystery novel, one such group arrives at Yeasdon, a Gloucester farming community, and, after guests are matched with host families, one child inexplicably remains unclaimed. The boy, with only the name Simon Thorn for identity, is unable to furnish either parents' names or a previous address. Until further inquiries can be made in chaotic London, Simon is billeted with Dot and Tom Cutheridge, a childless couple. Over the months and years that follow, with no further information available, Simon settles happily into the lives of the Cutheridges and the village, troubled only by occasional nightmares of a man beating a woman.

As the years pass, Simon excels at school and wins an Oxford scholarship in zoology, his life undisturbed until a robbery after a pub crawl with friends. Left dazed in an unfamiliar area of London, he wanders suddenly into a street that he recognizes instantly, and, more terrifyingly, he sees one particular house, No. 17 Farrow Street, which he now knows to be the scene of the nightmare beatings. Unnerved but still passive, Simon discusses the incident briefly with his adoptive mother, Dot Cutheridge, and once again buries the past.

Following a disastrous marriage and the death of an infant daughter, Simon secures a position with the London Zoo and, while looking for lodgings, is once again forced into his past, witnessing an ugly incident of a man beating a woman. Finally, faced with the realization that his early history must be resolved, he sets out methodically to retrace his steps and learns that the former residents of No. 17 were called Simmeter. The search begins.

By a process of elimination, Simon finally locates the family and succeeds in renting a room in their house. Barnard's penchant for making unpleasant characters credible is more than evident in the Simmiter menage. Dominated by a grasping, elderly matriarch, the cozy family circle is completed by a middle-aged son and daughter. All three prove to be secretive and inhospitable until Simon patiently wins their grudging confidence and learns more of their previous lives. Len, the son, is by turns militant and slyly ingratiating. Connie, the sister, proves to be more communicative, especially in her contempt for both mother and brother. After months of patient probing, Simon witnesses a final familial row, including an admission of murder, and departs in horror, convinced that, if he is indeed a member of this nasty clan, he wants no more of their questionable company.

Years later, after a second happy marriage and three children, a chance vacation wander through a Sussex churchyard changes Simon's life forever, and the reader is set upon the last adventure, with a totally surprising result. Barnard's characters are so well drawn and the tale so well told that even the twist within the final solution is acceptable.

—Miriam L. Clark

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The Woman in Red by Paula Gosling. New York: Popular Library, 1985. 214 pp. $3.95

The social habits, national attitudes, physical beauty, and cultural richness of Spain are featured in Paula Gosling's fourth novel, *The Woman in Red* (originally published in 1983). Additionally, Gosling gives us enticing glimpses into the world of the copyist of master paintings as well as that of the art forger. She makes the differences between the two careers very plain and also shows clearly that, when the boundaries between them slip, trouble, in this case murder, is bound to follow. Anyone would guess that; few people, however, have Gosling's skill at turning such a situation into a good, solid adventure story.

The setting accounts for many complications in *The Woman in Red,* for Charles Lewellyn, the hero, is an English diplomat, long assigned to Spain—and stuck: his most recent promotion has been lateral, and during the course of the story he realizes that, not only are his excellent Spanish and his knowledge of the Spaniards' mores being exploited (he gets assignments wherein success means credit for others; blame accrues to him), but also that one of his colleagues schemes actively against him. And finally, Gosling explores the sub-culture of the British community in Puerto Rio ("Surbiton-on-Heat"), "one of the many coastal towns that had become infested in recent years by hoards of retirees from England, Holland, Germany, and other countries rich in huddled masses yearning to be free." As this quotation indicates, there is a note of cynicism in *The Woman in Red* which has been absent from Gosling's earlier novels, *Fair Game* (British title: *Running Duck*), *The Zero Trap,* and *Solo Blues* (British title: *Loser's Blues*). But fans will also recognize the sophistication they have come to value in Gosling's work, and, if touches of humor and wit are fewer than usual, those present are as effective as always.

If you have no head for heights, the opening and confrontation scenes of this novel will be terrifying; even if you do, you will find them riveting. The first scene details the victim's fall from a penthouse balcony, and it is exceptional—packed full of telling details one remembers later but which, at first reading, simply plunge along with the action. The climax takes place on a narrow, improvised gangway between two penthouses. The O.K. Corral goes high-rise.

Charles Lewellyn acquits himself well in his quest to find a killer, solve an earlier crime, and exonerate an appealing English retiree accused of murder. Lewellyn himself, of course, is in constant danger, and he must also protect Holly Partridge, widow of the accused's son and sprightly, headstrong heroine in distress. The chase scenes across the Spanish countryside are speedy and sure. The romance between Charles and Holly is entertaining as each veers (very traditionally) between attraction and exasperation with the other. Still another level of interest lies in the varying assessments which Holly, his mother, and his father make of David Partridge, Holly's husband, killed in the midst of a criminal conspiracy which antedates the current plot. Was David really crooked or merely a self-indulgent, frustrated, misled, would-be artist?

Despite the thrills of the climax and the sentimental but very satisfying final scene, there are some awkward moments: the revelation, for instance, seems contrived. The villains of the piece, while certainly deadly, are not wholly convincing. But nevertheless, *The Woman in Red* is good entertainment. Gosling keeps you involved, and the charm of the protagonists and their true supporters well outweighs any artificiality in the resolution.

—Jane S. Bakerman

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The Other David by Carolyn Coker. New York: Signet, 1985. 223 pp. $2.95

The *other* David is a previously uncatalogued portrait of the most famous male nude in the history of sculpture. And the painting bears the sculptor's signature: Michaelangelo Buonarroti. Renaissance art

expert Andrea Perkins undertakes an exhaustive scientific examination to determine the authenticity of the painting that was so mysteriously left with her by an elderly priest.

In order to secure the use of the most sophisticated chemical analysis and dating equipment, Andrea must borrow a computer owned by Texas multi-millionaire Clint McCauley. McCauley has built and furnished a lavish museum with his own collection and subsequent acquisitions. He once offered Andrea a prestigious position with the McCauley Museum the morning after having wined and dined and bedded her. Without telling him why she found his proposal unacceptable, Andrea accepted a more modest job with the Florence Accademia and fled across the Atlantic.

Thus, nearly a year after Andrea's abrupt departure, Clint McCauley accompanies the equipment and his Houston curator to Italy. McCauley pursues only the very rare and the very beautiful; consequently, he is interested in both the painting and the "Titian-haired" woman who quite literally uncovered it.

Althought the staff at the Accademia has tried to keep the existence of the portrait a secret until the tests establish whether the painting is a genuine Michaelangelo, word gets out—to the underworld, but not to the press. Naturally enough, theft, kidnapping, and murder ensue.

Andrea is the sort of heroine who is best described as "spunky." She is extraordinarily good at authenticating and restoring fragile works of art. She is also brave and resourceful, but about as deep as a petri dish. Captain Aldo Balzani, the singing policeman with a Louisiana drawl, is a welcome addition to the otherwise very predictable cast of characters.

The premise and the plot of *The Other David* are original enough, and the reader gets a fascinating glimpse into the high stakes world of collecting and preserving art. Carolyn Coker's competent first novel promises better books to come. But the publicity people at Signet insult the book's author and mislead its readers by fabricating an "excerpt" just inside the cover in which the first casualty of the adventure is resurrected and murdered again. There is no excuse for this kind of sloppiness!

—Patrice Clark Koelsch

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Out of the Blackout by Robert Barnard. New York: Scribner's, 1985. $12.95

Robert Barnard's readers are numerous and devoted. When they read *Out of the Blackout,* they may be surprised but probably not dismayed.

We have come to expect certain things from Barnard—wit, intelligence, and intriguing plots; characters clearly drawn and very amusing who do not become caricatures. More than anything else, we expect amusing satire; we look for those places where an insightful phrase goes straight to the ridiculous heart of the matter.

There is very little satire in *Out of the Blackout;* it comes too close to the real and the probable to be amusing. It is, however, suspenseful and intriguing, the characters skilfully, if not humorously, drawn and very real. We wouldn't want to know them any better than we already do.

A small child gets off a train in a rural village, one of a group of London children evacuated for the duration of the Blitz. But this child is different—he is not one of the list of children in this group, he is not reported missing, his name and address are soon revealed to be false.

He is taken in by a childless couple and, with no one claiming him, grows up as their child. He is well loved and not bothered by an inclination to discover his "roots" until an episode of *dé jà vu* that occurs when he is a university student. He is intrigued, not just by that eerie feeling of having been there before, but also by the extreme terror aroused by the sight of a certain house in a certain neighborhood.

Normal curiosity leads him from one fact to another. He eventually uncovers wartime Fascism, domestic abuse, and the most unloving family imaginable. The entire process covers a period of several years, but by the end he has identified his birth family and uncovered a murder. While the murder goes unrecognized officially and the youth discovers no emotional ties whatsoever with his birth family, this novel is extremely satisfying. The title, *Out of the Blackout,* is finally seen to have a dual meaning: a small child appears from nowhere, out of the wartime blackout, and a young man discovers the truth of his early childhood and emerges from his blackout.

At least one witticism reminds us that, while Barnard may have put his sense of humor to one side, he still has it. About Mussolini he says: "[T]he English have always had a slightly tender spot in their hearts for the Italian posturer, and while they would never have made him their leader, they might well have put him in charge of British Rail."

Robert Barnard has had the courage to deviate from what for him has been a very successful formula. Many would have lacked either the courage or the ability to try something new. *Out of the Blackout* illustrates to his readers that Barnard is a talented and devoted writer, and we look forward to his next effort.

—Cheryl Sebelius Nelson

The Scoop and Behind the Screen by various hands. London: Victor Gollancz, 1983. 182 pp. £6.95

The two collaboratively-written plays contained in this book were first broadcast over the BBC (*Behind the Screen* between June 14 and July 19, 1930 and *The Scoop* between January 10 and April 4, 1931) and subsequently reprinted as serials in *The Listener.* Hugh Walpole, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Anthony Berkeley, E. C. Bentley, and Ronald Knox each contributed one episode to *Behind the Screen;* furnishing two episodes apiece to *The Scoop* were Bentley, Berkeley, Christie, Sayers, Clemence Dane, and Freeman Wills Crofts.

The first Detection Club collaboration, *Behind the Screen* is the less satisfying of the two; while of interest as a curiosity, it fails simply on the puzzle level. Though Berkeley, Bentley, and Knox (and, quite likely, more of the collaborators) had agreed upon the solution to be presented, each is so concerned with providing unexpected twists that the solution finally presented departs from a timetable carefully worked out in an earlier episode and depends on information previously unavailable to the listener/reader.

Though not without problems of its own, *The Scoop* is superior to *Behind the Screen*—primarily because of the way Dorothy L. Sayers supervised the overall story and the preparation of individual chapters. Sayers hoped that *The Scoop* would demonstrate that several writers could produce a perfectly orthodox detective story and, in addition, embody her view that detective fiction could and should be a serious criticism of life.

But, apart from incidental jabs, no contributor except Sayers criticizes much of anything, and even Sayers's more modest aim of reproducing the atmosphere of a newspaper office goes agleaming as the action speedily moves away from the offices of the *Morning Star* and into the field. Even the process of determining the identity of the murderer depends far more on coincidence than on Sayers's careful plotting; the complex but convincing scenario which she sets forth in her unpublished notes seem to have proved more than a collective effort could manage.

Even with their flaws, both plays are good entertainment as well as reminders of the high quality of radio drama available during the Golden Age. This volume is certainly worth a look by anyone with more than a passing

interest in the classic British form of detective fiction.

—William Reynolds

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Dead Man's Thoughts by Carolyn Wheat. New York: Dell, 1984. 228 pp. $2.95

Legal Aid attorney Cassandra Jameson, "the fastest mouth in Brooklyn," narrates *Dead Man's Thoughts* by Carolyn Wheat, which was nominated for an Edgar. Cass is bright, feisty, literate, tough, and even occasionally funny, an enjoyable character capable of sustaining a series. Overall, in fact, *Dead Man's Thoughts* is excellent, the characterization rich, the settings vivid, and the pace swift.

When Cass Jameson's colleague and lover, Nathan Wasserstein, is murdered, the police are tempted to write the crime off as a homosexual S&M scene which escalated into tragedy; moreover, they arrest a logical suspect, Heriberto Diaz (street name, Paco), one of Nathan's clients and a known hustler. But Cass cannot accept that explanation and puts her legal skills to work on her own investigation, reasoning that, despite the freedom they allowed one another in their relationship, she and Nathan knew one another too well for him to have had a second sexual life wholly secret from her. The apparent suicide of another of Nathan's clients, an unsavory but valuable snitch, suggests to Cass that the two deaths might be related, so, despite the advice of almost everyone she knows or encounters, she pursues her inquiries, along the way learning a lot about herself, about her friends and enemies, and about the difference between sexuality and sensitivity and about the contrast between illusions and ideals.

It's a tribute to Wheat's skill that *Dead Man's Thoughts* seems so lively and quick—there is some physical action, of course, but most of Cass's probing consists of conversations with various of Nathan's acquaintances, study of newspaper files, careful reading of court records. Primarily, Cass's own complex and appealing personality (she's also a skilled photographer and has serious doubts about her legal career) gives a sense of movement where there is only progress, no action, and also, her continuing caseload, which demands a good bit of her time and attention, heightens the tempo as it provides several very minor but useful subplots. Wheat also enlivens the pace by detailed but never ponderous descriptions of various Brooklyn and Village sites—the attorneys' hangout, a health food restaurant, Cass's own apartment, and, above all, the crowded, complicated, compromise-prone legal system. Each courtroom scene is alive with tension and intellectual conflict; each explanation of a point of law is firmly embedded in the necessities of action—the texture of this novel is dense, but nothing extraneous is allowed to intrude.

The seams don't show in *Dead Man's Thoughts*, which makes old conventions seem fresh and new; Carolyn Wheat has done a fine job.

—Jane S. Bakerman

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Flaming Tree by Phyllis A. Whitney. New York: Doubleday, 1986. $15.95

Phyllis A. Whitney has just published another book—her 67th. Nearly all her adult fiction have been bestsellers and all were major book club selections. Since 1941, when her first hardcover publication appeared, she has been hard at work producing the kind of mainstream mystery suspense novels which have earned her a wide following, with over thirty million copies of her books in print.

Devoted fans know what to expect in a Phyllis A. Whitney novel, and I can think of at least eight things they can count on without fear of disappointment:

- A well-constructed story and a twisty plot, with an ending which almost always takes you by surprise.
- Plenty of mystery, suspense, and a heartfelt romance which is an integral part of the story.
- Characters who are motivated. You may not figure out why some of them do what they do until after the slam-bang climax, but you don't come away from one of her novels with that low-level irritation one feels with major characters whose behavior starts out—and remains—inexplicable.
- That necessary ingredient to a good plot: personal conflict.
- Heroines who are gutsy, intelligent, and resourceful, pitting their strength and savvy against intriguing heroes who are often troubled but, in the end, irresistible.
- An indelibly wrought sense of place. Each novel explores an exotic or appealing new locale, rendered in such living color and loving enthusiasm that Palm Springs and Newport and Key West—and now Carmel—should consider making her an honorary member of their Chambers of Commerce. (I, for one, come away from every Phyllis A. Whitney novel determined to put her latest discovery on some future itinerary.)
- An insider's look at some interesting or unusual human activity, expertly woven into the fabric of the story—and ranging imaginatively from orchid growing and scuba diving for treasure (*Dream of Orchids*) to song-writing and the pop music scene (*Rainsong*).
- A writing style laced with vivid imagery and a keen sense of drama.

In *Flaming Tree*, Whitney delivers all of the above—and something more. She has written a mystery with a core-theme of compassion.

You experience compassion almost from the first dramatic page. You sense its presence—or absence—in every character, and it is the *leitmotif* of the novel's heroine, Kelsey Stewart. You never lose the *feel* of it, even as the plot pulls you forward and you find yourself stepping through a landmine of skillfully buried emotions which, from time to time, explode in your face. It never quite lets go of you, this sense of compassion, because at the heart of the story is a small boy who struggles with much more than the secret locked in his damaged brain. Nine-year-old Jody Hammond must fight his way back to all the things we take for granted: how to move, speak, feel, even taste. And he must do it in an atmosphere of tension, conflict, fear, rejection, and guilt—including his own.

Jody has fallen from the rocky cliff of Point Lobos, an accident which has put him in a coma and his mother Ruth, who fell with him, in a wheelchair. Kelsey Stewart is a skilled and sensitive physical therapist who must fight her own way back from a personal tragedy which threatens to incapacitate her with guilt and despair even as it spurs her on to greater and greater efforts on behalf of the little boy.

The backdrop for the story's events is California's contribution to fairytale land: Carmel. "With its rocky seacoast, white sand beaches, and windshaped cypress and pine," it is a place of breathtaking, almost haunting beauty on the Monterey Peninsula, where artists and writers abound, people live in gingerbread houses with peaked roofs, a town ordinance gives Carmel's glorious trees the right of way, and you can lose a child or a dog or your sense of direction when the fog rolls in on the beach at sundown.

It is also a place with a pervasive sense of an age-old clash: good and evil. Not only does the subject preoccupy the major characters, whose moods often reflect "a restlessness as great as those churning currents out beyond the rocky shore," but it dogs the reader as well, thanks to evocative descriptions such as this: "a mass of twisted cypresses [which] seemed to entangle their way downhill toward the water. Some were dead—gray-white skeletons that had long ago been deformed by ocean winds. On the left, a tongue of land reached into the water, ending in a spectacular rock with a high, jagged point that cut into the sky . . . [C]rowning it dramatically, stood the small lone cypress tree—not twisted like the others, but a straight, fragile silhouette against ocean and mountains, defying winds and water . . ."

But, as is typical of Phyllis A. Whitney dramas, you can't really be sure who stands for the good and who the evil. Jody's father Tyler Hammond is a brilliant, award-winning documentary filmmaker and a man of "stark, brooding intensity" with "an angry arrogance [that] seemed to stamp his manner." Is he a grief-stricken husband and father, unable to cope with the double tragedy of a crippled wife and son—or does his withdrawal from the world and his formidable opposition to Kelsey's attempts to help Jody stem from a

darker motive? Has the once-courageous, fun-loving Ruth Hammond undergone "a violent change of character"—or is her suicide attempt a silent cry for help? Is her enigmatic, soft-spoken brother Denis as devoted and loyal as he seems? Is their distraught mother Dora Langford on a collision course with the son-in-law she distrusts? Does Tyler's foster mother, photographer Marisa Marsh, whose photo gallery reveals a predilection for what she calls "the dark side of reality"—natural disasters—live up to her reputation as wise woman or witch? Why is the unsolved murder of the legendary Francesca Fallon, one-time gossip columnist and radio talk-show hostess, a studiously avoided topic in Carmel? And did Kelsey's innkeeper aunt do her a favor, or a disservice, by embroiling her in the complex and tragic affairs of the Hammond household?

In the midst of swirling emotions and secret lives lies the interior drama of Jody's heroic struggle, which Kelsey has made her own. The author has artfully constructed a two-lane highway of suspense which keeps you as interested and concerned about the boy's medical progress as you are about the rapidly unfolding mystery. In the process, you are made privy to the fascinating and controversial world of therapy for the brain-damaged. Whitney brings a special interest and perspective to the subject and, in a touching postscript to her readers, reveals how and why she has come to be so knowledgeable about today's conventional and unorthodox methods of treatment.

