MWA EDGARS & MALICE WRAP-UP

THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE®

1997 • VOLUME 30 • NUMBER 3 • $9.00

Knotty Problems *of* Margaret Maron

The World of Thomas Cook Explored
H.R.F. Keating Interviewed
Black Detective Duos
Mohonk Mystery Mayhem
The Lighter Side of Sue Grafton

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THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE®

1997 • VOLUME 30 • NUMBER 3

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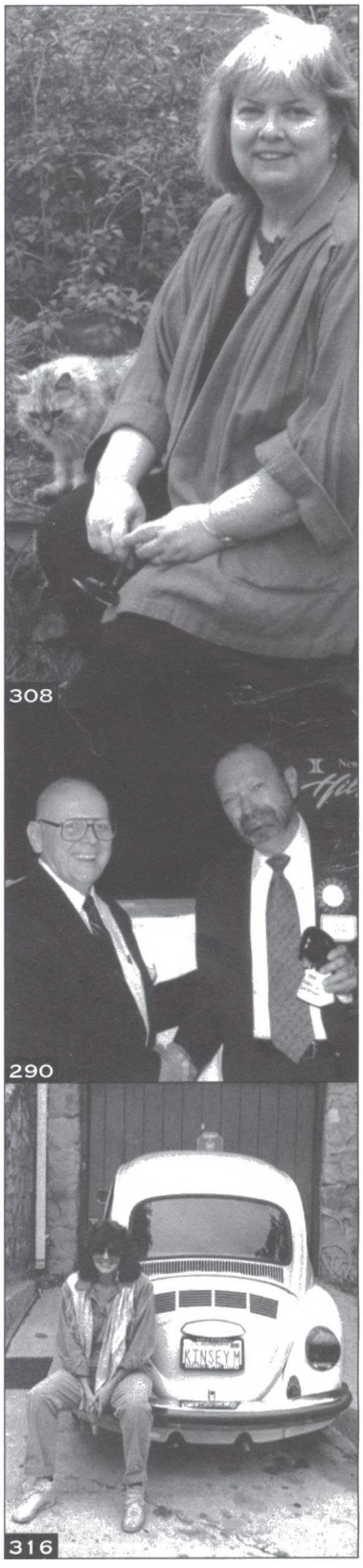

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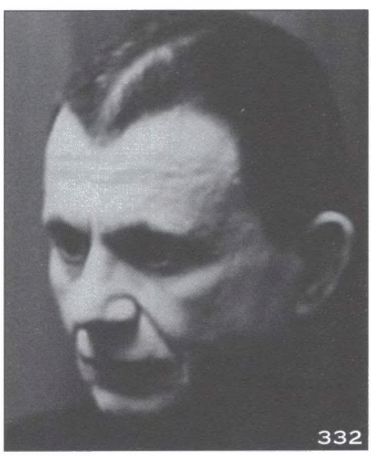
Cover photo courtesy of Margaret Maron



MISCELLANY

PUBLISHER
Judi Vause

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Elizabeth Foxwell

MANAGING EDITOR & ADVERTISING MANAGER
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Uneasy Chair

Some new steps in the danse macabre

A new partner steps into *The Armchair Detective*'s outstretched arms, perhaps wobbling a bit in the capacious shoes of Kate Stine who left *TAD* for new challenges with Agatha Christie Ltd. Faithful readers may recognize my byline from recent *TAD* articles (on the novels of Barbara Michaels and a "Mysterious Quest" in the UK with Dean James); or as a cofounder and now immediate past chair of the Malice Domestic convention; or as coeditor of such anthologies as *Malice Domestic 6* and *Murder They Wrote*.

I started my career with journalism (University of Maryland—College Park) and graduate school (Georgetown University), and moved into editorial work in education before I became consumed with the mysterious life. I am now an associate member of MWA, a member of the Detective/Mystery Section of the Popular Culture Association, and a fledgling author, due to publish my first mystery short story next year (with Berkley).

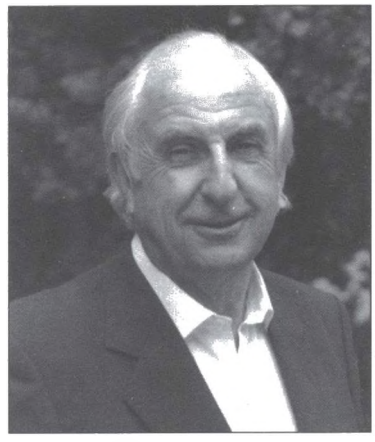
So I come to this floor with a variety of experiences and considerable excitement. These days, the mystery community resembles an exuberant hop more than a stately waltz. The range of partners from Albert to Zukowski; the growing works, including *TAD* articles, on the mystery's rich heritage; the study of mystery authors in libraries and high school and college classrooms; the array of mystery discussion groups and websites on the Internet; the national and international booksellers who provide a supportive and congenial atmosphere for the mystery's enjoyment—all comprise one dynamic dance card.