Flaming Tree, like its author, holds out a message of hope. In the words of the heroine: "One certainty that no one had taught her in any classroom, but which she had learned painfully through trial and error, was that unless one could *believe* in a return to the normal, the impossible could never be accomplished." In the words of the author: "[W]e must never stop seeking for alternative and supplemental help, no matter how grave the problem. New answers are always coming in."

Phyllis A. Whitney has written a novel that is highly entertaining even as it enlightens and uplifts.

—Erika Holzer

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Grave Goods by Jessica Mann. New York: Doubleday Crime Club, 1985. 192 pp. $12.95

Well, folks, Jessica has really dropped a clanger this time. She falls for the diary-discovered-in-an-old-trunk trick and is carried away, but this reader stayed behind.

One of Jessica's favorite sleuths, Tamara Hoyland, is elected to struggle with this chestnut. Tamara is a real whiz kid, an archaeologist, a secret agent, and unattached. What's more, her spymaster, Mr. Black, will never give Smiley cause to fret over job security.

To fuse this bomb, Tamara goes to visit her invalid grandfather and arrives in time to deliver a few karate chops to a masked intruder who is beating up on one Margot Ellice, the old man's nurse. The thug gets away, and, after Margot gets out of the hospital, she goes to stay with her brother Jeremy, who runs a book shop. Brother is not too happy to be saddled with Margot but keeps her out of his hair by giving her a Victorian diary which has turned up in a trunk he bought at the estate sale of one Lady Bessemer. The diary was written by the lady's sister Artemis, who was once married off to a German prince, Joachim of Horn. Poor old Artemis was cold-shouldered by the Prince's family because she wasn't blue-blooded and was English. The diary goes on and on, *ad nauseam*, about daily life with the Teutons, the only bright spot apparently being the birth of a son, who can never reign anyhow because of mom's lowly birth. The Huns do let her join them each year at Christmas when they all troop down to the dungeons to stare at the family relics: a bejewelled golden cup, a broken sword, and a coronet, all supposedly wrested from Charles the Great. Then Artemis's husband is killed in what she believes to be a rigged carriage accident because the good prince keeps yammering about social reforms and his brother, the reigning prince, can't shut him up.

Margot decides to try her hand at research and writing about the old diary and cons Tamara into reading some of her unfinished manuscript. In the meantime, our heroine meets a dashing art dealer at the book shop and they get cozy immediately. This certainly isn't the first of intrepid Tamara's romps in the hay—she looks for Mr. Right in every book. Now that we have our dash of romance, Jessica really steps up the pace. A fire in the bookstore snuffs out Margot on the top floor, and the rest of the diary goes missing. Enter Mr. Black, who briefs Tamara on an important East German exhibit that is coming to London and includes guess what—right on, the relics of the House of Horn. Wonder Woman goes right to work, finding the rest of the diary in which Artemis blabs the fact that the relics are fakes and the real ones are back in England, so Tamara has to go crashing around looking for them. In jig time, she interviews umpteen people who knew the trunk owner, tracks down the missing trinkets, and sends the handsome no-goodnik lover on his way. She has rotten luck with men, poor kid. All's right in the end, however, and international relations are not disturbed—but by this time, who cares?

—Miriam L. Clark

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Acrostic Mysteries by Henry Slesar. New York: Avon. 93 pp. $4.95

Forty clever mini crime stories, created by Edgar Award–winning author Henry Slesar, have been assembled in a softcover volume destined to tease and challenge mystery buffs.

Acrostic mysteries are reader-participation puzzles. The last paragraph of each story, containing the solution, is missing. To figure out the ending, the reader is asked to decipher the accompanying acrostic. Once the acrostic is solved, so is the crime.

In his introductory remarks, Slesar, a prolific writer of criminous short stories, reflects on how often the phrase "one last piece of the puzzle" appears in the genre of detective fiction. Initially, he conceived what seemed like "a brilliant, money-making scheme" through which a series of jigsaw puzzles would picture the solution to a mystery tale. Eventually, he saw the possibility of marrying a crime narrative to the puzzle form of the acrostic. "Why wouldn't the solution to the puzzle also be the solution to a mystery story?" writes Slesar. "It might give a solver more incentive for exercising those tired synapses. It might also be more fun."

Inspector Cross and his sidekick Sergeant Kingsley are the official sleuths of the intricate riddles. The inspector proves to be a little grumpy, often unsociable, but he possesses a dry sense of humor, a high degree of intelligence, and passions for baseball, jazz, and books. His sergeant has a nose for discerning dastardly deeds even in the most innocent surroundings.

Among the more entertaining yarns is "The Case of the Miserly Murderer," in which it is proven that a vacationing husband is his wife's killer (for her $200,000 trust fund) through his having bought for her a one-way airline ticket. In "A Murder in a Very Quiet Room," a strangled librarian leaves behind a dying message—the scribbled number "540"—and it points at the identity of her murderer, a chemical laboratory assistant (the Dewey Decimal System, used in libraries to classify books by subject, designates 540 for chemistry).

In another story, Dr. Rampart, an archaeologist who recently excavated the Tomb of Khasekkenui, believes that as a result of an ancient curse his life is threatened by a one-legged man: "I saw him at the site of our expedition. And I am sure I saw him when we embarked from Cairo. And now—I'm sure he's in this country . . . His footprints in the snow. The footprints of a one-legged man." Inspector Cross points out that Dr. Rampart is afflicted not by an ancient curse but by a modern one—absentmindedness. "When you left home this morning," he theorizes, "you were wearing two left shoes. Those imprints in the snow are yours."

Other brain-teasers deal with a bank embezzlement, the robbery of a pearl necklace, a locked-room murder, a missing family heirloom, blackmail, and political assassination. The incriminating clues include

such diverse objects as ice cubes, a pair of spectacles, a greasy thumbprint, custom-made shoes, an aluminum ladder, a showroom mannequin, a Yale diploma, and a wad of chewing gum. Among the deadly weapons used by enterprising villains are a hunter knife, a poison dart, a machine gun, a baseball bat, a heavy chandelier, and even a cast.

One wishes that the author had played a more sporting, fairer game with the reader-detective by planting all the relevant clues in the narratives. Some solutions are based on bits of information concealed from us and sprung unexpectedly by Inspector Cross in the acrostic section of the puzzle. Still, *Acrostic Mysteries* is a diverting venture for anyone who loves to play Whodunit.

—Amnon Kabatchnik

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The Fatal Equilibrium by Marshal Jevons. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press. $10.95

In 1978, Marshall Jevons (the pseudonym of William Breit, the E. M. Stevens Distinguished Professor of Economics at Trinity University, and Kenneth G. Elzinga, Professor of Economics at The University of Virginia) introduced Harvard professor (of Economics) Harry Spearman in *Murder at the Margin* (Sun Lake, Ariz.: Thomas Horton and Daughters). Applying economic theory to two murders which take place while he and his wife are vacationing at the Cinnamon Bay Plantation resort in the Virgin Islands, Spearman solves the mystery and in the process teaches the reader some elementary principles of the dismal science.

The Fatal Equilibrium again features Spearman in the detective role. This time, Spearman is confronted with the murders of two members of Harvard's Promotion and Tenure Committee following the apparent suicide of a young Harvard faculty member. Spearman, who continues his amusing habit of interpreting everything from love to cocktail consumption during happy hours in economic terms, relies on his professional expertise to hit upon the correct solution nearly three months after the supposed murderer has been convicted and sentenced to prison. His solution will confirm suspicions which every academic harbors but which few voice.

The Fatal Equilibrium is in every way a better novel than *Murder at the Margin* and, by almost any set of standards, a pleasant entertainment and an even more pleasant way of, in Milton Friedman's words, "imbibing sound economic principles." To begin with, the authors are scrupulously fair. In fact, given the novel's time scheme, readers are given the key information months before Spearman encounters it. Second, by placing most of the action in an academic setting, the authors breathe life into their characters. (The disconcerting shift of the climactic chapters to the *Queen Elizabeth 2* almost suggests that the authors had decided in advance to include everything they knew about an attractive but unrelated topic.) While not every character makes the leap from flat to rounded, everyone in the novel has a purpose in life, something to do other than appear periodically, drop a clue or a red herring or two, and vanish.

People with an ear for language may find some parts of *The Fatal Equilibrium* a bit stilted, but Breit and Elzinga have clearly worked on this aspect of their craft as well; and, by dealing with a topic they know well, they have given a picture of life in the academic fast lane (or, perhaps, pressure-cooker) that goes a long way toward making the murderer's motive seem believable.

—William Reynolds

* * * * *

The Master Key by Masako Togawa. Translated from the Japanese by Simon Grove. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1985. $13.95

One can go on and on listing the problems of the Japanese mystery novel: cardboard characters, derivative and contrived plots, flights into social criticism and political hectoring, hasty writing (some authors churning out three or more books a year), a buddy system of reviewing. But among the hundreds of mysteries published each year are many, many fine works, ones which would certainly be welcome imports, enriching our experience of the genre and making us thankful again that we choose to read mysteries.

Almost 25 years ago, Masako Togawa combined place and character with deft sleight of hand and a shocker of an ending to produce a mystery classic. *The Master Key* was a spectacular literary debut for the 24-year-old nightclub singer, launching her on a career as a popular novelist and public "personality." Simon Grove's translation, faithful to the original yet reading smoothly, will win her and, with luck, other Japanese popular writers an audience outside of Japan.

In the Tokyo of the early 1950s, some 150 single women are living in the K Apartments for Ladies. Built in the '30s to provide quality, and carefully chaperoned, housing for single career women, the building now houses these same women grown old and lonely. Though the building's inhabitants have emerged from the devastation of the war physically unscathed, defeat and the postwar economic and moral chaos have sent them spinning into a dark and shabby future.

Even the building itself cannot rest secure on its foundations. It is to be moved a few feet to make way for a wider road, and, as some of the women in the building know, the workmen will find the remains of a baby killed a few years ago and buried in the basement.

The suspects in this and other sordid crimes are a stunning gallery of miserable and downright strange old women. One copies over and over again the senile doodles of her dead husband, while another prepares a meal every night for a man who stepped out years ago and did not return. Others have converted to a shabby con masquerading as an exotic new religion. One old biddy has stolen the master key of the title and uses it to go snooping around in the others' rooms and lives. There is even an unforgettable Japanese version of the bag lady, ratting through the garbage to get fish bones for her self-prescribed high protein diet. One wonders if today's older Miss Togawa would be so willing to people a novel with old folks lacking everything but the sins of a lifetime.

In any case, the problems they are having in aging gracefully make for a terrific story, one that, as an examination of loneliness, could rest easily on the non-genre shelf.

Translations flood Japanese bookstores, but the flow the other way is barely a trickle, mostly of interest to academics. Only the fifth Japanese mystery novel to have been translated into English, it underscores how difficult it has been for translations of Japanese mass-market novels to find commercial publishers, and how much we readers are poorer for that.

—Peter A. Prahar

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Death of a Nymph by David Delman. New York: Doubleday, 1985. $12.95

Love and death: Freud told us that our existence oscillates between these poles, and David Delman defines them neatly in a story of lust and murder at a posh girl's school. Erotic watercolor studies are assembled into a portfolio called "The American Nymph" by lecherous art teacher–portraitist Roger Denny. He has limned and loved a bevy of Byrd School's women students, faculty, and administrators, and the paintings become clues, gambits, and warnings in a series of murders.

The grisly murder of Olivia Templeton, who lusts evenhandedly for Denny and for the headship of the school, brings husband-and-wife police team Jacob and Helen Horowitz into the picture. Helen faces male chauvinist harassment on the force, Jacob is soon *hors de combat* with a gratuitous wound, so the novel unfolds parallel stories of academic and bureaucratic politicking, various versions of feminine wiles, and many shades of romantic and sexual obsession. A strand of Arthurian allusion underscores this modern study in courtly love, chivalric ideals, and lustful passion.

As she turns homicide cop, Helen Horowitz must examine love diads and triads and unravel the tangled relationships of various students and teachers, while murders are threatened and begin to occur. Her husband offers moral support, but Helen goes it alone in a tough world.

While Delman's description of the nude portraits and of a 1940s DeMille-like movie epic are unconvincing, he uses fencing scenes well as a modern equivalent of jousting or dueling, and he creates a sinister ambience for crime in Byrd School. The narrative is paced briskly, sacrificing some characterization to rapid action.

Delman's characters are often stereotyped (male police, aside from Jacob Horowitz, are porcine, and most women are ravishing and voluptuous dolls), and much of their psychology is flimsy. The plot is satisfyingly ingenious, with genuine clues and puzzles to unravel. The various socio-political motives remain unexplored—the jockeying for position by women in a woman's world (Byrd School) and women in a man's world (the Tri-Town police force) could have been substantially developed.

Helen Horowitz seems unnecessarily appalled at the capacity of late adolescent girls for cupidity, spite, malice, and violence ("What a bunch of hard cases you girls really are," she says), when such a capable, intuitive police officer ought to *start* from this insight. She also seems naïve about the deviousness exhibited by academic or corporate ladder-climbers.

Delman writes fluently, and his novel is brisk and direct. Its investigation of the dynamics of hothouse mini-societies such as girl's schools and police forces is not as convincing as the love-hate pairings of the characters. Not quite either a police procedural or a Nick-and-Nora romance-thriller-puzzle, the book's balance is frequently uneasy.

—William J. Schafer

ESPIONAGE

The Ninth Dragon by E. B. Cross. Pinnacle, 1985. 274 pp. $3.50

It's obvious that author E. B. Cross is well versed in Southeast Asian culture, the martial arts, and weaponry, judging from the deployment of his expertise throughout *The Ninth Dragon*, the latest addition to Pinnacle's Crossfire Espionage line. Unfortunately, a critical disparity exists between Cross's worldly knowledge and his plot.

Sam Borne, a lethal 'provocateur' for a clandestine spy network known only as The Committee, is assigned to liquidate a renegade American general who has fiercely reigned over the Southeast Asian heroin market for the past fifteen years. Feared as Dr. Sun Sun, the megalomaniacal overlord of the Oriental drug trade, the former military figure possesses a blueprint with which to inundate the U.S. with heroin—manipulating American P.O.W.s as labor.

Cross builds up Sun Sun's entrance into the story to an expected level. But when this American Genghis Khan appears, he comes off as nothing more than an adequate adversary. Although a villain's name is secondary to the plot, Cross should have displayed more imagination in a suitable selection, given his character's identical signet to Robert Markham's (Kingsley Amis) *Colonel Sun* (1968), James Bond's initial post-Fleming odyssey. Further, *The Ninth Dragon* lacks the essential, grueling death confrontation indigenous to the generic super-spy saga; Borne dispatches an intoxicated Dr. Sun Sun into a covey of rats. This rather contrived development suggests that Cross may have sensed the limitations of the relationship between his protagonist and nemesis.

Cross minimizes the effectiveness of his authentic weaponry and Asian trappings, not to mention the overall suspense of the book, with a slight overindulgence in street language and a conventional plot dating back to the early days of the Avenger-against-the-Mafia genre of the seventies. *The Ninth Dragon* could have benefitted with a story line reflective of the current trend of Armageddon-oriented themes in espionage fiction. Cross's expertise, blended into this format, would have proven to be a formidable mixture.

This is not to say that Sam Borne does not have series potential. The author demonstrates an admirable sense of locale, especially his graphic depictions of Saigon night life and the dark environs of Ho Chi Minh City and his detailing of the specialized interests needed for the Bondian-style secret agent. Future missions for Sam Borne should emphasize topical urgency in plotting and characterization. The presence of American P.O.W.s in Dr. Sun Sun's compound added a realistic touch to the otherwise formularized proceedings.

All in all, *The Ninth Dragon* signifies a disappointment for Pinnacle's generally satisfying cloak-and-dagger fare.

Although set in another time (1965–66), Bill S. Ballinger's five-volume Cold War–era series featuring deadly C.I.A. operative Joaquin Hawks, assigned to Southeast Asia in the thick of the Vietnam conflict, was far more effective.

—Andy East

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Ampurias Exchange by Angus Ross. New York: Walker, 1985. $2.95

Mark Farrow is a British secret agent from the Special Branch, on an assignment in Spain. Waiting in the dark for a group of terrorists to make their appearance, he wonders if anyone may have tampered with the Citroen he left parked in an isolated area a few miles away. Mark might suddenly need the car for an escape. He decides there is nothing to be concerned about, observing, "Vandalism is rare in Spain. Youth is kept under control."

Ah-ha, thinks the reader, that dates this book. It must have been written during the repressive time when Franco was in power. It turns out, however, that *Ampurias Exchange* was published in 1977, when Franco had already been dead for two years. Discipline over young people rapidly ended along with other features of the dictatorship, and it is said that juvenile crime in Spain today makes many people wonder if the old days were so bad after all.

But even if this novel were actually written when Franco was alive and active, there are no other characteristics to tie the story to a specific time. Appearing now for the first time in paperback, *Ampurias Exchange* is a fresh thriller, filled with the situations and incidents which make such books appealing.

Whatever one's viewpoint on the subject of how properly to manage teenagers, fortunately the Citroen is all in one piece when Mark and the agent he rescues make their dash, and they reach the border safely. But the adventure is not over yet for this hero, who is large in every respect, from his bulk and his appetite to his willingness when it comes to risking himself in the line of duty.

This novel is part of the Walker British Mystery Series, which does include a number of mystery and detective books. *Ampurias Exchange* belongs in another category, however, as a drama with hunting and chasing, and a quality of suspense that builds well from about midway right through to the final pages.

If the plot and action are not particularly different from many other stories, there is freshness in the treatment of Mark Farrow, known through most of the book as Nelson after being supplied with a false passport showing the name of the famous British admiral. In the very first scene, Mark's girlfriend, Daisy, is killed by an explosion which was intended for the secret agent himself. Mark, however, pauses neither to mourn nor to allow his own injuries to heal.

A highlight as the story continues is Farrow/Nelson's developing friendship with Fito Ortega, an officer in the Guardia Civil, security branch. Ortega is introduced when he does a bad job of trying to tail the hero and is spotted in the first few minutes. The surprise is in how quickly the two men become friends, eventually working as a team to wrap up the plot.

Before that happens, however, they have some good scenes together while eating. (Farrow/Nelson does a considerable amount of drinking and eating when alone, too, and gives many details of these meals and refreshments in his first-person narrative.) For the two new companions, first they go to a little bar for *bandarillas,* squares of fried bread topped with prawns known as *gambas,* eggs, salmon, or other tidbits. Later, they feast in a hotel dining room, while the action holds and four pages are devoted to their meal. "I tell you, it's all on the government, man. Relax, and choose something good," the Englishman advises his Spanish colleague.

They conclude with coffee, brandy, and cigars, then have a siesta which Farrow/Nelson calls a kip, waking up just in time to begin preparations for the big finish.

—Martin Fass

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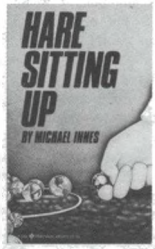
Ride a Pale Horse by Helen MacInnes. New York: Fawcett Crest/Ballantine, 1985. 384 pp. $3.95

After a score of successful novels combining the fierce tension of the espionage tale with the human interest "angle" of tangled romance, Helen MacInnes comes up with this thriller of the Cold War, originally published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1984. The cloak-and-dagger material is well done as always (her late husband, Gilbert Highet, was secretly in British Intelligence during World War II, and all her background research is well integrated into the story line). But the love interest seems hard to accept, given the character molds of her chief protagonists. Cupid brings a shade too much sentimentality here. The ending is like a soap opera in happy bliss.

The plot, though, is apocalyptic in its world consequences, with plenty of mystery for the educated reader. The current news headlines will add a savor to the problem presented. The two chief actors are both advanced into middle age and more than a little "world-weary" in their jobs, intelligent above the average person, naturally. They are made into dual upholders of the elements of Western values we are all told to cherish. Karen Cornell is staff reporter for an important American magazine of current affairs. She is very attractive, *naturally,* and up to all the tricks and turns of Western politicians and (she thinks) Communist bureaucrats. Feminist in deed, she is far from strident—and her philosophy (like that of MacInnes herself) is one of basic anti-Communist and conservative tenets. She is the catalyst to bring the plot to its boiling point in world crisis.

Her counterpart is CIA operative Peter Bristow. Middle age has brought a broken marriage and a certain tough cynicism to Peter. His still attractive personality creates near-instant love interest in Karen, naturally



(she is a widow). She is careful, of course, but the author throws her two characters together again and again—through bombings and kidnappings and the treachery of double agents—until finally both figures bow into the Happy Ending. Given their independent characters, we may speculate about how long this union can last. But best-sellers don't care. Miss MacInnes has a tradition here that does not fail her—not since her first success, *Above Suspicion,* in 1939!

The novel's real strength lies in the labyrinthine plot that takes us from the central problem of the believability of a Czech government defector to the stability of the NATO alliance. The threads of world disaster are enmeshed in the power of *dis-information.* Who and what can one believe? We have been prepared by Arnaud de Borchgrave's *The Spike.* A little truth is a dangerous thing—for it hides so many lies. Are the Soviets behind the Czech Josef Vasek? Is this the plot of one group within the KGB to create a coming Armaggeddon? Are American traitors at work? Identities come and go. The puzzle builds, as does the romance. We move from the heavy secrecy of Communist Prague to the frantic antics of bureaucratic Washington, D.C. Europe's Old World charm is brought out here—as in all of MacInnes's novels—in the cameo effect of local scenes. It can be an ice-cream parlor in Vienna, the hotel gardens of Prague, the boulevards of Paris, the crowded streets of Rome. They all ring true in a vitality of life and beauty that the author really loves, and makes us love too.

Not for her is the melancholic despair of John Le Carré. Her action scenes are realistic, but not a bloodbath. Her optimism respects logic in the world of spies and counter-spies (the romance leaves one skeptical). Her confidence carries us forward in the excitement of discovery and victory. But the Pale Rider of Death she invokes is hard to push aside so easily at the end. Its threat of assassination and chaos is *too* real for today. The defections and double agents are too real. Her novel is good, but the careful reader will carry away a note of unease from her plot's climax.

—Tom Egan

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The China Lovers by David Bonavia and John Byron. Hong Kong: South China Morning Post Publications Division, 1985. 286 pp.

The mystery reader who enjoyed *Gorky Park,* Martin Cruz Smith's bestselling novel of a Russian cop in a perplexing investigation of three Moscow homicides, will also find *The China Lovers* to his liking. Like *Gorky Park,* it combines elements of international intrigue with the everyday problems of an ordinary police investigator trying to do his job as part of a mindlessly dogmatic socialist bureaucracy. Its exotic background provides a look at how life was for Chinese and foreigners in Beijing in the rudderless years just after the tumultuous Cultural Revolution and Chairman Mao's death.

As the story begins, a burglar is busy at work on a cold winter night in Beijing, stealing from a house while its tenants, a high-ranking Foreign Ministry official and his family, are away. Suddenly, he hears a noise and realizes that he is not alone. Snatching whatever valuables he can carry without impeding his getaway, he flees into the night.

Within the hour, we learn that a neighbor has reported a corpse, who turns out to be the occupant of the house, a middle-ranking Chinese diplomat named Tang. Due to the gravity of the crime, Li Chunlong, head of the Criminal Affairs Division, Peking Public Security Bureau, is rousted out of his warm

bed to undertake the investigation. It is through Li's eyes and mind that we learn what it is like to be a plodding public servant in the People's Republic.

With the evidence pointing to the burglar as the culprit in the homicide, Li sends his men out into the city's dimly lit restaurants and other hangouts of known "undesirables." These are the unemployed, men and women who manage to survive in a sort of official limbo, with no work unit (to which everyone in China theoretically belongs) or other visible means of support. Many are youths recently back from years of "volunteer" labor in what was called the "countryside movement." They act as middlemen in moving black market goods, including stolen antiques and other relics which cannot be legally purchased by foreigners.

It is through one such liaison that we meet a young American named Bette Shroder, an exchange student with a freewheeling lifestyle. One of the so-called China Lovers, she is a part of the unwashed, pseudo-Marxist radical groupies who congregate in China with their Army surplus jackets and "Viva Che" sweatshirts. Turned off by the colorless existence of Chinese language studies, Bette flaunts local authority (and morals) by having a forbidden affair with a young Chinese named Yang, one of the "undesirable elements" who also happens to be under investigation by the police in connection with Tang's murder.

While investigator Li doggedly pursues suspects, he is confronted all the while with nagging suspicions that life isn't all that good for himself, either. Entering into the opulent homes and offices of the high-ranking party members, he closes his eyes to the inequalities, not that he really believes in the system, but merely because he is a cop with the sworn duty to track down a killer.

It gradually becomes apparent to Li that the burglar's pickings included some politically sensitive Russian documents which threaten repercussions within China's own Foreign Ministry. Naturally, when intelligence people in the American Embassy hear about this through the underground grapevine, they put out feelers to buy the documents from the thief, and the story becomes a two-way race between the Chinese officials and CIA-types to see who can get to the documents first.

Nevertheless, it is not the spy story so much as the social perspective which makes the book enjoyable. It focuses on two young friends, Yang and Shu, who are not *bona* fide "dissidents"—as they have no real "cause" to espouse—but merely sharp, individualistic people who see the dreary life under state socialism for what it really is: a dead-end street. They, not policeman Li, are the real heroes of the book, and the reader feels a sense of futility in their struggles not unlike of Winston Smith, the protagonist of Orwell's *1984*.

The China Lovers has mystery and intrigue, but it is above all else a story of the tribulations of modern Chinese youths. Looking past the dogma and regimentation of post-1949 China, we are reminded of yet another of that country's many tragedies: total alienation of perhaps millions of sophisticated and intelligent youth, who have little or no outlet for their energies and aspirations.

David Bonavia, a journalist, teamed up with Sinologist John Byron (a pseudonym) in writing the book, which brings to mystery fiction much of the ground covered in journalist Fox Butterfield's perceptive book *China: Alive in the Bitter Sea*.

—Mark Schreiber

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The Blind Side by Francis Clifford. Academy Chicago, 1985. 202 pp. $4.95

Warmly received upon its original release in 1971, Francis Clifford's *The Blind Side* richly merits inclusion in Academy Press's strong, growing list of reprints. A good story well told always remains current, and *The Blind Side* is certainly such a tale; more sadly, its opening scenes, describing the devastation of war and famine in Biafra during the late 1960s, seem all too contemporary to the reader of the '80s. Those passages are reported in a quiet, controlled, powerful third-person voice which continues throughout the work and which underscores the intensity of the protagonists' emotions.

The Blind Side is an adventure story without the standard romantic subplot. Instead, Clifford compares and contrasts the personalities and behaviors of two brothers, products of unhappy childhoods, activists in the Cold War and African states' struggle for self-definition and survival. Richard Lawrence is a Roman Catholic priest assigned to a Biafran mission; his brother Howard is a naval commander, a desk-bound submarine specialist—and a Soviet spy. In the course of the plot, both men confront a series of crises: Richard commandeers a planeload of relief supplies and flies it to his mission; Howard copes with an investigation into his activities. Their careers, their lives, and, Clifford suggests clearly, the states of their souls are at stake. Each brother runs incredible risks in order to do what he feels must be done; each suffers; each tries to influence the other. Not the least among complicating factors here is the approaching death of their selfish, demanding mother, source of many of the brothers' problems, but also, perhaps, the means of their salvation.

Clifford poses hard questions, offers no easy answers, and requires both his major characters and his readers to re-evaluate—or at least to reconsider—stock definitions of good and evil. To do this and to entertain simultaneously is to achieve much. Francis Clifford manages it all very smoothly.

—Jane S. Bakerman

NONFICTION

Private Eyes: 101 Knights by Robert A. Baker and Michael T. Nietzel. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1985. 385 pp. Paper.

The American Private Eye: The Image in Fiction by David Geherin. New York: Ungar, 1985. 228 pp. $7.95 (paper)

Our old friend, the battered, world-weary Knight of the Mean Streets, that cynical, independent, fast-punching hardboiler, seen in ten thousand books, pulp magazines, films and television shows, complete with trenchcoat, snap-brim, and loaded .45, has stepped out of the dark alleys of urban America into the light of pop literature.

Published within thirty days of one another, these two very welcome books take aim at the same target, attempting an in-depth examination and survey of the ever-popular private detective from the pulp-purple Terry Mack/Race Williams 1920s prototype created by Carroll John Daly to the sophisticated private operative of the 1980s and beyond, as exemplified in the novels of Robert B. Parker, Stephen Greenleaf, and other modern-day masters of the genre.

Each book has its omissions and shortcomings, but each is successful in an overall sense. Happily, what one lacks the other provides. Example: the Baker/Nietzel team does little more than barely mention Daly's Race Williams, while Geherin justifiably devotes his opening eight-page section to the pioneer eye.

On the other hand, the Baker/Nietzel approach is far more comprehensive and deals not just with the hundred and one "knights" of its title but with at least 325 private eyes from some 300 authors.

The Geherin approach is much more basic, covering only 27 detectives (and their creators), giving each a separate section

under the headings "The Pulpsters," "Life Beyond the Pulps," "Postwar P.I.s," "The Compassionate Eye," and "After Archer." To his credit, many of Geherin's choices are fresh and unexpected. In addition to the "musts" (The Op, Marlowe, Archer, Hammer, Shayne, Spenser), we are treated to detailed looks at Robert Leslie Bellem's Dan Turner, Raoul Whitfield's Jo Gar, John K. Butler's Steve Midnight, Norbert Davis's Max Latin, Cleve Adams's Rex McBride, Frederick Nebel's Donohue, and George Harmon Coxe's "Flashgun" Casey. Again, in contrast, the Baker/Nietzel team completely ignores Dan Turner and devotes but a single sentence each to Butler's Steve Midnight and Davis's Max Latin. And Fred Nebel's pivotal eye, Tough Dick Donohue (created directly in the shadow of Sam Spade at editor Joe Shaw's request for *Black Mask*) is not even named, let alone discussed.

Quibbles and nit-picking aside, the sheer scope of the Baker/Nietzel volume is quite staggering. The book begins with chapters devoted to the field's Big Five: Hammett, Chandler, Ross Macdonald, John D. MacDonald, and Spillane. The chapter which follows (covering the 1930–70 period) details the work of what the authors feel are the seventeen top talents beyond the Big Five, with discussion of their primary detective heroes. (Among them, to my genuine amazement and delight, I encountered my own two-book L.A. eye, Bart Challis!) Authors featured in this section: Fredric Brown, Erle Stanley Gardner, Rex Stout, Wade Miller, William Campbell Gault, Richard Prather, and Brett Halliday.

Next, the authors trace the work of sixteen other writers of this same early period, including Anthony Boucher, George Harmon Coxe, Cleve Adams, W. T. Ballard, Evan Hunter, and Frank Gruber.

Then the eighteen best (in the authors' opinion) of the new breed of eye writers are examined: Donald Westlake, Michael Collins, Joe Gores, Robert Parker, Bill Pronzini, Loren Estleman, Stephen Greenleaf, etc.

This group is followed by twenty other new talents, including Max Collins, Andrew Bergman, James Ellroy, Robert Randisi, Mark Schorr, *et al.* And following this, Baker and Nietzel offer a well-deserved look at the female of the species, the lady eyes of Sue Grafton, Marcia Muller, Sara Paretsky, and Maxine O'Callaghan, among others.

The book next examines the wacky, off-trail eyes of such talents as Thomas Berger, Richard Brautigan, Warren Murphy and Ross Spencer. And Chapter 10 deals with the Eyes of Tomorrow, the private ops of the future, highlighting the work of J. Michael Reaves, Mike McQuay, Ron Goulart, and (by golly!) William F. Nolan.

But Baker and Nietzel are far from done. In a lengthy 25-page Appendix, they provide us with fascinating details on another hundred-plus detectives, presented under a variety of self-explanatory headings: "Bad Eyes," "Best-Named Eyes," "Coast-to-Coast Eyes" (divided into eyes from Arizona, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Denver, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New Orleans, New York City, the Pacific Northwest, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, the South, Texas, and Washington, D.C.), "Defective Detectives," "Eyes of the Prophets," "Funny Eyes," "Jock Eyes," "Pairs of Eyes," "Other Pairs," "Real Eyes," "Reflective Detectives," "Scary Eyes," "The Longest Eye," "Transplanted Eyes," and "TV Eyes."

The Baker/Nietzel style is crisp and always informative, whetting our appetite for little-known P.I. novels with tantalizing mini-plot rundowns, and their opinions are

How can any true genre buff ignore this challenge? I know *I* can't. So let me mention a few eyes who seem to have eluded the industrious Baker/Nietzel team.

In *A Touch of Danger* (1973), James Jones (of *From Here to Eternity* fame) created a hardboiled European detective known as "Lobo." The novel's main action is set in Greece. It was Jones's only mystery novel. Other one-book-only private eyes include Max Raven of Chicago, who appeared in *Cain's Woman* (1960) by O. G. Benson, and Ed Clive of L.A. in *No Good from a Corpse* (1944) by Leigh Brackett (this book was so hardboiled that the execs at Warner Bros. were sure it had been written by a man, and, since they needed a tough writer to bring *The Big Sleep* to the screen they hired Brackett sight unseen—and were shocked when a woman walked into the studio). The late *Los Angeles Times* book critic Robert Kirsch, with *Pandora's Box,* gave us California's Johnny Lamb for a one-book appearance in 1962 under the pen name of "Robert Dundee." And the ex-editor of the *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine,* Charles E. Fritch, provided us with P.I. Mark Wonder in 1959's *Negative of a Nude.* William P. McGivern, writing as "Bill Peters," did a one-book stint with private detective Bill Canalli of Chicago for *Blondes Die Young* (1952).

In the wacky, off-trail eye genre, mention must be made of Keith Abbott's underground novel, *Rhino Ritz* (1979), starring none other than Ernest ("Rhino") Hemingway and F. Scott ("Ritz") Fitzgerald, who open the Rhino Ritz Detective Agency in San Francisco in a wonked-out case involving the future of American literature!

Of course, there are many private detectives who never achieved book publication, far too many to list—but two deserving consideration are D. L. Champion's Rex Sackler and Norbert Davis's Ben Shaley, both from the pages of *Black Mask.*

Robert Reeves gave us *Cellini Smith: Detective* in 1943, starring him in two other novels, and Harold Q. Masur propelled Scott Jordan through ten books, beginning in 1947 with *Bury Me Deep.* And, among forgotten rock-tough P.I.s, one of my personal favorites is Jake Barrow, from the pen of Marvin Albert (writing as "Nick Quarry"), who hard-knuckled his way through six Gold Medal originals: *The Hoods Came Calling* (1958), *Trail of a Tramp* (1958), *The Girl with No Place To Hide* (1959), *No Chance in Hell* (1960), *Till It Hurts* (1960), and *Some Die Hard* (1961).

While Baker and Nietzel naturally limit their coverage to genuine private eyes, they occasionally discuss other characters whose actions and adventures correspond to that of "official" P.I.s (such as crime photographer "Flashgun" Casey). In line with this, mention should be made of Gerry Kells, the ice-hard protagonist of Paul Cain's only novel, *Fast One* (1933), a true genre masterwork. On the distaff side of the ledger, Shannon OCork's sports photographer T. T. Baldwin is featured in three fast-paced crime capers, culminating in *Hell Bent for Heaven* (1983). And we can't leave out the hardboiled works of Elmore Leonard (though he has yet to create a series detective), since "Dutch" Leonard is a major name in our genre.*

*Of course, not *all* crime writers create private eyes. In my recent bok on Frederick Faust, *Max Brand: Western Giant* (Bowling Green University Popular Press), I list over a hundred crime tales by Faust. They feature secret agents, police detectives, and gentleman adventurers, but there's not a private eye in the lot.

Well, I must stop, or this will turn into another book. If you want more P.I.s, many of whom are not listed in the Baker/Nietzel volume, I refer you to Allen J. Hubin's exhaustive "Patterns in Mystery Fiction: The Durable Series Character" from *The Mystery Story* (1976).

There are several annoying errors in the Baker/Nietzel book that should be corrected in future editions: they fail to indicate that novelist Bill Miller is no longer alive; they incorrectly list *Thin Air* by Howard Browne as a Paul Pine novel; they mention that Race Williams appeared in six published novels when he actually appeared in eight; they list Prather's *Pattern for Murder* and *The Scrambled Yeggs* as two novels under the pen name "David Knight," when in fact they are the same book (the first title was as by Knight in 1952; Gold Medal then reprinted the book under the second title, as by Prather, in 1958).

Also, I was annoyed by the reference to Daly's Terry Mack only as "3-gun Mack." Our first 100% genuine tough-guy private detective deserves full discussion (I devoted a whole chapter to him in my *Black Mask Boys*), yet he gets totally bypassed by the Baker/Nietzel team. Mack appeared in two *Black Mask* tales by Daly and in a 1928 novel, *The Man in the Shadows.* First is first, gentlemen.

Gripes on my part should certainly not deter private eye buffs from immediately adding the Baker/Nietzel book to their "must buy" list. There's nothing around to match it for a comprehensive examination of the genre—and the authors' expansive research stuns and delights. They took upon themselves a truly mind-boggling task and performed with verve and color.

There is much less to get excited about in David Geherin's book, but as a supplement and extension of the Baker/Nietzel volume it has genuine value. If you love the hard-knuckled school of detective fiction as much as I do, then you'll want to buy *both* books. And you won't be sorry.

One wonders what Bogie would make of all this.

—William F. Nolan

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Art in Crime Writing edited by Bernard Benstock. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. $9.95 (paper)

These eleven essays on some of the top mystery writers are a varied lot. They range from overly-academic through pleasantly readable to intelligent but clear analysis. The authors discussed are, for the most part, acknowledged masters but as such have already been the subjects of numerous essays. The most refreshing pieces are on P. D. James and Peter Lovesey, partly because they have not already been analyzed to death.

The Sayers and Christie articles were somewhat vague and lacking in theme or cohesion. The essayists have just attacked their subjects from any and every angle with no new concept or viewpoint. Also less than coherent is the essay on Ross Macdonald. It starts out with one-and-a-half pages about Mark Twain's attempts to write a detective story, in a valiant but vain effort to give an original viewpoint.

On the bright side are the articles on Marsh, Hammett, James, and Sjowall/Wahlöo. The Marsh selection gives a very good sense and feeling of Alleyn, who can often be stoically enigmatic. The essay on Hammett is logical and heavily loaded with quotes to back up statements and opinions. More political (appropriately) is the analysis of the Martin Beck novels.

On the whole, there might not be too much that is startlingly new or insightful in *Art in Crime Writing*. It is, however, a handy book with fair representations of some of the basics of mystery fiction.

—Fred Dueren

RETRO

The Little Men of Death by MacKinlay Kantor. *Detective Fiction Weekly*, June10–July 7, 1933. 87 pp.