Among Stephen King's insights in his classic work *Danse Macabre* (1981) is his statement that the horror writer "is not interested in the civilized furniture of our lives" (4). It is much the same for the mystery writer. The civilized furniture may be in place, but the mystery writer is far more fascinated by the raw, often warped wood beneath the veneer of people's seemingly ordered lives. A crime acts as the mystery world's Bob Vila, stripping off layers of facade and careful artifice to reveal the bare truth—and often the rot—underneath.

I'll look forward to meeting you here on this floor in upcoming issues. Change partners, and dance.

Mystery at the Palace

This summer brought news of a British mystery writer on Queen Elizabeth II's Birthday Honors list. Michael Bond,



ANTHONY BARWELL

creator of the hapless *Guide Michelin* critic Monsieur Pamplemousse and his discerning dog Pommes Frites, received an OBE (Order of the British Empire) on June 13. Bond was recognized for his creation of Paddington, beloved bear and star of Bond's series for children.

In this issue...

Charles L.P. Silet examines Margaret Maron's approach to her novels of Southern discomfort...Laurie R. King provides a behind-the-scenes peek at the Edgar Awards process...Rachel Schaffer uncovers the black humor of Sue Grafton...H.R.F. Keating talks about his Bombay detective Inspector Ghote...Sparkle Hayter (aka Waif) experiences a classic New York mystery weekend with a cast of unsavory characters...Charles Heglar looks at a pioneering mystery novel by an author of the Harlem Renaissance...and much more.

ELIZABETH FOXWELL
Editor-in-Chief

Letters

The Mystery League—Solved

Dear *TAD*,

In Vol. 30, number 1, Geoffrey L. Jeffery asked about a *Mystery League Magazine*. I may be able to shed some light on his questions. The Mystery League was formed by The United Cigar Stores Company. The Mystery League published 30 books between 1930 and 1933. They were only 50 cents when other books at that time were going for $2 each. The quality varied, but they all had excellent dust jackets in an art deco style. The catch was that you could only buy them at United Cigar Stores or their affiliated drug stores. I have never heard of a magazine but the lettering is very similar to that used in the Mystery League's books. I couldn't make out the date on the cover; however, the story featured, "Drury Lane's Last Case," was first published in 1933.

RICK MATTOS
Vallejo, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE

Two unfortunate errors appeared in the "Past Mysteries, Present Masters" article in the spring issue. The French phrase attributed to Sharan Newman should have read, "plus ça change, plus ça même chose." Also, a moment, not momentum, was the smallest unit of time in the Middle Ages.

Mea maxima culpa.—*ed.*

THE ARMCHAIR DETECTIVE

presents

THE INDEPENDENT MYSTERY BOOKSELLERS ASSOCIATION

Mystery Best-Seller List

JANUARY–MARCH 1997

HARDCOVERS

1. *Three to Get Deadly,* Janet Evanovich
2. *The Cat Who Tailed a Thief,* Lilian Jackson Braun
   A Letter of Mary, Laurie R. King
4. *Trunk Music,* Michael Connelly
5. *Death in Lover's Lane,* Carolyn Hart
6. *Gone Fishin',* Walter Mosely
7. *Hornet's Nest,* Patricia Cornwell
8. *Endangered Species,* Nevada Barr
   The Echo, Minette Walters
10. *Night Dogs,* Kent Anderson

PAPERBACKS

1. *Jane and the Unpleasantness at Scargrave Manor,* Stephanie Barron
2. *A Monstrous Regiment of Women,* Laurie R. King
3. *Murder Bone by Bone,* Lora Roberts
4. *Name Withheld,* J.A. Jance
5. *Death at Daisy's Folly,* Robin Paige
6. *The Rosewood Casket,* Sharyn McCrumb
7. *Deadline,* John Dunning
8. *Rx for Murder,* Renee Horowitz
9. *Vanishing Act,* Thomas Perry
10. *Mean Streak,* Carolyn Wheat

THE FOLLOWING MYSTERY BOOKSTORES FURNISHED INFORMATION:

A Compleat Mystery Bookshop, Portsmouth, NH; Aunt Agatha's, Ann Arbor, MI; Clues Unlimited, Tucson, AZ; Deadly Passions, Kalamazoo, MI; Murder by the Book, Houston, TX; Murder by the Book, Portland, OR; Murder, Mystery & Mayhem, Farmington, MI; Mysterious Galaxy, San Diego, CA; The Mysterious Book Shop, New York, NY; Mystery Book Company, Tulsa, OK; The Mystery Book Store, Dallas, TX; Poe's Cousin, White Plains, NY; The Poisoned Pen, Scottsdale, AZ; The Rue Morgue, Boulder, CO; San Francisco Mystery Bookstore, San Francisco, CA; Seattle Mystery Bookstore, Seattle, WA; Snoop Sisters, Belleaire, FL; The Space-Crime Continuum, Northampton, MA.