With their deadly feathered darts—the kind thrown by hand, not shot by blow-guns—the cannibal Cashivis left their Peruvian jungles to come to New Jersey on a harsh mission of vengeance. Directed by one Señor Roa, sadist and homicide extraordinaire, they perpetrated three ghastly murders in the first two days of their penetration of the quiet countryside. Fortunate it was that Ed Garris, seasoned explorer, quickly swung into counter-action, taking matters in hand and ending the menace of the sinister little men.

Fortunate it was also that the redoubtable MacKinlay Kantor, printer's ink coursing through his 28-year-old veins, chose to record these sanguinary happenings for the readers of *Detective Fiction Weekly* in 1933. This was Kantor's solo performance as a novelist of pulpish crime, and he pulled out all the stops in five thrilling installments. At this time, *Andersonville* and Pulitzer recognition were over two decades in the future, and Kantor was writing regularly in the pulps to support his wife, his daughter, and his more respectable literary endeavors. During the Depression, many writers tried the pulps for bread money, only to find that they were somehow wanting. With Kantor, however, pulp success came easily.

From the age of 17 to 22 he had worked constantly with his mother to issue the daily newspaper (of which she was editor) in Webster City, Iowa. Later, he wrote poetry and short fiction, and his first novel was published when he was 24. Unquestionably, Kantor was a writing professional when he started writing crime, mystery, and horror stories for the pulps in the early '30s. Besides the serial here considered, he turned out a score or more of short stories which today are still a working lode for the questing anthologist. By the time of his death in 1977, he was credited with over forty published works, including *The Voice of Bugle Ann, Long Remember, Signal Thirty-Two,* and the original story for the Oscar-winning movie *The Best Years of Our Lives*. It is not often that a writer so prodigiously gifted turns to our genre, even if only to fill the kitchen pot.

Not surprisingly, the prose in *The Little Men of Death* is a cut above that in other stories in the same magazines, being fluid, even slick. Minor characters such as postman, coroner, sheriff are fleshed out with a deft hand. Action sequences follow smoothly and consistently, one after another, and can be tautly suspenseful, as when the heroine, captured by Roa's men, unravels her bonds and bluffs her way to freedom. Kantor's unhackneyed touch in plotting puts vigor into pulp clichés such as jungle gangsterism and lost cities, and the bursting pyrotechnics of the conclusion are, within the novel's framework, quite logical.

Certain parallels exist between this novel and Rex Stout's recently reissued *Under the Andes*. Both are full of action, violent yet credible; both have characterization above cardboard cut-outs; both touch the wilder shores of pulp fiction (indeed, both are South American, one directly, the other indirectly); and both were written by men who had fixed literary objectives beyond pulp writing and neither succumbed to assured income from the pulps. Yet neither writer scorned the canons of pulp writing, each took this type of writing as seriously as any other kind. Neither wrote down to an assumed low-caste readership, and each thus enriched the magazines of their respective days.

Sadly, you must be a pulp collector to read *The Little Men of Death,* although the Stout volume is available to today's audience. Surely, a Kantor volume of criminous fiction would be in order—the novel and a sampling of those short stories not yet anthologized. Please, someone!

—A. H. Lybeck

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Justice Be Damned by A. R. Hilliard. Farrar and Rinehart, 1941.

This book was recommended by Howard Haycraft *en passant* in his introduction to James Sandoe's "Reader's Guide to Crime," which was included in Haycraft's 1948 volume *The Art of the Mystery Story*. H. H. needn't have bothered. *Justice Be Damned* is just not good enough to be included in any recommended grouping. That this amateurish effort won the publisher's prize for the best mystery of 1941 exemplifies the dismal state of the detective fiction art in the U.S. at the time.

The plot revolves about a young lawyer's attempt to prove the innocence of a suspect accused of murdering his wife and her supposed lover. The action takes place in and around the courthouse of a university city in Upstate New York. Bodies and guns are fished out of a nearby body of water at the same time as witnesses are committing perjury willy-nilly. Oh, there is a sinister menace lurking in the background, even though the real culprit is easily discernible early on. Definitely not recommended.

—T. J. Shamon

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Midnight and Percy Jones by Vincent Starrett. Covici, 1936.

This piece of '30s fluff is also recommended in Sandoe's "Reader's Guide to Crime." The recommendation probably expresses professional courtesy toward the eminent bookman and Sherlockian rather than real judgment. Two other Starretts—*murder in Peking* and *The Great Hotel Murder*—do not read especially well either.

The locale of this story is Starrett's own city, Chicago, where series detective Riley Blackwood is drama critic for a leading newspaper. Blackwood comes complete with a monied aunt and a manservant and draws his friends from the city's in-crowd, including its gangsters. In this novel, R. B. flits between nightclubs and luxury apartment buildings and eventually solves a multiple-murder case. The one notable feature of the tale is the imaginative method of disposing of one of the bodies. This one goodie is insufficient, however, to overcome this reader's not-recommended rating.

—T. J. Shamon

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Murder Is Absurd by Pat McGerr. Gollancz, 1967.

Murder Is Absurd is a well-constructed and well-written crime novel; but then, virtually everything by Pat McGerr is finely crafted. Still, this reader cannot recommend it because it is only a crime story, and that is not our meat. In general, this reader feels that, without a detection element, one might just as well subscribe to the Book-of-the-Month Club and be assured of a continuous supply of meritorious straight novels.

In this book, we are spared a first-person narrative and we are not asked to plumb the depths of the criminous mind. Instead, we are entertainingly told about a seventeen-year-old murder the perpetrator of which is known to the protagonists. It takes a contemporary attempt at another murder to bring the culprit to a justifiable end. Along the way, there are rather nice peeks behind the scenes of summer-stock theatre. Recommended to anyone who applauds the selection of Leonard's *La Brava* as a recent Edgar winner.

—T. J. Shamon

COZY

The Latimer Mercy by Robert Richardson. New York: St. Martin's, 1985. 11.95

The Latimer Mercy brings together elements from a number of mystery genres that guarantee to recommend it to a wide audience. Robert Richardson combines actors, clergy, an intelligent amateur detective, and a sympathetic policeman in the story of the strange and frightening events that disrupt the Vercaster Arts Festival. The crime with which the book begins is the theft of a priceless Bible (the "Latimer Mercy" of the title) from Vercaster Cathedral. Detective Sergeant Jackson is dispatched to learn what he can of the theft from Canon Cowan and the Canon's brother-in-law, playwright Augustus Maltravers. Attention is temporarily diverted from the theft by the opening of the Festival, for which Maltravers has written a one-woman show. Despite its feminist criticisms of conventional theology, the play is performed to general acclaim by Maltravers's friend, Diana Porter (an actress well known both for a nude stage appearance in *Hedda Gabler* and for a television reading of extracts from Juliana of Norwich). But crime once again becomes the central focus of attention in Vercaster on the following day, when Diana disappears from a "Trollopian gathering" in the Dean's garden. And the situation becomes still more urgent when, in a bizarre development, a severed human hand is found nailed to the Canon's front door.

The business of the severed hand is, admittedly, grisly, and it sets up trains of association that are as unpleasant for the novel's readers as for its characters. But Richardson puts this device to a valid use, demonstrating with intelligence and sympathy how such macabre events might affect those involved. In detective stories, Detective Sergeant Jackson notes, hardly anybody cries. "In real life," he goes on, "it's not just solving murders, it's people breaking up." While *The Latimer Mercy* may not be closer to real life than to fiction, it is closer to real life in its description of the stress that the characters experience than are most mystery novels cast in such a classic form. Responses range from Melissa Cowan's effort at "being British" to Maltravers's frustrated anger.

This type of credibility is the book's greatest strength, and Richardson is able to give even supporting characters vivid presence. Detective Chief Superintendent Madden, who is "so totally a professional policeman that his very plain clothes seemed as much a uniform as the one he had ceased to wear," is nevertheless more than a type. Both Jeremy Knowles, the hatchet-faced solicitor who plays the part of the Devil to perfection in the Vercaster mystery plays, and clergyman Matthew Webster, whose faith is "somewhat over-fervent," convincingly suggest possible sources of the unrest in the community. Unfortunately, Richardson's skill at characterization does not seem to extend to his female characters. The figure of Tess Davy, Maltravers's girlfriend, is probably the biggest disappointment—she only comes to life in two or three scenes, and it is impossible to discover what Maltravers sees in her. With Diana Porter, however, Richardson has greater success, conveying clearly the star quality which defines her character in the minds of her public and her friends, and which provides sufficient justification for the anxiety everyone feels on her behalf.

But *The Latimer Mercy's* greatest attractions are its two detectives. Maltravers is witty without being irritating (a great virtue in an amateur detective); Detective Sergeant Jackson is sympathetic and concerned while remaining believably professional. Is a repeat performance from both of them in Robert Richardson's next novel too much to hope for?

—Margaret Masters

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The Plain Old Man by Charlotte MacLeod. New York: Doubleday Crime Club, 1985. $12.95

You might as well kick off your shoes right now for this counting exercise. Charlotte has lumbered us with at least fifteen main characters in the first fifty pages, including many lovable, related eccentrics. We are further asked to keep track of a number of dear departeds, art students, an orchestra, and a choir. While we are sorting out this mixed bag, we learn everything we could wish to know and more of an impending annual operetta to be produced, directed, and participated in by one Emma Kelling, who just happens to have her sleuth of a niece Sarah Kelling Bittersohn in residence. Good thing she is, as the plot thickens immediately, what with a gargantuan family portrait going missing and a gouty member of the cast dying off. An elderly, lovable uncle directs Sarah's attention to a chamber pot as proof that the old gent died unnaturally, which clue pretty much explains the tenor of the entire book. The next disaster is another cast member's tumble down some rigged stairs under a trap door. While all these hilarious events are happening, we are asked to hop back in time for some tales of unrequited love, a rake's progress, and a youthful love affair or two. If the reader's head has stopped whirling and his eyes are no longer rolling, he can delight in Sarah's incarceration in a potting shed and a car chase when she foils the villains and puts a crease in her Mercedes or Marmon or something. Perhaps we should just put our shoes on again and forget the whole thing.

—Miriam L. Clark

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A Deadly Sickness by John Penn. New York: Scribner's, 1985.

A Deadly Sickness rings numerous changes on a classic British detection puzzle: the aged, rich peer who refuses to die, the grasping relatives eager for the kill due to the financial benefits it promises for their high-flying lifestyle, the faithful retainer, the sleazy friends of the avaricious relatives, and, of course, the charming but bewildered young woman caught up in the multiple deaths.

Sir Oliver Poston finally succumbs to his lingering illness—or so it seems—and the trusted, long-time servant promptly plunges to his death down the wine cellar stairs. All is once again peaceful in the Cotswolds, except that young Celia Frint, half-sister of Sir Oliver's heir's wife, is disturbed by the sudden amorous attentions of her brother-in-law and by the antics of the curious ménage that assembles each day for drinks, swimming, and dinner at the Poston's: brother-in-law Alan Poston, convalescing from a drunken fall, greedy half-sister Diana, who carries on a flagrant affair with lounge lizard Tony Dinsley, and Frank Leder, whose wife never attends the Postons' wild parties. Celia becomes increasingly alienated from her relatives and loses, in addition to Sir Oliver and his servant, what little comfort she has when Alan's dog, Nelson, is taken away because he has inexplicably attacked Tony.

Penn creates an atmosphere of suspense and unease as the narrative unfolds through Celia's eyes and under the scrutiny of Detective Superintendent George Thorne and his assistant, Sergeant Bill Abbot, when they are called in concerning Leder's death, a "suicide" that turns out to be murder. The novel's multiple plot twists prove to be entirely satisfactory, particularly because Penn's adherence to the "fair play" rule (whereby all clues are made available to the reader) is scrupulous and the reader *still* can't predict the outcome. Penn sets up so many well-considered options (some revolving around business dealings, some around passion, and some around compost heaps) that the dénouement comes unexpectedly but is nevertheless thoroughly grounded in the information which the reader has already received. *A Deadly Sickness* is formula fiction, to be sure, but what a nice twist Penn gives it when he presents the mystery fan, who is already set up to anticipate the untoward, with a startling and clever conclusion.

—Susan L. Clark

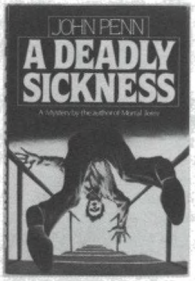
An Advancement of Learning by Reginald Hill. Woodstock, Vt.: The Countryman Press, 1985. $14.95

Opposites may attract in matrimonial circles, but detective teams are a different story. Certainly Reginald Hill's ill-matched pair, Dalziel and Pascoe, are a textbook example of age, educational and personality differences. Readers who are familiar with their exploits will welcome this opportunity to meet them in the early days of their association, on their second case together. Originally published in England in 1971, *An Advancement of Learning* is now available in the United States, and the title can just as easily refer to their personal struggles as it does to the purpose of the scene of the crime, a small college called Holm Coultram. Superintendent Andrew Dalziel is an older man from the ranks, blunt to the point of rudeness, often devious, embittered by divorce, who has little praise for and many misgivings about the newer, university-educated breed of police such as his partner, Sergeant Peter Pascoe. Peter, on the other hand, finds himself constantly irritated by Dalziel's plodding methods, as well as his annoying lack of communication, his almost secrecy of action.

Their efforts to work as a team don't get any easier when they are sent to Holm Coultram, where the startling discovery of a corpse and a red wig, unearthed during the moving of a statue, has the entire campus in a state of shock. Dalziel soon finds himself out of his depth and at odds with most of the faculty, who regard him as some annoying, insensitive intrusion in their lives, and Pascoe is forced into an interpretive, diplomatic position. The faculty itself, which has been existing for five years under an uneasy truce since the school became co-educational and hired male professors, is now splitting into separate camps over the appeal of a withdrawal order by a student, Anita Sewell, and the two detectives arrive in the middle of the storm.

The first problem, the identity of the remains, is quickly solved by forensic science, and the corpse and red wig both are proved to be those of Alice Girling, former principal of the college, under whose memorial statue the grisly discovery was made. The statue was in the process of being moved to a new spot to allow for expansion of the campus, with a new building planned for the site. Unfortunately for Dalziel and Pascoe, the trail is more than cold, as Miss Girling supposedly died five years earlier in an avalanche while on holiday in Austria. The sculptress Marion Cargo, now a faculty member, had completed the statue while still a student but can give no explanation for the problem existing under it.

The rest of the faculty has already chosen sides regarding the campus expansion, with the older members from Miss Girling's tenure deploring it while the new principal, Simeon Landers, and most of the male instructors strongly support it. Similar lines have also been drawn regarding Anita Sewell's appeal, although the girl's defense of low academic scores reveals her claim to have been the mistress of the biology professor, Dr. Sam Fallowfield, for two years and she insists that her failing marks in his course were caused by his wanting her out of his professional as well as his personal life. Sewell's defenders are led by a formidable lady named Edith Disney, nicknamed Walt, of course, out of her hearing. She too is one of Miss Girling's old team and is quick to remind everyone of her devotion to the former head. Dalziel finds all of these squabbles incredibly petty and also gives short shrift to the two leaders of the troublesome student council, Franny Roote and his insolent lieutenant Cockshut. Pascoe, on the other hand, finds nothing unusual in all this maneuvering and, even better, discovers that an old girlfriend, Eleanor Soper, is on the faculty and is willing to resume their former friendliness and to help sort out some of the academic tangles.



While the two men continue interviews, another piece of the puzzle surfaces. An elderly bird watcher, Harold Lapping, is startled to discover some sort of student orgy, instead of birds, at the lakeshore. Whatever the ritual, the students flee when another figure appears. The interrupted rite takes on special significance when Sewell's nude body is found nearby the following day by two golfing faculty members. Too late, Pascoe races to Dr. Fallowfield's shore cottage to discover an apparent suicide.

Faced now with two murders, a suicide, and some bizarre student behavior, the detectives begin backtracking through the victims' former lives, with Pascoe being sent to interview the dean of the college where Fallowfield taught before coming to Holm Coultram. While Pascoe is prying important information from the reluctant dean, Dalziel is busy sorting out the students' involvement in the last death and suicide. After both men pool their results, they hand us an unlikely pair of murderers and, in the process, discover a grudging respect for each other's strengths. Even more surprising to them, an affection has developed and Pascoe is amazed to find a sense of humor under all that uncouth behavior of Dalziel's. Hill's mismatched pair go on to many more investigations, but *An Advancement of Learning* gives us the chance to meet them early on, before their working and personal relationships have solidly formed. Hill takes his audience to many different locales successfully, and the Dalziel/Pascoe wrangles and tactics make all the trips worthwhile.

—Miriam L. Clark

The Deer Leap by Martha Grimes. New York: Little, Brown, 1985. $15.95

The Richard Jury/Melrose Plant mysteries, of which this, *The Deer Leap*, is the seventh, are consciously pointed toward a literate—and certainly a literary—audience, an educated readership familiar not only with Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, and Wilkie Collins, from which Grimes freely draws and adapts characterizations and settings, but also with the obvious legacy that this American/Anglophile author owes to her forebears in British–American detective fiction. Early on compared *ad nauseam* to Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, Margery Allingham, and other Golden Age experts, Grimes clearly harks back to that tradition but nevertheless seems to be developing, to my mind, more consistently along the lines of American models, among them Raymond Chandler and Robert B. Parker, so that the disparity in social class and attitude between the detective and his subjects is increasing. Moreover, her puzzles are becoming more graphic and violent and less tidy-English-houseparty-ish, just as her explorations into the psyche become more and more haunted and, for the reader, haunting.

The Deer Leap, like the earlier Jury/Plant investigations, centers on an English pub—and Grimes's pubs have significantly been getting more and more working-class since *The Man With a Load of Mischief*—in the small village of Ashdown Dean, where mystery writer Polly Praed both loses her cat and discovers a dead body in an isolated telephone booth. Praed, whose melodramatic mannerisms Grimes satirizes constantly, is allowed her "one call" from the police station, and it is to fetch Plant and, ultimately, Jury, about whom she is still gaga, while Plant is obviously in a way of being more than a little smitten with her—or at least her amethyst eyes. The body in the call box, that of one Una Quick, the local postmistress who had a gimpy heart, soon ties into the subsequent demise of the innkeeper's wife at "The Deer Leap" and rapidly into the seemingly unrelated deaths of three neighborhood housepets, all beloved and one of whom was Una's.

The central premise Grimes utilizes in *The Deer Leap* is that the casual attitude toward and even the murder of animals speaks in a very telling way to the at times callous and often destructive treatment of children and subsequently of adults. Accordingly, her list of suspects and victims includes a veterinarian who moonlights at a lab where cosmetics are brutally tested on rabbits' eyes, a withdrawn teenager who has set up an animal sanctuary, a rabid huntsman-cum-innkeeper (Sebastian Grimsdale, whose inn is appropriately named "The Gun Lodge") who plays against the rules by planting foxes for the hunt to find, the mother of a retarded child who refuses to face the fact that her boy loves to torture cats, and a governess who adopts human strays.

Carrie Fleet, the official charge of the governess and the waif-like ward of the self-styled baroness who is the matriarch of

the village, is the central character of *The Deer Leap*, with Jury and Plant moving around on the periphery, and hers is a story that plays on the heart-strings, despite her abstraction and conscious self-distancing from the detectives and the reader. She was found, wounded and amnesia-struck, in the woods, by a down-and-out London couple who do not scruple first to sell her to the baroness and then to seek to extort more money from this woman, who "bought" Carrie just because she handled dogs well outside a posh London store ("You make her sound like a purebred dog with dubious credentials," Jury protests to the baroness). Carrie's purchaser is one Regina "Gigi" Scroop of Liverpool, who herself happened to be takin in and given her credentials by the rich Baron Reginald de la Notre because something about her, perhaps the similarity in the names Regina and Reginald, appealed to him, and she treats Carrie with benign neglect. If she shows up for her meals on time, that's fine with the baroness, and, if she doesn't, there is always an excuse that smacks of animals giving in to urges and losing track of time, which is, after all, a human measure. Carrie is just like the stray animals she constantly befriends—and defends—and Grimes puts together, as always, a powerful image-complex behind her mystery plot. Here, in *The Deer Leap*, the human forces that hunt, abuse, or display—as if they were trophies—animals and children are coupled with the forces of nature ("It's raining cats and dogs"), and the result is a powerful novel that happens, incidentally, to include some good police procedural effects.

In the final analysis, Grimes writes in her seventh Jury/Plant novel an indictment, and indeed a judgment, of those who take relationships with living things lightly, and, as a counterpoint to this, she portrays Jury and Plant once again coming up short in their personal relationships, failing again to connect significantly and lastingly with their fellow human beings unless a crime is involved. Jury allows himself to be titillated by the new upstairs lodger in his London house—and she is described as if she were "best of the breed" and eminently breedable at that. Furthermore, he permits himself, by dint of sexual attraction, to be drawn like prey into a maze not of his own making by a very attractive Ariadne who seeks to kill him. In addition, Plant allows children, even though he doesn't like them, to pique his curiosity and receive an occasional affectionate gesture, but he still fences with Vivian Rivington and can't seem to get on Polly Praed's wavelength. Finally, there are fortune-hunters as well out among *The Deer Leap's* crime-stalkers, adventure seekers, and "lookers-for-love-in-all-the-wrong-places."

Let it not be said that Grimes is not fun to analyze. On the one hand, her narrative intent is quite accessible to the reader and critic, because she structures her themes and plots consciously and intelligibly, but, on the other hand, she raises issues that by their very nature are unfathomable. To my mind, she is one of the most fascinating mystery writers today, precisely because she sensitively juxtaposes what adults conceal and what they reveal, and how the less self-conscious worlds of children, animals, landscape, architecture, and weather both give and take away clues.

—Susan L. Clark

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The Dirty Duck by Martha Grimes. New York: Dell, 1984. $3.50

Although Grimes is often compared favorably with classic British authors, her breezy, humorous style is distinctly her own. If anything, her writing style has faint Emma Lathen overtones, while the enterprising children who appear in her books are indeed Dickensian, but definitely American translations. As her readers have come to expect, her book titles are names of English inns and the action is normally set in England. *The Dirty Duck* varies slightly in that some elements of the plot involve the United States.

The inn, "The Dirty Duck" or "The Black Swan," depending upon your direction of approach, is situated in Stratford-On-Avon, where Grimes's familiar characters Inspector Jury and his aristocratic friend, Melrose Plant, arrange to meet with the proposed intention of attending some of the plays being given for the Shakespearean festival. Each, however, has a second reason for the journey: Jury hopes to renew acquaintance with Jenny Kennington, and Plant's reason is partly self-defensive. His grasping Aunt Agatha has hoped to lodge some visiting American cousins at his estate, but, thwarted, she too is in Stratford for the reunion. The numerous cousins are part of Honeysuckle Tours, a joint British-American enterprise, affordable only by the very wealthy.

The tour group becomes well known to Jury as he is asked to assist in locating a missing young boy, James Farraday, whose American family is part of the tour. Farraday Senior adopted James and his sister Penny after their mother's death and then later married a fading Georgia peach named Amelia Blue, who came equipped with daughter Honey Belle, of lush proportions. Other members of the tour group include such disparate people as the Florida spinster Gwendolyn Bracegirdle; an obsessed computer toter named Harvey Schoenberg; a diamond dealer, blasé George Cholmondeley; and Lady Violet Dew and her niece, the self-martyred Cyclamen.

While Inspector Jury unofficially helps his friend Detective Sergeant Lasko in the search for the missing boy, Plant often finds himself an unwilling listener as Harvey Schoenberg enthusiastically expounds his theory that Shakespeare engineered Christopher Marlowe's death, all the while resorting to his trusty computer for stored historical facts and sonnets. Both Jury and Plant, however, are soon involved in much more serious matters as the mutilated body of pathetic Gwendolyn Bracegirdle is found, the only clue being two lines of poetry written on her theatre program. In dreadful succession, Amelia and Honey Belle are the murderer's next victims, both subject to similar mutilation. As with the first victim, two additional lines of the poem are left with each woman. A fourth murder, complete with poetry, upsets previous theories and points the way to the solution.

The search for the murderer and missing boy lead Jury and Plant into unexpected areas of Stratford and London and into the victims' personal lives. Grimes's books are always extremely well plotted, and *The Dirty Duck* ranks among her best. For most readers, however, the biggest attraction lies in her delightful characterizations, which Grimes does as well as or better than other suspense authors. Don't miss this excellent tale.

—Miriam L. Clark

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Death of a Mystery Writer by Robert Barnard. New York: Dell, 1985.

The first puzzle facing the reader of this novel is the miraculous survival of the victim until his 65th birthday celebration. Sir Oliver Fairleigh-Stubbs is the epitome of rudeness, outrageous behavior, and arrogance, scattering wounded throughout his life. As a highly successful thriller writer, Sir Oliver has achieved more than just a comfortable living and status of squire of Wycherly, a small English village. He has, in fact, become a living legend of malice in Britain and appears on the BBC, panels, and any other public occasion on which he can vent his spleen.

In private life, as in public, his manipulations have almost estranged his two sons and daughter. Mark, the eldest, has become a tippling drifter, piling up debts which his father has ceased to pay. The middle child,

Bella, has learned her lessons well and uses people almost as cold-bloodedly as her father, who finds her his most tolerable offspring. The youngest child, Terence, is a member of a pop music group, earning his father's constant wrath and belittlement. The long-suffering Lady Fairleigh-Stubbs is determinedly optimistic, despite her inability to curb Sir Oliver, and persists in defending the two unacceptable sons. The household also includes the secretary, Barbara Cozzens, who functions with an automatic efficiency while deploring the potboilers she must type. The other two residents of the household are Surtees, a tattling butler-houseman, and a cook.

Despite some misgivings, Lady Fairleigh-Stubbs plans the annual birthday celebration for Sir Oliver, summoning the troublesome brood. She also invites a local couple, the Woodstocks, in an effort to atone for Sir Oliver's rudeness as a dinner guest of theirs. Ben Woodstock is an aspiring writer, and the squire alternately tempts him with publishing contracts and insults his wife's intelligence and cooking. With great humor, Barnard excels at relationships of this sort, to the reader's benefit.

The big day finally arrives, as do the three children, son Mark obviously the worse for alcohol, a fact which Sir Oliver graciously overlooks. In fact, the honoree behaves so charmingly that alarm bells are ringing for everyone, expecting a later nasty explosion. By the time the after-dinner drinks are served and presents opened, Mark has ingloriously passed out and sleeps through the festivities. The party ends abruptly when Sir Oliver sips his favorite Finnish drink *lakka* with fatal results. Until an Inspector arrives at the door the following day, the family attribute the death to his uncertain health.

Chief Inspector Meredith, assigned to the case, is a Welshman of deceptive manner who informs the shocked family that Sir Oliver's *lakka* contained poison. The second shock occurs when the solicitor arrives and reads the will, which leaves Lady Fairleigh-Stubbs, Bella, and Terence each the royalties of one particular book, with the bulk of the estate and all other royalties to Mark. As Inspector Meredith soon learns, the book royalties left to Sir Oliver's wife are from an unpublished manuscript, which has not only disappeared but is apparently unknown to his publishers and to Miss Cozzens.

The search for the manuscript and the murderer, the wrangling of the siblings, and Mark's sudden elevation to a title and wealthy estate are fascinating reading. Barnard does full justice to a tale of a plethora of suspects and an unloved victim.

—Miriam L. Clark

* * * * *

The Bay Psalm Book Murder by Will Harris. New York: Walker, 1983.

The Bay Psalm Book Murder appeals to the book lover in all mystery readers. Besides revolving around a newly discovered copy of the first book printed in America, it contains literary references to fictional detectives of the past and a good deal of poetry. A liberal sprinkling of professors, librarians, and their respective institutions rounds out the intellectual side of the novel.

It's not all intellectual, though. The noble ideals of scholarship are balanced by the sleazier side of life—a compromising politician, a questionable attorney, and a retired madam, all interwoven with the sinister thread of the Mafia.

The main character in *The Bay Psalm Book Murder* is Dr. Clifford Dunbar, an English professor whose life has recently undergone an upheaval. His wife has died of cancer, and his best friend, librarian and custodian of *The Bay Psalm Book,* has been murdered. Disillusioned with life in general and academe in particular, the professor has resigned his position at the university and needs something constructive to do. He starts seeking the murderer of his friend in a desultory way but finds some contradictions which compel him to dig more deeply. Eventually, he discovers who murdered his friend and how *The Bay Psalm Book* was involved, largely as a result of good bibliographical research combined with haphazard investigative methods.

The Bay Psalm Book Murder is a first novel and has some rough places. The roughest is the dialogue; perhaps it has been over- or under-worked. Either way, just when the reader gets heavily involved, someone speaks in such a stilted, jarring way that the moment is ruined. When Mona appears, scared and lonely, in Cliff's bedroom, she says, "Well, I'm crazy in love with you, so why don't we go to bed together for God's sake, like any normal couple in this decadent age?" It's wordy and stiff, and the phrasing is all wrong. Just when we might expect to be touched and moved, we get a rude jolt.

Still, this is a book that I finished, and I don't finish them all. It contains a lot of bibliographical background, some good descriptive detail, and the plot succeeds.

—Cheryl Sebelius Nelson

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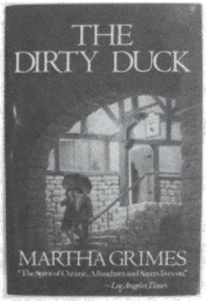
The Plain Old Man by Charlotte MacLeod. New York: Doubleday Crime Club, 1985. $12.95

No one ever believes in a MacLeod plot, or even thinks it has anything at all to do with reality. But the books are enjoyable, mildly humorous escapades—this one into a crazy world of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and other minor pleasantries of life. A Kelling "family" production of *The Sorcerer* is the backdrop in question, giving Sarah Bittersohn a chance to visit home while husband Max is out of the country recovering a Picasso.

In the midst of Emma Kelling's production of *The Sorcerer,* two criminal events occur. The murder of Charlie Devanter (who has one of the leads in the show) and the theft (kidnapping, actually) of a family heirloom portrait. Sarah has to decide if the two crimes are related, as well as solve each of them individually. But the problems and persecutions of producing the show and keeping the would-be *prima donnas* happy provides a lot of distraction.



MacLeod's books are usually fondly gobbled up or nonchalantly waved aside. In spite of relatively thin characters and meandering, distracted plots, they have an attraction and pull that many enjoy. If you have any taste for traditionalism and the mystery form, as opposed to private eyes and pure detection, this and other Kelling books should be just what you're looking for.

—Fred Dueren

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Away With Them To Prison by Sara Woods. New York: St. Martin's, 1985.

Prosecution of corrupt public servants, the police force in particular, is the timely theme of Sara Woods's latest mystery, featuring the two English barristers Sir Nicholas and Anthony Maitland.

The first indication which either Maitland has of the possible wrong-doing is a casual

approach to Anthony during a social lunch with his old friend Detective Superintendent Sykes. The officer reminds him of a previous case involving a protection racket which existed two years earlier in London, one which Anthony was instrumental in solving with the arrests and convictions of the leaders. Now two police officers are being charged with extortion, having allegedly offered protection for a price. Both Anthony and Sykes, who know the two men well, find the accusation totally unbelievable. Shortly after this meeting, both Maitlands become officially involved when Sir Nicholas is asked to take the brief for the accuseds' defense. Despite his reservations regarding his nephew Anthony's sometimes unorthodox methods, he asks for his assistance.

The police case begins with the beating death of a man named Goodbody, proprietor of a small shop selling papers, tobacco, and candy. Robbery is ruled out, and subsequent questioning of his wife reveals that he has been paying protection money for eighteen months through Shadwell Confectionery, the firm supplying his candy, and has refused to continue payment. The two investigating officers, Detective Inspector Mayhew and Detective Constable Harris, then discover another shopkeeper, a Mr. Peele, who not only made similar payments but actually witnessed the murder and recognized the two men responsible. He identifies them as Stokes and Barleycorn, Shadwell salesmen, and both men are duly charged with murder. It is also discovered at this time that a separate Shadwell account has been opened at a local bank and that customers serviced by the two accused salesmen pay their over-large invoices into this bank, rather than Shadwell's main account at another bank. Questioning of Mr. Shadwell reveals that he has no knowledge of the special account but, being a true authority delegator, leaves such matters in the hands of a Mr. Kingsley, who is conveniently on holiday. To further complicate matters, the foreman of Shadwell's shipping department is killed in a hit-and-run accident shortly after the murder, a coincidence the Maitlands find improbable.

It is at this point, at the Magistrate's hearing, that the incredible happens. Both Mrs. Goodbody and Mr. Peele repudiate their sworn statements, although admitting that their signatures are genuine. Mrs. Goodbody pleads shock over her husband's murder, and Mr. Peele claims duress, stating that the two officers threatened exposure of his fiddled accounts to the tax authorities. The Magistrate throws the case out of court, the prisoners are released, and then one of them makes a statement in court charging the officers with extortion, claiming that they offered no prosecution in exchange for £3,000. With this ammunition, the new Assistant Commissioner immediately charges Mayhew and Harris with extortion rather than a lesser perjury charge, and Sir Nicholas Maitland accepts the brief for their defense.

Readers already familiar with the two Maitland men know of their living arrangements. Sir Nicholas and wife Vera live in the two lower floors of the Maitland home, and Anthony and his wife Jenny occupy the two upper stories, with both households sharing the services of the cantankerous, elderly butler Gibbs. The supportive intermingling of the two families proves invaluable in this case, as in past ones. Shortly after the Maitlands receive the brief for the defense, Anthony is attacked by a knife-wielding petty criminal, which only strengthens their suspicion that there is indeed a gang operating a full-fledged protection racket in London, structured on corporate lines.

The subsequent pursuit and detection of the forces behind the two officers' prosecution follows an intricate weave of threads from the men's pasts and modern business practices, and, as is to be expected of Woods, ensures a good plot with no loose ends.

—Miriam L. Clark

PRIVATE EYE

Mac Slade—Private Dick: The Tinseltown Murders by John Blumenthal. New York: Fireside (Simon and Schuster), 1985. 175 pp. $2.95

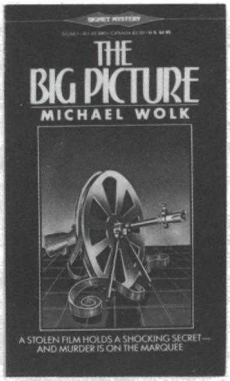
A few months ago, I almost bought this book simply because of the tag line on the cover—"He's hard as rock, tough as nails, dense as concrete." For some unknown reason, I recently found it on sale as a "bargain book." I figured it was a great stroke of luck. I soon found out that the tag line was just about the only truly funny thing about *The Tinseltown Murders*.

As far as I can tell, the Mac Slade series is a parody of the hardboiled school of detective fiction. The problem with this parody is that it isn't funny. The biggest stumbling block with private eye parodies is that it seems easy to pull off. Just take a rough-and-tumble detective, mix with a lot of tough talking, first-person narration and a lot of colorful characters and it can't help but to turn out funny, right? But, without some substance and originality, all one is left with is a bunch of empty clichés. Basically, that's all that *The Tinseltown Murders* is.

The story has Mac Slade in Hollywood, tracking down the murderer of fellow private eye Jack Mushnik. As the back cover states, "a lady private-eye, a runaway farm girl, a movie star, a hostile homicide detective named Lieutenant Lou Tennant, a Chinese houseboy, a Nazi cleaning lady, a Hollywood agent, a gay hairdresser, a celebrity psychic and a behemoth named Moose Lebowitz all do their utmost to impede Slade's sleuthing . . ." This makes it seem as though the book may be fun, or at least diverting, but, without the necessary freshness, it all falls flat. The story, as weak as it is, is just an excuse for Slade to meet up with these one-note, unoriginal characters.

The humor is of the pun and literal translation type of the movie *Airplane*. An example is one of the characters getting physically slapped with a subpoena. It just lies there. This book also believes that "private dick" is a unique and witty innuendo.

Since *The Tinseltown Murders* does have a mystery in it, as well as a pretty good twist ending, attention should be paid to the problem of poorly thought-out meanings of clues—reasoned by the detective, written by the author—which lead to the correct solution in the end. Here are two examples. At one point, it is necessary to know the owner of fingerprints on a cigarette lighter, shaped like a gun, which Slade has lifted from a character's apartment. Slade deduces that they cannot be *that* character's fingerprints because that character doesn't smoke. Though the fingerprints become of lesser importance later in the story, it is never presented that just because a character doesn't smoke doesn't mean that he would never touch an object that he owned.



Another example is another character's dying in a pool full of Jello (one of the book's truly funny ideas). Part of the puzzle revolves on how it was done. Slade figures that the victim triggered the Jello to harden when he turned on the pool's heater before he went swimming. That's fine and all, but wouldn't it take a long time for all that Jello to harden, enough time for someone to swim out? If the "fair play" rules are part of the parody, the reader should be made aware of it. In this case, it just looks like ineptitude on the part of the author.

In addition, the tone of the book seems to be confused. The parody is definitely of the '40s/'50s tough-guy thriller type. All the characters, places, and situations seem to be straight from that time period, yet the author goes to the trouble of telling the reader that it is the present. This seems to be an attempt to re-create some of the flavor of the recent *Mike Hammer* television series. The result is something awkwardly between the timeless tough-guy setting of Ross Spencer's Chance Purdue series and the man-out-of-his-time setting of Mark Shorr's Red Diamond series.

This may seem like quibbling, but I feel that the cover of a book should mirror what's inside. The cover of *The Tinseltown Murders* shows Mac Slade beside a pool of Jello. The Mac Slade of the story is a strapping,

muscular guy. The Mac Slade of the cover is a wimpy guy swimming in his own trenchcoat. In the book, the Jello in the pool is lime. On the cover, it is some sort of red flavor. There is a definite reason for the killer to use lime Jello—it won't show up in the dark (perhaps another poorly conceived solution by the detective/author). The reasoning is that red will stand out better on the cover, but is it so much to ask to have the same details on the cover as inside?

All in all, even if it were on sale, I should have left *The Tinseltown Murders* on the shelf.

—John D. Kovaleski

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Nervous Laughter by Earl E. Emerson. New York: Avon, 1986. $2.95

This is the third Thomas Black mystery. Previous titles were *The Rainy City* and *Poverty Bay*. Black is a private eye who was formerly a cop. He lives in Seattle, Washington. Black has a lady friend (a friend, not a lover), lawyer Kathy Birchfield. She frequently gets Black involved in his cases. She is also a mime and has a slight case of extrasensory perception.

Nervous Laughter starts with Black receiving mailed instructions to follow and report on the amorous activities of businessman Mark Daniels. Black is to report to a post office box. Black is hardly on the job when Daniels and a teenaged girl with him are killed. It appears to be a murder/suicide. Appearances are, of course, deceiving. Deanna, Daniels's wife, hires Black to prove that her husband did not shoot the girl and himself. If he did, his insurance won't pay off.