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

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION WRITE TO:

Pam Jobin, Deadly Passions
157 S Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo MI 49007

THE CRIMINAL DOCKET

Magna Cum Murder: October 24–26, 1997, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. Guest of Honor: James Crumley; Mystery Masters Award winner: Lawrence Block; Master of the Revels: H.R.F. Keating; Mistress of the Revels: Sarah Caudwell; Magna Luminary: Patricia Moyes; Magna Luminary: Harlan Coben. Registration: $145. Information: Katherine Kennison, EB Ball Center, Ball State University, Muncie IN 47306; tel: (317) 285–8975; website: <http://www.parlorcity.com/secop/murder.html>.

Bouchercon 28: The World Mystery Convention, October 30–November 2, 1997, Monterey, California. Guests of Honor: Sara Paretsky and Ross Thomas (posthumously); Lifetime Achievement Award: Donald Westlake; Toastmaster: Julie Smith; Fan Guest of Honor: Cap'n Bob Napier (*Mystery & Detective Monthly*). Registration costs $100. Information: Bouchercon 28, PO Box 26114, San Francisco CA 94126; e-mail: <bchrcon97@aol.com>; website: <http://users.aol.com/bchrcon97/index.htm>.

Left Coast Crime 8: February 27–March 1, 1998, Bahia Hotel and Resort, Mission Bay, San Diego, California. Guest of Honor: Elizabeth George; Toastmaster: Alan Russell. Registration: $100. Information: Left Coast Crime, PO Box 900051, San Diego CA 92190; e-mail: <camera@mysurf.com>.

AZ Murder Goes...Alternatively: A gay and lesbian mystery symposium, February 13–15, 1998, Scottsdale, Arizona. Host: Steven Saylor; Guest of Honor: Val McDermid; Confirmed speakers: Nevada Barr, Laurie R. King, Michael Nava, Abigail Padgett, Lev Raphael, R.D. Zimmerman. Registration: $100. Information: AMGA, Box 908, Scottsdale AZ 85252; e-mail: <karen@poisonedpen.com>.

Malice Domestic X: May 1–3, 1998, Renaissance Hotel, Washington, DC. Guest of Honor: Robert Barnard; Toastmaster: Katherine Hall Page; Fan Guest of Honor: Maureen Collins; Ghost of Honor: Ellery Queen. Registration and Agatha Awards Banquet: $150. Regular (Non-banquet) registration: $100. This convention regularly sells out far in advance; it's best to register in the autumn. Information: Malice Domestic Ltd., PO Box 31137, Bethesda MD 20824; e-mail: <malice@erols.com>; website: <http://www.erols.com/malice>.

Murderous Affairs

BY

JANET A. RUDOLPH

The purpose of this space is to keep you informed about happenings in the mystery world. Since I first started writing this column, the mystery community has grown so much that it's hard to keep track of all the happenings, groups, meetings, mystery bookstores, and awards.

MYSTERY BOOKSTORE UPDATES

Since the last issue of *The Armchair Detective,* I have heard of some new mystery bookstores, changes in address, and unfortunately some closings.

Camilla Crespi, author of the Simona Griffo series, says that according to Sharon Villines's *Deadly Directory* (a valuable book—there's a second edition out), **Murder for Fun** in North Carolina is only a mail-order house and that the **Mystery House on Cape Cod** is no more since Jane Mendoza passed away.

Barbara Diehl wrote to say that **The Mystery Bookstore** in Omaha moved to a much larger space, 1422 S 13th St, Omaha NE 68108, tel: (402) 342–7343.

Rick Robinson e-mailed to say that **Mystery Ink** has moved back to Laguna Beach but not in the same place. They, or rather their inventory, are in the Church Brown bookstore. The address is 384 Forrest Ave, Laguna Beach CA 92651; tel: (714) 497–8373.

MYSTERY SOCIETIES AND PERIODICALS

The Historical Novel Society is a new group which promotes the historical novel in all its forms. Membership is £8 per year. Those who join receive a free copy of one of four books. Members also receive an annual bibliography of all historical novels currently in print with sections devoted to different subgenres (detective, saga, military, etc.); and two issues of the society's magazine, featuring the latest news, interviews, reviews, and original fiction. The Historical Novel Society, Dillons Bookstore, 252 High St, Exeter EX4 3PZ, England; tel: 011–44–139–242–3044.

Suomen Dekkariseura (roughly translated as "Finnish Whodunit Society") was founded in 1984 and has about 500–600 members (writers, journalists, scholars, and lots of ordinary readers of crime fiction). The society has published the quarterly magazine *Ruumiin kulttuuri* since 1984 and presents annually the prize "Clue of the Year" (since 1985). Usually it is awarded for the best crime novel of the previous year, but important achievements in other areas of the crime scene can be recognized (theater, research, publishing, etc.). Since it is the sole award for crime fiction in Finland, it reaps much publicity every year.

FYI: About 100 new crime books are published in Finland each year. Original Finnish ones number 15 to 20, with translations accounting for the rest (most of them from the United States and England). The population of Finland is 5 million people.

The **Ngaio Marsh Society International** was organized to celebrate Marsh's contributions to mysteries, theater, and the creative community as a whole. Two meetings per year (at Malice Domestic and Bouchercon). Informal activities in-between. Dues: $20/year. New members welcome. Check the Ngaio Marsh Society page on Nicole St. Johns's website: <http://www.blaze.net/chipmunkcrossing>, or send e-mail to: <johnstonstjohn@worldnet.att.net> or call (201) 891–0595.

The **Agatha Christie Appreciation Society** meets three times a year. Its newsletter, *The Poisoned Penletter,* is published three times a year and is $5/year for a subscription. The newsletter has featured tributes to Agatha Christie from Sue Grafton, Margaret Maron, Carolyn Hart, and Elizabeth George as well as other items of interest to a Christie fan. For further details, contact: The Agatha Christie Appreciation Society c/o Dorothy M. Carr, 61 E Northampton St #206, Wilkes-Barre PA 18701–3005.

If you're in England or elsewhere, contact: The Agatha Christie Society, PO Box 985, London SW1 9XA, England; e-mail: <agathachristie@dial.pipex.com>. The society plans to establish a U.S. branch soon.

The Mystery Readers Journal has entered its 13th year. Janet A. Rudolph, Editor. Issues in 1997 focus on Medical Mysteries, Mysterious Wilderness, Murder in Transit, and The Big Apple. *MRJ* is a review periodical and contains reviews and articles on a theme. For more information, contact: MRJ, PO Box 8116, Berkeley CA 94707, website: <http://www.murderonthemenu.com/mystery>.

The following is a list of upcoming mystery activities. There are some overlaps between groups, events, locations, and societies, but you're a mystery reader—use your detecting skills.

ARIZONA

February 1998: AZ Murder Goes... Alternatively. See "The Criminal Docket," page 262.

February 1999: AMG...British is planned for the second weekend in February.

CALIFORNIA

Ongoing: Mystery Readers International NorCal Chapter (East Bay) has an ongoing mystery discussion group. The last group focused on Contemporary British Mystery Fiction. Group meets Tuesdays, 7–9 pm. 166 Beau Forest Drive, Oakland (Montclair), RVSP at tel: (510) 339–2800. This group has been meeting for over 20 years. Janet A.

Rudolph, moderator.

Ongoing: Mystery Readers International book discussion group (San Francisco) meets the third Wednesday of the month. Call Lorraine Petty at (415) 753–0733 or write to PO Box 14757, San Francisco CA 94114–0757.

Ongoing: Book Discussion Group has resumed meeting at Mysterious Galaxy, San Diego. Every other Wednesday night from 7–8 at the store. 3904 Convoy St, #107. Also, check for signings. Call (619) 268–4747.

October 31–November 2, 1997: Bouchercon 28, Monterey. See "The Criminal Docket," page 262.

February 27–March 1, 1998: San Diego. Left Coast Crime. Bahia Hotel & Resort on Mission Bay. Guest of Honor: Elizabeth George, Toastmaster: Alan Russell. Author panels, coffee klatches, roundtable discussions, Saturday Night Cabaret. Registration: $100. Left Coast Crime, PO Box 900051, San Diego CA 92190; tel: (619) 268–4747; e-mail: <Camera@mysurf.com>.

Florida

Ongoing: MRI Chapter Meeting. Connie Ross of Melbourne, Florida, has a mystery readers group which has been meeting for two years. They meet monthly on the first Tuesday evening of each month to discuss a previously selected mystery. They are now officially the first MRI chapter in Florida. To find out more about this group (which meets in different homes), contact Connie Ross at 4156 Brentwood Ln, Melbourne FL 32934; tel: (407) 242–7386.

Iowa

Ongoing: Mystery Readers Club meets the first Tuesday of each month (except December), 7 pm at Borders Books recently relocated in Watertower Place, 40th & University in West Des Moines. Two books are discussed most months with occasional speakers or movie tie-ins. All mystery fans welcome.

Ongoing: Booked on Crime, Adult Mystery Readers Club, is associated with the Sioux City Public Library and meets in the Wilbur Aalfs Library, 529 Pierce St, Sioux City, on the 3rd Thursday of every month at 7 pm. Contact: Barbara J. Larsen, 2411 Deer Run Trail, Hornick IA 51026–8050; tel: (712) 876–2805.

Illinois

Ongoing: Joyce Welsch of The Mystery Nook, 1907 Knox St, Peoria, has a reading group called "Book 'Em" sponsored by the Peoria Public Library. The group meets the third Sunday of each month. Guest authors or speakers are asked to suggest their favorite author and book. Call (309) 672–8841 for location and more information.