The inevitably tangled trail leads to a corrupt preacher with martial-arts skills, Vietnamese thugs, more murders (including a lady in the lake *à la* Raymond Chandler), an affair with the client, and a particularly gripping scene in a large meat locker where Black and Birchfield are trapped. They have to break out from the cold.

The solution to the murders comes as no great surprise, but the story moves and the writing is skilled. The series is gaining strength as it goes along. I await the next Thomas Black.

—David H. Everson

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The Big Picture by Michael Wolk. New York: Signet, 1985.

As a comedy, the hardboiled novel *The Big Picture* is a resounding success. Instead of the hero being a private detective, he is a literary agent with offices next door to a shady P.I. in Times Square. Max Popper, our hero, has recently been dumped by his lover and has many more debts than clients. For some time he has been reduced to writing porno at $750 a novel.

One day, Popper sees a suspicious character talking to Marsdale, the P.I. Soon after, a few underworld thugs mistake Popper for Marsdale and the chase is on. Several murders occur, Max takes up with a highly selective model/call girl, and the trail twists slowly to a highly popular movie. Little else need be said except that it is all very improbable.

The Big Picture is strong on plot and humor, weaker on characterization. Popper is a bit schizoid and not particularly likable. But by the end of the novel, we are on his side and rooting for him all the way. The book may not be all that memorable, but it is enjoyable.

—Fred Dueren

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A Catskill Eagle by Robert B. Parker. New York: Delacorte, 1985.

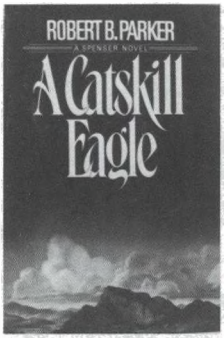
Robert B. Parker's title quote, cited in full on the novel's frontispiece, draws from Melville's *Moby Dick:* "And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls that can alike dive down into the blackest gorges, and soar out of them again and become invisible in the sunny spaces. And even if he forever flies within the gorge, that gorge is in the mountains; so that even in his lowest swoop the mountain eagle is still higher than the other birds upon the plain, even though they soar." The implication is that the character in this "Spenser Novel" to whom the quote refers is a person of extraordinary capacity, one who, even at his lowest ebb, experiences more—and is somehow worth more—than those below him. That is the central premise around which *A Catskill Eagle* is built, so that the reader is asked to empathize with, and even cheer for, a man (Spenser) who breaks his good buddy (Hawk) out of jail in order to engage upon a continent-wide search for a beloved woman (Susan Silverman), during the process of which several people are murdered/sacrificed in a calculated but apparently necessary fashion. One might add, too, that considerable expensive property is destroyed, the federal government is deliberately compromised, and an international angle (munitions manufacture) is introduced as a plot motivation. But it's all right in the end for the eagle, because Susan is rescued from the bad brainwasher, Russell Costigan, who wants her to live with him, and at the end of the book she's back, as always, in bed with the hero.

When it's put flippantly this way, the book sounds fast-paced and certainly exciting, but not up to the psychological standards set by the earlier Spenser books, which were always literate and uncommonly perceptive but which became increasingly violent and anguished as Spenser dived deeper into the gorge and distanced himself further from Susan. But in the reading of it, *A Catskill Eagle* proves to be gripping in plot and in the story's implications, precisely because of the number of myths Parker pulls in to chart Spenser's upward climb from the abyss in which he finally found himself in *Valediction*. Parker, who has academic training and university teaching experience, has obviously taught his share of literature courses and observed popular culture closely, and this background shows, from the references to *Uncle Remus* that pepper Spenser's perceptions of Hawk's speech, to those to Joseph Conrad ("'Ah, Kurtz,' I said"), to classical mythologies (the journey into the depths of the mountain, that tomb/womb that tests and regenerates the hero, and the references to the Oedipus myth), to contemporary advertisements ("'Where was O.J. when you needed him' "), and to detective fiction ("'My God,' Hawk said in a flawless English accent, 'Holmes, you're incredible' "). Spenser's story is not a new one, and the hell he harrows is in part one of his own making as he follows the footsteps of other "heroes of the Western world," whether they inhabit the realms of Greek literature or pop culture, but it is a hell other heroes in the past have traversed as well, in their own ways and in their own times.

In the process, under Parker's conscious manipulation, Spenser and Hawk become heroes in both primitive and contemporary senses, but with a twist. To be sure, they engage in combat with evil personified (the members of the Costigan family empire), they rescue a princess, albeit Jewish, and they come back to a society that cannot understand why they acted so lawlessly in the first place. Yet, over the course of Spenser's archetypal quest, with its precisely defined phases of departure, struggle, and return, he becomes a maker of and a participator in new myths, an Orpheus who looks on his Eurydice and who yet does not lose her, a thief who snatches Persephone back without making any bargains with Pluto, and an Arthur who chases Lancelot away from Guinevere. I'm not suggesting that this new Spenser novel is the *Rambo* equivalent in modern detective fiction (Pauline Kael's *New Yorker* review of same was priceless, as she indicated that viewing that movie was "as comfortable as having a tank on your lap"), but I would suggest that Parker rings some new changes on an old theme as he adapts the conventions of epic and romance to a mystery audience, in the process producing a hero precisely molded for the dragons modern American culture creates, from the mindless munitions makers to the equally brainwashed government agents who throw their lot in with Spenser and Hawk as heroes: heroes who kill pimps to save San Francisco prostitutes, who use martial arts techniques to infiltrate paramilitary compounds, and who kill not dispassionately nor with nightmares afterward but with conviction.

If *A Catskill Eagle* has a major failing, it can be found in the flatness of the heroine's characterization. Susan Silverman was, to my mind, always one of the strengths of the Spenser novels, and what Parker seems at first to be saying, when he has the ever-verbal, always perceptive Susan becoming more and more taciturn and even zombie-like, is that women participate in Spenser's life only insofar as they are quest objects or "happy ending" participants. Yet that does not appear to be what he intends in the final analysis, for this novel is told almost entirely from Spenser's perspective, and *he* seems to need to rescue people—witness Rachel Wallace and Paul Giacomin, both of whom surface in cameo appearances in *A Catskill Eagle*. Susan's story, overtly the story of the "rescued" but covertly the story of one who went willingly with the "capturer," may come out bit by bit in subsequent novels, for there

is considerable indication that she has been plumbing psychological depths of her own (she, "shrink," has been seeing a therapist). As this novel is told from the narrative perspective of Spenser, the reader only hears of Susan as she is filtered through Spenser's consciousness. This failing aside, one further strength in the series deserves final mention, and that is the characterization of Hawk and of his relationship with Spenser, and that may stem from the quest tradition that gives male-bonding more play than male-female relationships. Through Hawk, the black sidekick who isn't a sidekick, the symbolic "black/white" dichotomy that has been



featured in all of the Spenser novels gets full play in *A Catskill Eagle*, and it calls forth all of the racial, ethical, and ironic connotations that Parker, consummate symbologist he, knows how to evoke. Hawk is deadly serious, riotously funny, and always right on target. Throughout the series, he has been the stable pole around which Spenser's and Susan's emotions, drives, and careers have careened, and it is no coincidence that *A Catskill Eagle* begins with the terse note Susan sends Spenser: "I have not time. Hawk is in jail in Mill River, California. You must get him out. I need help too. Hawk will explain. Things are awful, but I love you." Hawk is a type of glue that binds the two as well as a type of narrative cement that helps keep the series together. He is not the Great White Whale of Melville's frontispiece quote—he is not pursued at all but pursuer, by and large—but he is at the heart of the Spenser novels, and if Spenser has become eagle to Hawk's hawk, then some sort of growth on the part of the hero clearly is presaged. Hawk seems to be the only major character who doesn't have a mid-life crisis that works itself out violently, and if, in the final analysis, there is a rescuer in the Spenser novels, it is Hawk.

—Susan L. Clark

ANTHOLOGY

Dark Lessons: Crime and Detection on Campus edited by Marcia Muller and Bill Pronzini. New York: Macmillan, 1985. $19.95

Muller and Pronzini have assembled an impressive anthology of tales, significant in both its scope and diversity, involving crime and detection in academia. First, they have selected crime scenes that range from elementary schools to universities, correspondence schools to one-room schoolhouses, and even "schools of hard knocks" where pickpockets are trained. Second, they have chosen authors who represent much of the chronological history of mystery fiction, from Poe to Pronzini himself. Finally, they have covered considerable sociological territory, now including a piece featuring inner-city classroom violence and now one in an Oxbridge milieu, as well as psychological possibilities, from Poe's haunting "William Wilson" to George C. Chesbro's tale of fragile sanity, "Broken Pattern."

Dark Lessons features the above-mentioned pieces by Poe and Chesbro, as well as offerings by Dorothy L. Sayers ("Murder at Pentecost"), Cornell Woolrich ("Murder at Mother's Knee"), Norbert Davis ("The Lethal Logic"), Evan Hunter ("To Break the Wall"), Graham Greene ("When Greek Meets Greek"), Shirley Jackson ("Charles"), and Harry Kemelman ("The Ten O'Clock Scholar"). Additionally, readers will enjoy Edward D. Hoch's "The Problem of the Little Red Schoolhouse" and Talmage Powell's "The Disappearance of Maggie," both of which treat of kidnapping. Anthony Boucher contributes "A Matter of Scholarship," and Barry W. Malzberg solos with "The Turncoat Journal of Marc Milton Stearns" and teams up with Bill Pronzini on "Final Exam." "Dead Week" (L. P. Carpenter), "Robert" (Stanley Ellin), and "Van der Valk and the High School Riot" (Nicholas Freeling) complete the anthology.

It would be hard to find fault with the selection of authors and even of individual narratives, but it's relatively easy to spot glaring omissions in the anthology's introduction. Ideally, an introduction to a theme collection should give ample sources for further reading. Muller and Pronzini hit the high spots but fail to cite other, at times even more prominent, academic crimes of authors they do mention. For example, Amanda Cross's *James Joyce Murder, Poetic Justice,* and the *Theban Mysteries* are noted, but it is as if the co-editors stopped reading her after 1971, for no mention is made of the, to my taste at least, more insightful academic mysteries of *Death in a Tenured Position* and *Sweet Death, Kind Death* by the same author. Similarly, a 1936 and a 1958 Innes (*Seven Suspects* and *The Long Farewell,* respectively) are mentioned, but not his earlier *Death at the President's Lodgings. Dark Lessons,* which is directed to "academicians and general readers," would be truly informative if it had included many more sources for further reading, both in primary and secondary readings. Even lip-service to *The Modern Language Association Bibliography* or to studies such as John E. Kramer's *College Mystery Novels: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Press, 1983) would have been welcome by mystery fans who are always looking for the many and fascinating graves of academe.

—Susan L. Clark

POLICE PROCEDURAL

A Growing Concern by Ian Stuart. New York: Doubleday Crime Club, 1985. 182 pp. $12.95

A Growing Concern is a superbly crafted mystery in which ambiguity and shaded deception are played to near perfection. In his twelfth thriller, Ian Stuart (not to be confused with the pseudonym of Alistair MacLean) adroitly blends the traditional English mystery with the "financial shocker" novel.

Bank Inspector David Grierson is assigned to investigate the suspected suicide of an alluring female teller. Grierson eventually discovers that the circumstances surrounding the incident seriously contradict the victim's notoriously placid background.

Probing the intricate maze of the British financial world, Grierson encounters several similarly savage murders, a perplexing assault, and the malefactions of a smoothly insidious investment consortium. A seemingly

isolated four-year-old suicide provides the tenacious Grierson with the critical link needed to connect the darkly intriguing events of the book's central plot.

Stuart strikes a pulsating fusion with his masterly execution of the mystery elements in *A Growing Concern* as well as the staggering financial acumen of the nebulous investment cartel.

Unquestionably, Stuart has found his niche with *A Growing Concern,* advancing as he does toward the Paul Erdman style of financial intrigue. Quite simply, Stuart has invested a chilling dimension into his work.

—Andy East

* * * * *

Monkey Puzzle by Paula Gosling. London: Macmillan, 1985. 256 pp.

Fans are in for a surprise with *Monkey Puzzle,* Paula Gosling's fifth novel. Like *Fair Game* (British title: *A Running Duck*), her first thriller, *Puzzle* is set in the United States, but, unlike any of her previously published works, it is a procedural and might, of course, be the beginning of a series.

Well into Chapter 24, someone mentions that the story takes place in Ohio. Until then, it had fooled me; the whole scene felt (and still feels to me) like Detroit. In any case, the setting is a grim Midwestern city where the cold and snow do nothing to soften the Rust Bowl aura. Murder on the local college campus just proves that, if there ever really were any ivory towers, they are long gone.

Her use of an American setting gives Gosling some problems with diction. One of the most admirable features of her work has been that American places and Americans sound American; English places and English people sound English, perhaps one of the benefits of her own long residence abroad. That is not so true of *Monkey Puzzle,* for the murder squad assigned to the Grantham Hall case sound all too English. This objection may, however, strike many readers as merely a quibble.

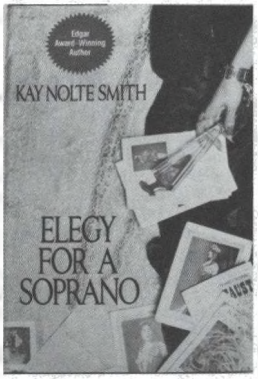
Characterization is always one of Gosling's strengths, and it bears comment here. Surprisingly, most of the minor characters are more stereotypical than Gosling's characters usually turn out to be, but, if a series does evolve, she has plenty of room in which to deepen and complicate a whole range of potentially fascinating folk. *Monkey Puzzle's* victim, Aiken Adamson, is ripe for killing. As the case unfolds, he is revealed to have been thoroughly wicked and dangerous. He is also very thoroughly killed: he's bashed in the head, his tongue is cut out, and he's stabbed. No halfway measures in this murder.

In sharp contrast to Adamson, Gosling's protagonists, Police Lieutenant Jack Stryker and suspect Kate Trevorne, grow more and more likable as one comes to know them better. Beneath their tough, prickly surface mannerisms lie complex personalities worth exploring, and most readers will care a lot about them by the end of the novel. Stryker is better educated and more vulnerable than he initially appears to be. Kate is often filled with doubts beneath her poised, confident manner. They slug it out between moments of genuine communication throughout the investigation, and the slow revelation of the nature of a much earlier encounter between them is tantalizing. Feelings will run high among readers, no question about it, over some interpretations of that encounter.

One of the best features of this book is Kate's awareness that, as a child of the '60s, whose consciousness was formed by anti-war protests and hatred of the police, she both retains and rejects her old ideas. Certainly, she has joined one of the oldest establishments of all, academe, and certainly she has aged and changed. But she still clings to the past emotionally and nurtures along an old, radical lover, a major suspect. Her discovery that Stryker, too, is struggling to come to terms with his past as well as his present situation enlarges her perspective. This is strong material and gives *Monkey Puzzle* real backbone on which to hang the conventions of the gritty procedural.

The investigative details are sound; the love story is enticing; the characters are intriguing. These factors offset the lesser weaknesses and for many readers may also overshadow the arbitrary resolution of the case.

—Jane S. Bakerman



Red Chameleon by Stuart Kaminsky. New York: Scribner's, 1985. $13.95

Red Chameleon is the third Porfiry Rostnikov mystery which describes the role of police in a police state. Written by an American, it details a Moscow-based police procedural case that seems initially straightforward but, upon analysis, turns complex in the juxtaposition of the conventions Western detective fiction novelists often use to portray "the Russian mentality" and the Soviet Union and what those nebulous psychological and bureaucratic entities might actually be. Indeed, the difficulty in separating fiction from fact, myth from reality, deliberately informs the work on a number of levels: among the suspects in the bathtub murder of elderly Abraham Savitskaya, who is guilty? among the quotes from mainstream Russian literature on the one hand, and the references to foreign mystery fiction on the other hand, that pepper the novel (Dostoevsky, Gorky, Checkhov among the former—and Bill Pronzini and Ed McBain among the latter), which most accurately mirror the mentality of the suspects and the police? among the conversational interchanges dealing with political ideology, which of them are to be trusted, both for the truthfulness of the speaker and the validity of the sentiment? and, finally, among the ideologies in question—capitalist, Marxist, Soviet-Communist, humanist, and, as the narrative shows, "animalist"—which presents a more accurate picture of human nature?

The basic narrative concerns Rostnikov's investigation of the slaying of an old man who shared a tiny Moscow apartment with his late-in-life children, but this killing somehow becomes intertwined with murders committed by a rooftop sniper nicknamed "The Weeper," and with a luxury-car-theft ring that happens to lift the Chaika of a high government official. The various detectives on the separate cases interact in comic-serious ways, compromise themselves repeatedly, and eventually all the cases get solved, much as Dell Shannon makes sure that Luis Mendoza and his Los Angeles crew solve multiple murders and crimes in each novel. This isn't *Mendoza Does Moscow,* but it does have that same sort of tidiness, an orderliness not only attributable to a Communist state, but also to an authorial state of mind. It's a type of literary good housekeeping, a visible tying up of loose ends and a structure that sounds as if an interior decorator decided to write a mystery novel, that keeps this Kaminsky novel going (in his Toby Peters novels, it's mostly the fictions Americans cherish about Hollywood), and yet this doesn't really grate on the reader's nerves, because what Kaminsky does here and what he has done elsewhere in the other Peters and Rostnikov novels has been to question the very myths he documents, to put out several versions of one story—which makes for many stories—and to put them all to the test. The structure is so conscious, the myths so evident, that the reader can focus on the ethical decisions and personal relations of the hunters and the hunted, which produces satisfying crime-fiction reading.

Much of the reader's interest lies in what makes for criminal and for heroic behavior in a Communist state. Kaminsky's Russians know in theory what they are expected to be as dictated by their political ideology and cultural traditions. But precisely where do the individual and society fall short of or exceed those ideals? And what constitutes betrayal of ideals—and, for that matter, the upholding of principles? Kaminsky wrenchingly catches these expectations as they work themselves out in the lives of both police and criminals and presses them home as his crime-stalkers hunt down a terminally-ill female athlete ruined by steroids, an old man who crossed continents to kill for a brass candlestick, and a high government official, the chameleon of the title, who changes identities as easily as political philosophies. The detectives suffer constant frustration, whether it is in the continual oneupmanship the bureaucracy seems to foster in them and which they actively encourage, or in the depressing conditions that characterize life in Moscow, with its endless lines, terrible housing, and

universal suspicion. This is Moscow in the summer, but it's just as depressing as *Gorky Park* was in the winter. Humor, warmth, and love exist, too, but in narrowly circumscribed situations, islands of optimism in a seemingly overwhelming sea of pessimism. Yet *Red Chameleon* is mesmerizing precisely because of the tension between humans and their surroundings—and the psychological environments they create: "Crime would not stop. Corruption would not end. It was the nature of the human beast. The goal of the Soviet state was a perfection it could never reach, but the seeking of that state of perfection created meaning. Each pain, setback, and criminal, bureaucratic obstacle simply proved the need for commitment." In the last analysis, *Red Chameleon* details the impossibility of "that state of perfection," the compromises humans make in attempting to attain it, and the alternately depressing and uplifting ways they find to survive.

—Susan L. Clark

* * * * *

What's in the Dark? by Ellery Queen. New York: Zebra, 1985.