Indiana

October 24–26, 1997: Magna Cum Murder IV. See "The Criminal Docket," page 262.

Michigan

Ongoing: The Mystery Mavens meet at 7 pm on the fourth Thursday of every month at Murder, Mystery & Mayhem, 35167 Grand River, Farmington MI 48335; tel: (810) 471–7210.

Minnesota

Ongoing: The Minneapolis chapter of Mystery Readers International meets at Once Upon a Crime, 604 W 26th St, Minneapolis MN 55405. For more information on discussions, call (612) 870–3785. Non-members encouraged to attend.

Ongoing: Saints And Sinners: Twin Cities Mystery Reading Group. Paperback mysteries selected by group in advance. First Saturday of the month, 1 pm, Barnes and Noble cafe area. Contact: Barbara Diehl, e-mail: <bdiehl@msus1.msus.edu>; tel: (612) 787–0858.

Nebraska

Ongoing: "Killing Time," a mystery bookgroup which meets in Omaha the first Tuesday of each month at the Village Book Store in Countryside Village from 7 to 8:30 pm. They discuss a book each meeting and have free-ranging discussions as well. All are welcome.

New York

Bogie's Mystery Tours®, the original interactive mystery event company, has public performances on Fridays and Saturdays at The Yankee Clipper, 170 John St, NY. For dinner reservations, call (212) 362–7569; or write to Bogie's Mystery Tours, 328 W 86 St, New York NY 10024.

Ongoing: Mystery Reading Group: Location: The Book House, Stuyvesant Plaza, Albany. Contact: Chris Myers, tel: (518) 235–0249; e-mail: <myers@albany.net>. Chris tells me that this group has been operating for almost three years. They started at Betsy Blaustein's Haven't Got A Clue until she moved to Saratoga Springs. Chris writes, "I find the group to be a lot of fun, and I would suggest that mystery fans should seek out a group in their area or start one if none exists."

Ohio

Starting up: Annette M. Houck recently moved to Ohio from San Francisco where she was a member of Lorraine Petty's MRI discussion group. She is looking for a group in Columbus to join or start. Contact her at (614) 459–6617.

Oklahoma

Ongoing: Oklahoma Mystery Writers (whose members are published writers, unpublished writers, and mystery fans) meets on the third Saturday of January, March, May, July, September, and November at 12:30 pm at the Western Sizzlin' Steak House, 21st & Sheridan, Tulsa for lunch followed by a speaker. Guests are welcome. Dues are $10/year. For more information, call Jean Hager at (918) 492–8614.

Oregon

Friends of Mystery is a non-profit literary/educational organization headquartered in Portland. For the past 15 years, it has presented lectures, organized conferences, sponsored reading groups, and published a regular newsletter. Its purpose is to promote the study and understanding of mystery.

Ongoing activities include Bloody Thursdays. All meetings are open to the public and begin at 7:30 pm on the Lower Level of the Northwest Service Center, 1819 NW Everett. Contact: Friends of Mystery, PO Box 8251, Portland OR 97207; tel: (503) 223–3519 [Stanley Johnson]; or (503) 241–0759 [Jay Margulies]. To receive an electronic copy of *The Blood-Letter,* their newsletter, send e-mail to <MysteryOrg@aol.com>.

Pennsylvania

Ongoing: There are currently six mystery book discussion groups at Mystery Lovers Bookshop. Detailed schedule can be found at their website <http://www.mysterylovers.com>. The oldest, at over three years, is the Mystery Book Group of the Allegheny County Bar Association. The youngest, at four months, is the Historical Mystery Group. They all enjoy fabulous food, friendship, and favorite mystery reading. The 3-year-old Mystery Writers Group meets twice a month for several hours to critique and the new Story Circle meets every two weeks. This summer, MLB plans to have a Boxcar Kid Mystery Reading Program.

Ongoing: Murder in the Library. A regular group which meets at the Pierce Library in Perkasie. Call the library for more information or e-mail Jenni Levy at <Levy_Smith@compuserve.com>.

October 3–5, 1997: Mid-Atlantic Mystery Bookfair and Convention. Holiday Inn, 4th and Arch Sts, Philadelphia. Meet the Authors party, panels, book room plus a special "How To Do It" track—an examination of the writing process. Contact: Deen Kogan, 507 S Eighth St, Philadelphia PA 19147; tel: (215) 923–0211.

October 1–4, 1998: Bouchercon. Philadelphia. Convention Hotel: The Wyndham Franklin Plaza in Center City. Registration Fee: $100. Contact: Bouchercon 29: c/o SHP, 507 S 8th St, Philadelphia PA 19147; tel: (215) 923–0211.

South Dakota

Ongoing: Murder by the Book meets at the Yankton Community Library the third Thursday of every month, 7–9 pm. For more information, call (605) 665–1004.