The action takes place during the Great Blackout in New York City on the 21st floor of a downtown office building. Captain Corrigan of the NYPD is ordered to investigate a suicide there. (It seems improbable to this reviewer that the PD would bother with a suicide during the blackout.) Corrigan, Officer Maloney, and Chuck Baer, P.I., laboriously climb the 21 flights of stairs, finding their way with matches and lighters. The floor is home to a jewelry firm, an advertising agency, and an accounting office. Corrigan is directed to a small office of the latter firm, where he finds the body of Brian Frank, a CPA for the company. There is a sort of suicide note, but one look by Corrigan shows that the death is not suicide: the safety on the pistol is on.

Two men of the 21st floor group go out for food and drink. This leads to a general lessening of tension, with much interaction between the *dramatis personae*. There is some implied sex, but not in offensive quantities. It is an interesting scene, lit by flickering candles. There is a second murder, that of LaVerne Thomas, secretary to the jewelry firm. Captain Corrigan solves the case by cerebration and ties all the loose ends together. Although obviously one of several paperbacks ghostwritten under the Ellery Queen name in the 1960s, *What's in the Dark?* is nonetheless a recommended read.

—Howard Rapp

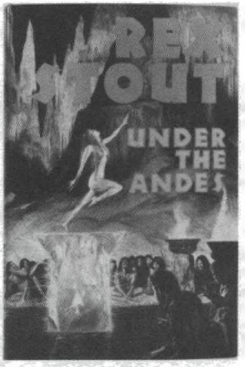
* * * * *

Elegy for a Soprano by Kay Nolte Smith. New York: Villard Books, 1985. $14.95

The opera world is deeply shocked when famed soprano Vardis Wolf is poisoned during one of her "evenings at home," when she performs informally at her Manhattan town house for her loyal fan club, "the small group of admirers, associates and friends that Vardis had allowed to enter her private life." Consisting of relatives, long-time friends, and former employees, the group dubs itself "the Wolfpack," and "for all of them, the association with her was one of the most intense experiences in their lives." At first, Vardis's death is reported as an inexplicable, random killing, not unlike the recent Tylenol killings, but when not one, but four, of the Wolfpack variously confess to her murder, the New York City Police Department is stymied.

Sam Lyons, the officer in charge of the investigation, finds the case taking a personal direction when Dinah Leone Mitchell, the wife of his slain partner, contacts him with the suspicion that she may be Vardis's daughter. When Dinah's mother died of a stroke, Dinah found, in the way "a lot of people discover they were adopted...by going through her parents' papers," that she was actually born to one Hjoerdis Olafsen, and her shock at seeing this same name given as Vardis's real name in the *Times* obituary is intensified by her long-running obsession with opera, and in particular with Vardis, who was one of her idols, "one of the people who opened doors for me. Doors in the mind, I mean. I'd never heard an opera in my life, before her. Dad drove a cab and Mother was a hosiery saleslady—their idea of classical music was a Strauss waltz. Finally I saved up enough money to go hear Vardis at the Met. I had to get up at four in the morning in the middle of winter and stand in line for eight hours, but I'll never forget that performance."

With Sam's grudging approval, and inside information tips gleaned from the ongoing police investigation, Dinah, a community college remedial English teacher, sets out to find out what she can about her birth mother's life and death, and the stage is set



both for an emotional confrontation with a past she never knew and a present she knows all too well: Dinah works with "failures," whereas she feels that her birth mother was by all professional standards a resounding success. And, in her mind, she keeps contrasting the struggles she had with her parents, the Leones, concerning going to college and moving to Manhattan, with what her life might have been like had Vardis not given her up at her birth over three decades ago. Reality intrudes rapidly, however, and the picture of Vardis as a difficult diva and a ruthless individual emerges as Dinah begins to get perspective on the sacrifices her parents made to raise her in Brooklyn. Multiple motives for Vardis's murder surface as Dinah finds out more of her natural mother's past, those mysterious years between her childhood in occupied Norway and her arrival in New York City as a refugee, those ideological convictions that set her at odds with the establishment in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when her anti-war "Dead Flower Song" gripped the nation's youth, and her cavalier and autocratic ways of dealing with others. One of the murder suspects contends that Vardis had no "human emotions" and that anyone who got in her way suffered but that Vardis did not: "How does the fire feel after it burns your hand? I think it just feels that your hand got in the way." By all accounts, Vardis sang beautifully, but when Dinah learns about "the human being behind the achievements," motives for murder become plentiful: "artistry and humanity were separate accounts and you couldn't transfer credit between them."

Elegy for a Soprano should justifiably appeal to a wide audience, since its subject matter and method of exposition bridge the gap between mystery fiction and the novel, since its passion for the world of opera proves to be thoroughly convincing, and since Smith's ear for dialogue and sense of portraying human emotions are splendid. The intricacies of the multi-layered mystery

plot and Smith's well-developed sense of time and place (many of the flashbacks take place in occupied Europe) make for absorbing reading in this fourth novel by the 1981 winner of the Edgar Allan Poe Award for the best first novel.

—Susan L. Clark

THRILLER

Under the Andes by Rex Stout. Introduction by John McAleer. New York: Penzler Books, 1985. $15.95

Here is magnificent and heady lost-race adventure, derivative indeed of Verne, Wells, and Haggard, yet with the imprimis of Stoutian erudition and wit. Originally published in the February 1914 *All-Story Magazine*, this is the sole extant sample of Stout's first writing career, that of pulp romancer. It was only after *How Like a God* appeared in 1929 that his second career started and global recognition followed with millions of copies of Nero Wolfe titles in 22 languages, starting with *Fer-de-Lance* in 1934 and closing with *A Family Affair* in 1975.

From 1912 to 1916, Stout wrote steadily and sold to pulps four novels and some two dozen short stories. His success was practically instantaneous, and his proficiency in the exacting craft of turning out pulp fiction brought him under the guidance of the legendary Bob (Robert H.) Davis, discerning editor of the family of pulps published by Frank Munsey. In time, Rex rejected a pulp career, realizing that artistic ambitions would be sacrificed were he to become "a goddam fiction factory." We can only speculate today that Stout's mastery of pulp writing might have made him into another Edgar Rice Burroughs or Max Brand, had he continued. This is a crushing thought for TAD readers—no Nero Wolfe? no Archie?—but fantasy aficionados would have gained vastly to judge by *Under the Andes*.

Narrator and undoubted hero of the novel, Paul Lamar is an imperturbable and analytical young man with the chiseled assurance—even arrogance—of a Charles Dana Gibson hero. Aristocratic and wealthy, he is alive to family values and seeks to disrupt a sizzling romance between his younger brother, Harry, and a remarkable and utterly bewitching *demimondaine* with the name of—are you ready for this?—Desirée Le Mire. Stout took Lola Montez as the prototype of Desirée, adding to the historic image yet managing to elude caricature. Gorgeous beyond mere beauty, Desirée is witty, outspoken, and surprisingly hard-headed; for her, dukes build lakeside villas and princes blow out their brains. Harry is the man of impulse, the forthright and irrepressible romantic, a far cry from his coldly intellectual older brother.

Paul follows the lovers across the continent, catching up with them in Colorado and accompanying them to San Francisco. Here they lease a fully-manned luxury yacht and sail southward, touching at random ports. On a side-trip to the Andes in Peru, they investigate a cave, and all three fall into a subterranean river to be carried miles into dark and immense caverns. This occurs in Chapter VI, and the remaining eighteen chapters relate the separate and conjoint adventures of the three. The pace of narration is rapid, and each chapter lives up to pulp tradition with a cliff-hanging ending.

They are captured by troglodytes, descendants of Incas who fled into the caverns some four centuries earlier to escape the Conquest. The veneer of Amerindian civilization disappeared over this period, and physical deterioration has transformed these latter-day Incans into degenerate and barbaric trolls. A priest-king who officiates at a degraded form of solar worship is the only vestige of former glory, and, adept as ever at titillating male nobility, Desirée soon becomes his consort. Time and again the adventurers are separated, reunited, and again separated, only to face new perils which must be overcome by virtue of skill or intellect. Besides the incessant hostile attentions of the troglodytes, there are monster fish, a gigantic reptile with hypnotic powers, and hazards of terrain without end. Of course, there is eventual escape, and the concluding chapter adds a satisfying mystical fillip. Sam Moskowitz's 1970 description of this story is to the point: "an extraordinarily vigorous and well-written fantastic adventure."

John McAleer's introduction is eminently readable and of inherent interest to fans, pulpish or Wolfian, adding several morsels of fascinating trivia and highlighting the copyright problem. The book is large and handsome, with a garish pictorial wrapper showing a scene similar to one which once might have been painted for a pulp cover. One wishes that a table of contents had been included, since chapters are titled and numbered, but this is a trivial point to raise about so satisfying a book. One further ventures to hope that others of Stout's early pulp novels will be published in similar editions.

—A. H. Lybeck

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Cool Runnings by Richard Hoyt. Tom Doherty Associates, 1985

Cool Runnings, the title of this mystery-thriller (already flakked by the *New York Times Book Review* as "brilliant" and the *Washington Post* as "A perfect summer thriller"), refers both to Jamaican lingo that translates, according to a stoned Rastafarian, to "everting cool" and to New York City home-town marathoner Marty Spivak's Pheidippidean sprint into Manhattan to save that city from a homemade atomic bomb. The bomb, a "demonstration" model *sans* the four kilos of plutonium necessary to activate it, has been assembled by the Vrienden (= friends), a Dutch group advocating unilateral disarmament (when its members are not high on hashish), and is destined for the U.S., stolen by a Japanese graduate student with a grudge against Manhattan. The bomb is ferried to Manhattan *via* Jamaica, and, in the process, British, French, American, and Finnish diplomats trip over each other to determine (1) where the bomb is, (2) whether whoever has it has access to the requisite amount of plutonium, and (3) who's in charge here anyway?

The unlikely protagonist of *Cool Runnings* is one Jim Quint, a freelance journalist who writes for *Rolling Stone* (the content of this novel is *so* trendy that one has to ask if it's soon to be a major motion picture, especially since John Travolta plays a *Rolling Stone* reporter in this summer's *Perfect* film) and publishes novels filled with "overworked scenes of sex and mayhem" under the pseudonym Humper Staab. Quint is dispatched on the heels of a story to the Vriendens' double-decker bus, which traverses Europe regularly to take its members to anti-nuclear demonstrations. And isn't it convenient that he meets Marissa Stanley, a sociology graduate student examining the Vrienden at close hand? You see, Jim hails from Bison, Montana, and Marissa is from Lost Horse, Montana. It turns out that Jim once "lugged irrigation pipes up Lost Horse way," and it's just "a real Montana whing-ding" after that—except that Jim and Marissa are occupied with all sorts of nasty types that would never live in Montana: drug runners, prostitutes, double agents, and, yes, sir, diplomats. Even the President of the good old U.S. of A. gets involved, not just with this pesky bomb problem, but also with Humper Staab novels, which he favors just like J.F.K. used to like Ian Fleming. Except this isn't the Cuban missile crisis—it's just a problem with a young woman in Jamaica who "has a plane and she's fixing to fly an atomic bomb over Cuba and to the United States."

This "look back at earlier, equally crazy days" tactic is certainly conscious on Hoyt's part, as all the other nuclear mayhem details might as well be translated into 1960s anti-war rhetoric. The evocation of the myth of the '60s is deliberate and is actually pretty insulting. All of the women in *Cool Runnings* are pliant, subservient, and sex-starved; there's enough dope to sink the Spanish Armada; and the political rhetoric of the counter-culture types is pure flower-power cant (unlike the serious feminist and political thought that has come from that period). And yet the double agents, diplomats, and international functionaries don't fare much better than the born-again hippies.

One saving grace is that *Cool Runnings* doesn't take itself tremendously seriously. It's as if Hoyt knows that he could never match Joseph Heller and write *Catch-22*, for example, just as his hero knows that Humper Staab novels are trashy. After all, they don't have to be literary to be consumed, if the President himself can keep them on the back of his toilet.

Thriller fans will find *Cool Runnings* tame, mystery buffs will be bored, semi-porn readers should look elsewhere, and nostalgic counter-culture types will probably have to be *very* stoned, indeed, to tune into this one and giggle along with Jim Quint.

—Susan Clark

DIAL N FOR NONSENSE

By Louis Phillips

The actor Robert Speaight on Sherlock Holmes

"Sherlock Holmes I read now with the same pleasure as I did then, and am constantly finding myself in good company. T. S. Eliot once told me that he thought *The Speckled Band* one of the great short stories in the English language, and as I recalled to him the classic opening chapters of *The Hound of Baskervilles* his slow, his slightly sepuchral, voice completed the quotation: 'Mr. Holmes, they were the footsteps of a gigantic hound.'"

—Robert Speaight,
The Property Basket
(Collins and Harwill Press, 1970).

* * * * *

Has any rock group called itself the Speckled Band?

* * * * *

Elmore Leonard is better known to his friends as "Dutch" Leonard. He received his nickname in high school when he appeared briefly as a pitcher for his school's baseball team. At that time (1939), there was another Leonard making his mark on the major leagues—Dutch Leonard, the knuckleball pitcher for the Washington Senators. In honor of that twenty-game winner, the future writer of Westerns and mysteries was dubbed "Dutch." Ronald Reagan, by the way, was nicknamed Dutch by his father.

* * * * *

Query:

In which one of Sinclair Lewis's novels does a character admire a play written by F. Tennyson Jesse? The play in question is *The Black Mask*, and the character comments: "Glorious ending, where this woman looks at the man with his face blown away and she gives one horrible scream."

* * * * *

Party Game

Here's a game that can be played by yourself or with others. First come up with a one-word mystery title, then a two-word mystery title, then a three-word mystery title, and so on. What is the longest published mystery title you can come up with?

* * * * *

New food: THE WHO-DONUT-breakfast treat for mystery fans.

* * * * *

Trivia Corner:

1. The 1961 film *The Naked Edge* was based upon Max Ehrlich's suspense novel *First Train to Babylon*. The movie was the 92nd and, alas, the very last film of what great Hollywood star?

2. The noted television series *The Fugitive*, starring David Janssen, was loosely based upon what notorious real-life crime case?

* * * * *

Talking about the TV series *The Fugitive*, did you know that when the second half of the very final episode of that show (the 118th episode) was telecast, the program attracted an estimated 30,000,000 viewers and a 45.9 rating. At that time (1967) the program became the highest-rated episode of a series ever telecast. David Janssen, of course, is also famous to mystery fans for his portrayal of *Richard Diamond, Private Detective*.

* * * * *

ANSWERS

Gary Cooper

The Sam Sheppard Murder Case

Back Reading

Mystery fans might want to track down the October 25, 1985 issue of *Publishers Weekly*. That edition of the magazine centers its attention on mystery writers and features an article on the "10 Top British Detective Authors." That issue also profiles Susanne Kirk, editor of Scribner's mystery books. Carol Anthony's article quotes Kirk as saying that the key to selecting mysteries for Scribner's list is the page-turning quality of the writing: "...[I]f I cannot wait to get on with the story and see what happens then I believe there will be a lot of people who agree with me. We look for quality, literacy, a good puzzle is essential. But it is the page turning quality that counts the most with me."

* * * * *

EGAP = a page turned. □

LETTERS

From Will Murray:

I'd like to respond to Michael Avallone's rebuttal of my article, "The Saga of Nick Carter, Killmaster" (TAD 17:1).

Mike begins his letter of complaint with this statement: "Since I have not received your magazine in years, I only recently received a Xeroxed copy of Will Murray's 'Nick Carter' article." Then he goes on to complain about what he describes, in his Freudian way, as the "glaring truths" my piece contained.

Mike must be suffering from amnesia. I sent him a copy of the final draft of my article prior to publication. To quote from his May 13, 1982 reply to me: "While all of this is substantially true *a la* the Carter series, I will *not* sit still for the line on page 6 – 'Moolman is the originating author of the series.' That is patently untrue."

As it happened, Lyle Kenyon Engel also objected to that line. He felt that neither Avallone nor Moolman originated much of anything. Rather than referee a three-way controversy, I simply dropped that particular sentence.

I won't bother to address Mike's other complaints except to note that they are without merit. I wrote an objective article based on what I could research. I was not writing "The Michael Avallone Story." If Mike thinks that my piece makes him "sound like a sucking-around novelist," that is his interpretation, not mine.

I think it is absurd for Mike to pretend that my article's appearance in print was the first he had heard about it. And, as I made the one correction he originally asked for, he has no right to criticize me at this late date. But then, this is a man who, when asked for his comments on Valerie Moolman's rewriting of his Nick novels, responded with a series of vicious personal characterizations of the woman, whom he admits he has never met.

I think it is sad that a writer who espouses such high ideals in theory is so utterly bereft of them in practice. But to quote the man himself: " 'Twas ever thus."

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From Mark Rose:

In the interests of completion and helping out a fellow author, I would like to add to Robert Zaslavsky's article on "The Divine Detective" (TAD 19:1). His checklist, unfortunately, is not as exhaustively complete as he states. I can add one more to it:

Through the Valley of Death by E. M. A. (Eric and Mary Ann) Allison (New York: Doubleday, 1983). The detective is Brother Barnabas. I own the book but am ashamed to admit that I haven't fully read it.

Please pass this information along, and let him know that I will be glad to correspond on the matter, as the subject is quite an interesting one.

* * * * *

From Bill Pronzini:

I appreciate Jon Breen's favorable review of *Gun in Cheek* in the most recent issue of TAD. However, he is wrong about one important aspect: that I consider every writer whose work I quoted and/or commented on to be bad. This is simply not the case.

I included Evan Hunter's introduction, in which he lists some howlers from his early work; I certainly don't consider *him* to be a bad writer. The same is true of Ellery Queen, Stephen Marlowe, and Brett Halliday, whom I also quoted. And if I considered myself to be a bad writer (I quoted one of my early howlers as well, as Breen pointed out), I couldn't bring myself to sit down at the typewriter in the morning.

Yes, I think that Gaston Leroux's *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* and *The Perfume of the Lady in Black* are absurd novels; but I also think that Leroux was an historically important writer, and I admire *The Phantom of the Opera*. Yes, I find the plots of most of Richard S. Prather's Shell Scott novels silly, and no one will ever convince me that such lines as "She was nude as a noodle" are not "alternative classics." But I grew up reading Prather and Scott and will always have a soft spot in my heart for them; I think Prather, too, is an historically important writer, in that he took the private eye novel in a somewhat new direction in the early '50s (I stated as much in *Gun in Cheek*); and I have been lobbying for years to Bob Randisi and others to bring Prather the PWA Life Achievement Award he deserves. (Are you finally paying attention, Bob?)

TAD readers who missed *Gun in Cheek* when it was published three years ago may be interested to know that Warner will bring out a trade paperback edition sometime in 1986. Readers may also be interested to know that I'm now compiling a sequel, under the working title of *Gun in the Other Cheek*, which The Mysterious Press will publish next year. This book will be no more judgmental than its predecessor. It will contain quotes from and comments on the works of (among others) Joseph Wambaugh, John Gardner, Hugh Pentecost, William Marshall, Murray Leinster, Leslie Ford, and Hillary Waugh – none of whom I consider to be a bad writer.