Vermont

Ongoing: Middlebury—A mystery readers group is looking for new members. They do simple potlucks in each other's homes once a month, and are always home by 9 pm. Contact: Jennifer Nelson, tel: (802) 388–7008.

Washington

Ongoing: Seattle Mystery Readers Club is now meeting in private homes on the third Wednesday night each month. Contact: Sandy Goodrick, tel: (206) 363–2541.

Ongoing: The Tacoma Borders Mystery group meets on Tuesdays from 7–8 pm. Contact: Gail Egbers, Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma WA 98447; e-mail: <EGBERSGL@plu.edu>.

Washington, D.C.

Ongoing: The Chesapeake-Potomac Chapter of Mystery Readers is now meeting the third Sunday of each month at the Writer's Center, 4508 Walsh St, Bethesda, Maryland. Contact Mike Taylor at (301) 490–7646; e-mail: <Michael.J.Taylor.1@gsfc.nasa.gov>.

Malice Domestic X. See "The Criminal Docket," page 262.

Wisconsin

September 30–October 3, 1999: Bouchercon '99. Milwaukee. PO Box 34128, Milwaukee WI 53234. Guest of Honor: Max Allan Collins. Toastmaster: Parnell Hall. Fan Guests of Honor: Bev De Weese and Maggie Mason. Milwaukee Hilton Hotel. Gary Warren Niebuhr and Ted Hertel, co-chairs.

Ongoing: Fond Du Lac: Mystery Book Discussion Group. Lorraine Gelly is the co-owner of a general used book store in Fond du Lac (60 miles north of Milwaukee). Last fall, she started a mystery book discussion group at the store which meets the first Thursday of each month at 7 pm. Contact: Lorraine Gelly, Amelia's Book House, 23 N Main St, Fond du Lac WI 54935; e-mail: <gelly@execpc.com>.

Caribbean

January 31–February 7, 1998: Suspense, Mystery, and Intrigue on the High Seas. From police thrillers to medical mystery to legal intrigue to romantic suspense, this is an opportunity to learn from the best in their field and improve your writing skills as you sail the eastern Caribbean on Norwegian Cruise Line's *The Norway* (formerly the *SS France*). Workshops, lectures, scavenger hunts, great food, and more. Keynote speaker: Nora Roberts (also writing as J.D. Robb), Elaine Raco Chase, Carole Nelson Douglas, Eileen Dreyer, Ruth Glick, Jennifer Crusie, Hugh Holton, Janet Rudolph, and more. Forensic and police specialists, screenwriters, bounty hunters. For information and reservations, contact: Patty Suchy, tel: (800) 432–6659 (9–5 EST); e-mail: <novelexp@erols.com>; website: <www.erols.com/novelexp>.

AWARDS

Although I write a special round-up column on awards, I like to keep readers apprised of new ones. Awards are a wonderful way to direct your reading. More and more awards are being given every year, and it's very exciting for readers as well as writers. Send me any information on awards you've been given or awards about which you've read.

Keijo Kettunen of Suomen Dekkariseura reports that **"The Clue of the Year 1997"** was given to the author Leena Lehtolainen for her novel *Luminainen* (The Snow Woman).

The New Mystery Short Story Award went to "The Music Lesson" by Rosemarie Santini.

Jameson Cole received the **Colorado Center for the Book Award** for best adult fiction for *A Killing in Quail County*.

Ellen Hart won the **Lambda Literary Award** in the Lesbian Mystery category for *Robber's Wine* (Seal).

The North American Branch of the International Association of Crime writers announced that *Rose* by Martin Cruz Smith (Random House) won the sixth annual **Hammett Prize** for a work of literary excellence in the field of crime writing.

Alaska author John Straley received the 1997 **Spotted Owl Award** offered by Friends of Mystery for his novel *The Music of What Happens* (Bantam, 1996). The Spotted Owl Award is given annually to the best mystery or detective novel by a Pacific Northwest writer. Named for the familiar Northwest bird, the award is designed to recognize the achievements of writers who use Northwest materials in detective fiction.

Agatha winners: awarded at Malice Domestic for traditional mystery works.

Best Novel: *Up Jumps the Devil* by Margaret Maron (Mysterious)

Best First Novel: *Murder on a Girl's Night Out* by Anne George (Avon)

Best Nonfiction: *Detecting Women 2* by Willetta Heising (Purple Moon Press)
Best Short Story: "Accidents Will Happen" by Carolyn Wheat (*Malice Domestic 5*, Pocket)
1997 Malice Domestic Lifetime Achievement Award: Emma Lathen

Arthur Ellis Awards: presented by the Crime Writers of Canada. The award, named for the nom de travail of Canada's official hangman, consists of a wooden gallows with a puppet suspended from it. If one pulls the cord attached to the puppet, it "dances" on the rope.
Best Novel: *Innocent Graves* by Peter Robinson
Best First Novel: *Death at Buckingham Palace* by C.C. Benison
Best Nonfiction: *The Cassock and the Croum* by Jean Monet
Best Short Story: "Dead Run" by Richard K. Bercuson, from *Storyteller*
Best Juvenile: *How Can a Frozen Detective Stay Hot on the Trail* by Linda Bailey