* * * * *

From William F. Nolan:

I'd like to correct two errors in your pages. I note in TAD 18:4 that the review of my book *Things Beyond Midnight* lists it as "edited by William F. Nolan." This is incorrect; I wrote all the stories in it, and it's a collection, *not* an anthology. The other error was three issues back (18:1) in which you titled my bio piece on Charles Beaumont as "A Bibliographical Note" when it should have been "A Biographical Note." Speaking of Beaumont, my booklet on him, *The Work of Charles Beaumont*, is finally out from Borgo Press. A local writer, Roger Ankor, has signed with Evening Star Press to write a full biography of Beaumont, so, if anyone has any anecdotes about Chuck, send them along to me in care of TAD, and I'll forward them to Roger. He's attempting to interview or write to anyone and everyone who knew or worked with Chuck.

Many readers are not aware that I wrote (and had published by Bantam as original paperbacks) two sequel novels to *Logan's Run*. In 1977: *Logan's World*. In 1980: *Logan's Search*. As with the original edition from Lancer of my *Space for Hire*, these books vanished from the nation's book racks

within a month of their publication and are now very difficult to locate. I'm pleased to announce, therefore, that John Maclay, of Maclay & Associates, in Baltimore, is bringing out all three Logan novels in a new hardcover edition in the fall of next year, titled *Logan: A Trilogy*. Maclay just published a very handsome new collection of Ray Russell's Gothic tales (all seven of them) as *Haunted Castles*. A fine volume, well worth ordering.

And while we're on the subject of books worth ordering, I also urge TADians to send for the first five volumes of Fredric Brown's pulp tales (in hardcover for the first time) as published by Dennis McMillan of New Mexico. He's bringing out two more titles, for a set of seven volumes—collecting all the best of Brown's pulp mystery/suspense work. How happy Fred would be to see this project realized. Also, Dennis has issued the newest Paul Pine novel by Howard Browne, *The Paper Gun*. This is the long-awaited fifth volume in the Pine series.

I've been busy writing crime-related Movies of the Week for television of late. The first of a trio of my TV films, *Bridge Across Time*, was telecast in late November from NBC and concerned the return of Jack the Ripper to London Bridge (now located in Lake Havasu City, Arizona). My second, *Murder on the Istanbul Train* (ABC), will star Angela Lansbury, while the third is for NBC and is not titled *Au Pair*. They should be telecast in late '86 or early '87. The *Au Pair* story deals with a demon who inhabits the body of a young *au pair* girl from Sweden. I'm having fun with these and intend to do more.

I'd like to mention a beautifully bound and illustrated edition of Chandler's *The Little Sister* that I recently purchased second-hand here in L.A. Published in England by Heron Books in 1982. Red and gold binding, with half-a-dozen superb full-page illustrations by Paul Crompton. Worth looking up by the Chandler buff!

I read Chandler's original screenplay, *Playback* in the book edition from The Mysterious Press, and, while I'm delighted to see this script finally published, I found it pretty dull going. Despite all flaws, I much prefer the Marlowe version that Chandler reworked into his last novel (under the same title). There's one more major screenplay by Chandler that has yet to see print. I refer to his script for *The Lady in the Lake*. He wrote this for MGM, and, after he had completed the draft, it was turned over to Steve Fisher, who totally redid it. But we still have that first draft by Chandler (which varies quite a bit from his novel, since he got "bored" adapting the same plot to screen form). It's sitting over at MGM, waiting for some publisher to grab it. (Are you listening, Mysterious Press?)

Don Herron (who conducts those Hammett tours in San Francisco) sent me a copy of a wonderful paperback which he authored, put out in 1985 by City Lights Books—*The Literary World of San Francisco & Its Environs*. It's a literary guidebook to such "locals" as Dash Hammett (lots on him), Fritz Leiber, Jack London, Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, etc. Fascinating, and fully illustrated. A real bargain at ten bucks.

I'd like to bring the Hammett buff up to date on what has been published about ole Dash of late. First, in my last bibliography of works about DH (TAD 17:4), I *missed* William Marling's critical study from Twayne in 1983, *Dashiell Hammett*, published as part of the "United States Authors Series." A most worthwhile study, sent to me by Marling.

Since my checklist, three new books on DH have been issued. The first, by Sinda Gregory, is titled *Private Investigations: The Novels of Dashiell Hammett* (1985) from Southern Illinois University Press, a critical study of his major books. A more "popular" approach is taken by Julian Symons in his *Dashiell Hammett* (1985) from Harcourt Brace Jovanovich—one of their "HBJ Album Biographies"—and the real value of this one lies in its heavily pictorial presentation. The text is flat and simply reworks the basic Hammett life story from other sources, but the photos are terrific, ranging from movie stills, book jackets, mag covers, and personal portraits to photos of Hammett text, as well as a page from his Alaska-edited service paper, *The Adakian*. A feast for the Hammett buff.

The third DH tome, also titled *Dashiell Hammett*, was completed in 1984 but came out late in '85 from Frederick Ungar. The author is Dennis Dooley, who spends half of this critical study dealing with Hammett's shorter works, a welcome change of pace for a critic. Worth having.

Also worth having, for purposes of in-depth research, is a slim 1985 volume from Scarecrow Press titled *The Hard-Boiled Explicator: A Guide to the Study of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald*, this one by Robert E. Skinner. It lists articles, essays, books, pamphlets, etc. about the Big Three. A must for any reference library.

We now have over a dozen books dealing directly with Hammett, so I don't think anybody's going to feel any sense of loss in not having a copy of my announced book, *A World of Hammett*, which was to gather together all the best essays and articles about him. I've abandoned it. After two Nolan volumes on DH, enough is enough. Do we *really* need another book on Dash? □

A CATALOGUE OF CRIME

By Jacques Barzun

Wendell Hertig Taylor died in Princeton last November 3 after a long illness. His infirmities did not keep him from doing his share of reading and writing for the "Catalogue of Crime" entries in our pages or for the updating of the book of that title, of which he was co-author.

Dr. Taylor was born in Uniontown, Pennsylvania in 1905, the son of two physicians. He took the path of science at an early age, earned his B.A. and Ph.D. at Princeton, worked briefly as a researcher for Dupont, and was called back to the university as an assistant professor. When a course that he initiated—one of the earliest—in the history of science displeased the department of philosophy, Taylor resigned and accepted the headship of the science department at Lawrenceville. There he introduced innovations in science teaching later widely imitated.

His interest in crime fiction also dates back to his teenaged years, when he and Jacques Barzun first met. By the time that Dorothy Sayers's first book appeared in 1923, both were seasoned (though not published) critics of the genre. For 64 years, they kept notes, corresponded, and met periodically to discuss literature at large and their specialty in particular. Taylor's scrutiny of the science on which fictional detection has increasingly relied was not pedantic. He was content with high plausibility, agreeing with Raymond Chandler that it depended greatly on style. Taylor's own writing style showed the breadth of his reading and a characteristic turn of sardonic humor. He had not read and reread Sherlock Holmes for nothing.

S303 Bell, Josephine
Hatchet Man
Walker 1979

The output of crime fiction by Dr. Doris Ball has had its ups and downs over the long haul, and it is pleasant to record an up in this tale of her 82nd year. Not that this account of murder in a hospital is a *tour de force,* but it is good solid work in the English tradition of scheme and circumstance. The author has kept up with the motives and tendencies of the young, with the changed routines of hospitals, and with the language appropriate to all these. There are enough kinks in the lives and minds of the people interviewed to make things hard for Superintendent Robertson and Sergeant Craig as they try to find out how and why nurse Tan Sunee was murdered and bundled up; and, as always in English stories, the social commentary is shrewd and unobtrusive.

S304 Fischer, Bruno
The Pigskin Bag
Ziff Davis 1946

A good, simple accident sets off this adventure: a heavy suitcase is put by mistake in a woman's car after a highway collision. Her husband then becomes the object of pursuit and persecution by a number of shady types, all of whom want that bag. The events which follow the original error are well contrived, and some are even ingenious. The pace quickens at the right time, and the conclusion is, in principle, satisfactory. What is lacking in this thriller—for that is what it is—is the proper tone and style. One can imagine what Chandler would have done with the plot, or either of the U.S. Macdonalds. Fischer's relaxed and colorless prose is inadequate to both the physical action and the emotions that go with it—a pity.

S305 Gover, Robert
The Maniac Responsible
Grove Press 1963

In the mid-'60s, the notion of combining parody and *avant-garde* "freedom" inspired a good many writers, usually young. The parody in this attempt is of the tough U.S. crime tale, and the liberated narrative form is that of Dos Passos (not so new in 1960), hybridized with some elements of the French *nouveau roman.* The sarcasm about conspicuous facts of daily life, the sexual pruriency, and the typographical tricks together yield a rather low score for wit and literacy but a passing grade for storytelling. The parody, though, is invisible.

S306 Highsmith, Patricia
Those Who Walk Away
Doubleday 1967

The author's reputation is hardly enhanced by this story of a maniacal hatred pursuing an ineffectual victim. The would-be avenger is a father who idolized his daughter and who blames for her suicide some unspecified act or failing of his son-in-law. Three murderous attempts leave us less and less wrought up, except at the tongue-tied stupidity of the young widower. The scene is Venice, where several persons and events are loosely interwoven with the central action, and where much that might have proved plausible and gripping turns out merely silly. Note the left-handed dedication of the book: "To——, one of my more inspiring friends."

S307 Lewin, Michael Z.
Out of Season
Morrow 1984

Albert Samson keeps eyeing privately all over Indianapolis, seeking on this occasion the true identity of a happily married woman, at her wealthy husband's anxious desire. The somewhat featureless Samson rings doorbells, uses the police and the press to an extent that strains belief, and comes upon traces of an old murder and a new one. We also run into the author's other hero, Lt. Powder, who in this brief contact is unrecognizable. Unlike him, Samson has little humor, and he comes to seem less a doer than a spectator such as ourselves. The plot requires some very close adjustments, and the solution involves a near-impossibility, not of fact, but of feeling. We expected better from Indianapolis.

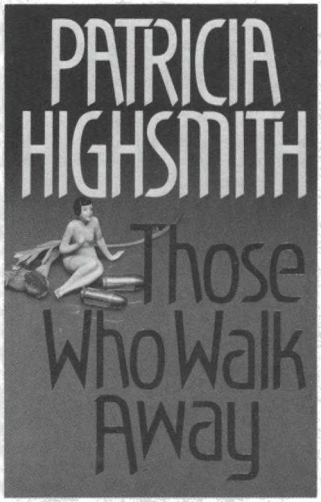
S308 Lipatov, Vil
A Village Detective
Progress Publishers (Moscow) 1970

Ten longish stories make up this engaging collection about Militia Inspector Fyodor Aniskin, who exercises a benevolent rule over the village of Togura in the Tomsk region of Siberia. The crimes he deals with are not dramatic but commonplace, folksy, very much in the manner of certain tales—say, by Edward D. Hoch—about humane sheriffs in the U.S. The interest lies in Aniskin's foibles and family life and the wisdom divorced from intellect with which he sets straight the emotionally charged misdoings of some members of his community. There is hardly a word of ideology but a good deal of resentment against bureaucracy and much evidence of rural poverty.

The tales are well translated by four different hands, and the 400-page paperback is obtainable through Imported Publications in Chicago.

S309 Woods, Sara
Dearest Enemy (Henry IV, Part I, Act 3, Scene 2)
St. Martin's 1981

This tireless professional keeps at it, producing not only a couple of Maitland tales a year but also doing other writing under untold pseudonyms. This specimen of her art offers a good display of the usual quintet—barrister, wife, uncle and wife, and dangling solicitor. They are at work (but not always at one) to defend an elderly actor accused of murdering his wife on a darkened stage, during the play itself. Excellent detection as well as character-drawing go with the efficient backchat. If critics really put their minds on what they say, they would call Woods, and not some other lady, the new Agatha Christie. For here is a writer playing virtuoso variations on a formula without stepping outside a medium range of familiar and respectable existence—no nonsense about turning the tale into symbolism or psychology or "a true novel." □



THE PAPERBACK REVOLUTION

By Charles Shibuk

MARIAN BABSON

Holiday festivities in London are somewhat disrupted by a serial murderer in **The Twelve Deaths of Christmas** (1979) (Dell). Detective-Superintendent Knowles of Scotland Yard is assigned to this case, and most of the action takes place in a boarding house on Baker Street—of all places! The lodgers, a mixed lot, embrace the holiday spirit, but many are not what they seem, and one of them is probably a dangerous killer.

ROBERT BARR

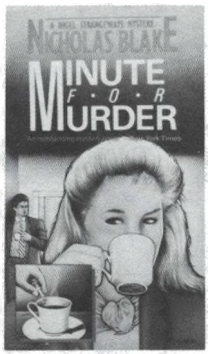
The Triumphs of Eugene Valmont (1906) (Dover) is probably the first attempt to present a humorous (and fallible) detective figure. The titular protagonist, who narrates his own exploits, is also considered to be the precursor of the much more famous Hercule Poirot.

(NOTE: This short-story collection has the distinction of appearing in both the Haycraft "cornerstones" list and *Queen's Quorum*. One story, "The Absent-Minded Coterie," is an anthological favorite and belongs on the all-time "best" list.)

NICHOLAS BLAKE

Perennial reprinted this author's best novels in the '70s and does it again in late 1985. **Minute for Murder** (1947) finds series character Nigel Strangeways laboring in the Ministry of Morale shortly after the end of World War II, and involved in a case of murder by cyanide poisoning. Plot, puzzle, atmosphere, wit, and especially characterization combine to form a superb model of the classic detective story. Barzun and Taylor call *Minute for Murder* Blake's masterpiece, and a memorable triumph.

The Beast Must Die (1938) tells a grim story of the hit-and-run murder of a six-year-old boy and his grief-stricken father's attempt to find, and obtain revenge upon, the guilty motorist. This is a tense, gripping, and completely unconventional detective story (featuring Nigel Strangeways) which has been compared to the best of Francis Iles. *The Beast Must Die* has justifiably appeared on many "best" lists—including those by Haycraft and Sandoe—and this columnist finds it vastly superior to Blake's other crime fiction.



JOHN DICKSON CARR

The eerie **Hag's Nook** (1930) (International Polygonics) involves an ancient prison in a small English village, an ancestral curse wherein family members die of a broken neck, and the usual young romance and comedy. This is one of Carr's better and most ingenious detective stories, and is especially notable for its introduction of that Chestertonian figure—Dr. Gideon Fell—who is unquestionably one of the world's greatest detectives.

FERGUS HUME

The nineteenth century's biggest bestselling mystery novel, **The Mystery of a Hansom Cab** (1886) (Hogarth) sold half-a-million copies, and, curiously, lapsed into total obscurity for many generations. One hundred years later, this columnist finds that time has not dealt too harshly with *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, and it remains a soundly constructed, sometimes powerful, and always readable work. The less effective **Madame Midas** (1888) is also available from the same publisher.

MICHAEL Z. LEWIN

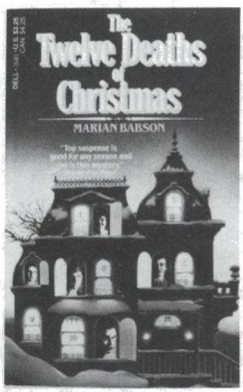
Out of Season (1984) (Perennial) features Indianapolis private eye Albert Samson, whose straightforward narration relates a complex tale reminiscent of Ross Macdonald. This is a medium-boiled effort from one of the most reliable practitioners in his genre and is notable for its avoidance of many clichés, for its less than minimal violence, and, especially, for its refreshing lack of pretentiousness. Series character Lt. Leroy Powder makes two brief appearances.

HERBERT RESNICOW

Is the painting a lost and unrecorded masterpiece by legendary Dutch artist Jan Vermeer worth $10,000,000? Or is it just a brilliantly executed forgery that is baffling the experts? And what about the bizarre and unsolvable murder of the Fine Arts Museum of New York's much-hated director in his private dining room? Join supersleuth Alexander Gold (and his wife and friends) in the engaging and highly readable **The Gold Frame** (1984) (Avon).

HAKE TALBOT

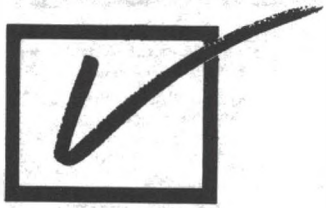
James Sandoe selected **Rim of the Pit** (1944) (International Polygonics) for his "Readers' Guide to Crime" and said it was "the second novel by a newcomer in the demanding tradition of Melville Davisson Post and John Dickson Carr." *Rim of the Pit*, with its "impossibility piled on impossibility," has gathered extravagant praise from Carr, Anthony Boucher, Bill Pronzini, Robert E. Briney, Robert C. S. Adey, and Douglas G. Greene—who contributes an illuminating introduction. This column reserves its right to dissent.



DARWIN L. TEILHET

The reality of the Third Reich's bloody rise to power in early '30s Germany, and the fantastic exigencies of the classic detective story, are masterfully blended in the meritorious but much too-little-known **The Talking Sparrow Murders** (1934) (International Polygonics). This is both an excellent and original choice for reprinting, and I believe this is also the first paperback edition. □

CHECKLIST



By M. S. Cappadonna

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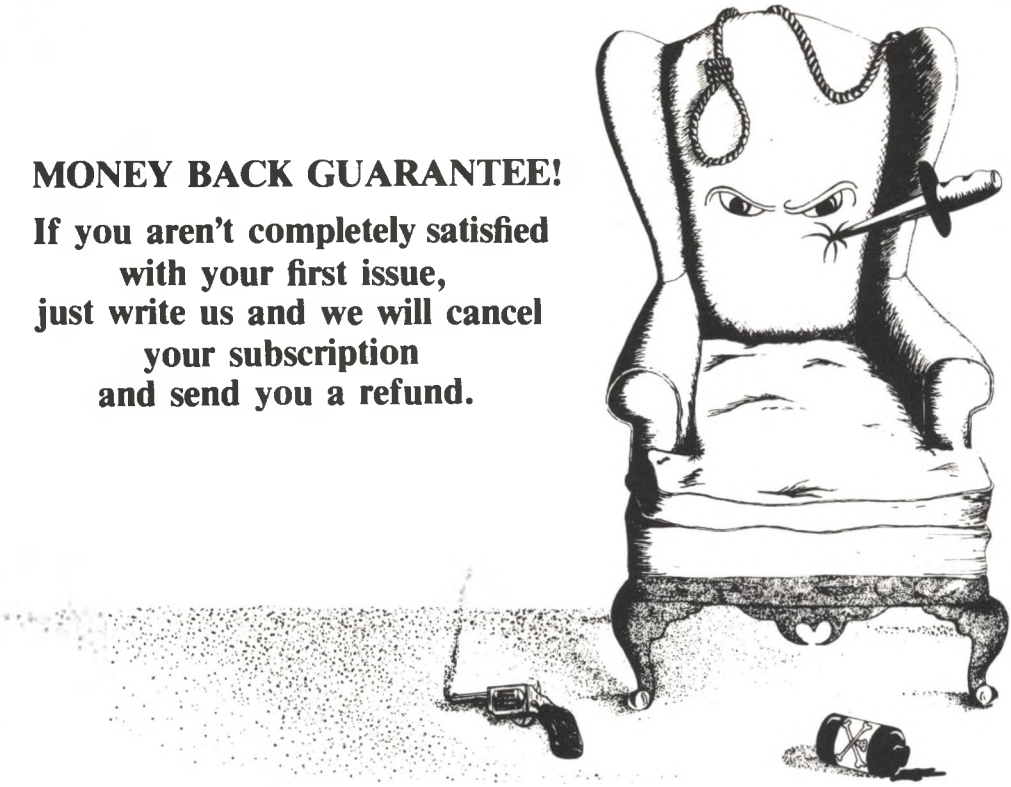

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