Edgar winners: awarded by Mystery Writers of America.
Best Novel: *The Chatham School Affair* by Thomas A. Cook (Bantam)
Best First Novel by an American Author: *Simple Justice* by John Morgan Wilson (Doubleday)
Best Paperback Original: *Fade Away* by Harlan Coben (Dell)
Best Critical/Biographical: *The Secret Marriage of Sherlock Holmes* by Michael Atkinson (University of Michigan Press)
Best Fact Crime: *Power to Hurt* by Darcy O'Brien (HarperCollins)
Best Short Story; "Red Clay" by Michael Malone (*Murder for Love*, Delacorte)

Ellery Queen Award: to honor writing teams and outstanding people in the mystery-publishing industry: François Guerif

Robert L. Fish Award: Best first short story by an American author: "The Prosecutor of Duprey" by David Vaughn (*EQMM*, Jan.)

Raven: For outstanding achievement in the mystery field outside the realm of creative writing: Marvin Lachman

1996 **Chester Himes Award**: awarded at the First Annual Chester Himes Conference, Oakland, California, to Gar Anthony Haywood.

1997 **Minnesota Book Award**: *Silent Words* by Joan Drury (Spinsters Ink.)

1996 **Glass Key Award**: awarded by the Skandinaviska Kriminalsällskapet (Crime Writers of Scandinavia) for the best Scandinavian mystery—Fredrik Skagen for *Nattsug*. The award is an actual glass key.

French National Crime Prize to Nevada Barr for *Firestorm*, the fourth in her series featuring park ranger Anna Pigeon.

I depend on you, faithful (and new!) readers of this column, to send me information, so I can spread the word to others. Please send updates, corrections, additions, and anything else you think relevant to: Janet A. Rudolph, Mystery Readers International, PO Box 8116, Berkeley CA 94707–8116 or e-mail: <whodunit@murderonthemenu.com>. Thanks. ■

Literary Loot

Compiled by Marvin Lachman

Selecting a subject for each of these compilations depends on my having a sufficient number of quotes. I'd love to do a column of quotations about quoting, but I could only find one. In *Sweet Death, Kind Death* (1984), Amanda Cross's Kate Fansler says: "Quoting, like smoking, is a dirty habit to which I am devoted."

There are many quotations about sex, love, and marriage. Once, in the mystery (as in life), they seemed to be the same. (Think of Mr. and Mrs. North.) Now, in our society, they are related—but too often separate.

The Mysteries of Sex, Love, and Marriage

"...still seeking the perfect wife and who hadn't yet settled for someone he loved instead."

—Catherine Aird, *A Late Phoenix* (1970)

"...his club in St. James, where old men who had sodomized each other at school shook their heads over the younger generation."

—Robert Barnard, *Death of a Mystery Writer* (1978)

Regarding an affair between two actors: "I knew that if I dusted Amy for prints, I'd find Buck's in all the wrong places."

—Joyce Burditt, *Buck Naked* (1996)

"If it weren't for R-rated movies, I'd have no sex life at all."

—Jill Churchill, *Silence of the Hams* (1996)

"It was easier in my day; safe sex meant when your parents weren't home."

—B. Comfort, *The Cashmere Kid* (1993)

"...like most American males, married from the neck down."

—Dorothy Salisbury Davis, "Meeting at the Crossroads" (*EQMM*, July 1959)

"He'd had two earlier marriages that had gone sour, the last on the eve of the wedding."

—Earl Emerson, *The Million Dollar Tattoo* (1996)

"It's just as easy to love a wealthy man as a poor one. And it's a lot easier to marry him."

—Frank Gruber, *Simon Lash, Private Detective* (1941)

Regarding a poor scholar willing to marry for money: "The price of pride was, as usual, beyond his means."

—Sharyn McCrumb, *Sick of Shadows* (1984)

A character known for keeping his sex drive in check says, "I'm not called the North American continent for nothing."

—William P. McGivern, *Very Cold for May* (1950)

When someone notes she and a police detective have been seeing a lot of each other, Jenny Cain says, "Oh well, you know. Murder breeds familiarity."

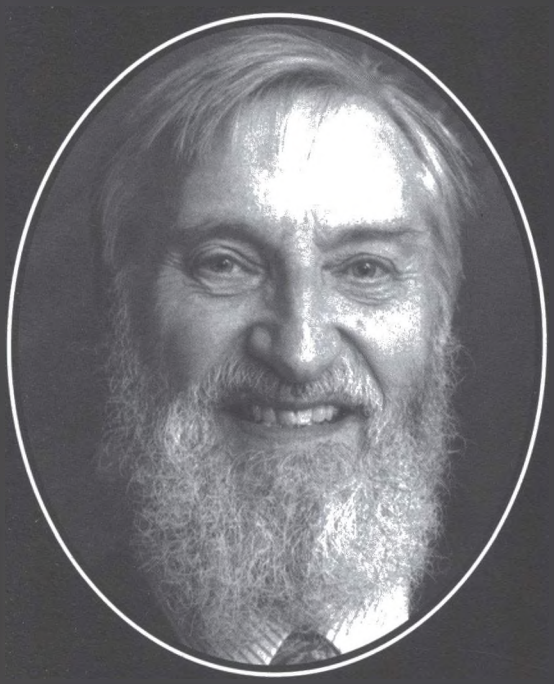
—Nancy Pickard, *Generous Death* (1984)

Inspector Bone comments on a bored wife trying to seduce him: "Lady Herne playing social games was not about to get him as opponent, partner, teammate, or, conceivably, quarry."

—Susannah Stacey, *Goodbye, Nanny Gray* (1988)

"Nothing is worse than having a nice sex fantasy interrupted by the memory of murder."

—Valerie Wolzien, *Murder at the PTA Luncheon* (1988)



A PASSAGE TO INDIA

An Interview with H.R.F. Keating

Henry Reymond Fitzwalter Keating—Harry to friends and acquaintances—was born in St. Leonard-on-Sea, a coastal town in Sussex, in 1926. Though his father was a headteacher, Keating initially was educated at a school away from his parents. The Second World War and subsequent evacuation dictated otherwise, and attending the school at which his father taught had both advantages and disadvantages. Keating recalls, "I was allowed to bathe in my parents' bathroom while the boys had theirs in rather lean, austere school-type baths and I always felt terribly guilty about this. Also, sometimes I would hear some gossip about the staff which I knew I shouldn't pass on, but was terribly tempted to do. It was an awkward period."

After taking his degree at Trinity College, Dublin—where Keating won the vice-chancellor's prose prize—he chose a journalism career. Returning to England, he undertook a three-year stint at a regional newspaper as sub-editor. Moving on to *The Daily Telegraph* in 1956, he left it in 1958 to work for *The Times* in both cases in the same capacity. Instead of the excitement that the job title of sub-editor might suggest, the work involved was somewhat disappointing. "In America sub-editors are called 'rewrite-men,'" Keating explains. "It means you sit there and you receive a reporter's copy and you decide how long it should be, you write the headline, and check the text for spelling, etc." The future mystery author found the work terribly dull. "I would go to work every day," he says, "treading the same paving stones to the same office to sit in the same chair, and all around you'd hear people asking your friends, who were reporters, "Got your passport with you?" or "Who's going off to Africa this afternoon?"

Yet Keating also has happy memories. "When I went to work for *The Times* one of the senior people came up to me and whispered—they all whispered at *The Times*—'That used to be the chair that Graham Greene sat in,' and I thought "My golly, will his influence seep up from it still?"

Keating acknowledges that working as a rewrite man helped him in his future writing career. When he finally started to write fiction, he also was able to break some of the rules he previously was expected to enforce. "*The Telegraph,*" he says, "had a regulation that you should never use the word 'very.' Either it was 'red' or it was not 'red,' but it was never 'very red.' It really took me years to be able to say something was 'very.' Eventually, when writing the Ghote books I was able to say, 'very, very.'"

It was his wife, actress Sheila Mitchell, who persuaded her husband to give fiction writing a go. "Sheila said to me, 'Oh, you must write! You like detective stories don't you, why not write one of those?,' and so I did. I wrote one, I wrote another, I wrote a third, which was then published, and that is how I started, really."

PHOTO ©DOMINIC TURNER

Adrian Muller is a freelance journalist based in Bristol, England, specializing in profiles of crime fiction authors.

BY ADRIAN MULLER

In 1996, ten years after the Crime Writers' Association (CWA) first established the Diamond Dagger, H.R.F. Keating was the eleventh recipient of this prestigious life-time achievement award for outstanding service to crime fiction. With his background it was more than appropriate that Keating should be so honored.

The author's first crime novel was published in 1959. Five years and an equal number of books later, he won a Gold Dagger for *The Perfect Murder*. It was this book that introduced his best-known creation: Ganesh Ghote, the Indian police inspector from Bombay.

Since then, Keating has gone on to write some forty crime novels and numerous articles and reference books on the subject. For fifteen years he reviewed the genre for *The [London] Times*. He has served as the chairman of the CWA, and is currently the president of the famed Detection Club. The following is an overview of a career still in progress.

The first H.R.F. Keating novel to be accepted by a publisher was *Death and the Visiting Firemen*, and the author found his inspiration for the plot in his earlier personal experiences as a journalist in Swindon. "I'd gone on a coach and four [horses] trip taking loyal greetings to the new Queen on Coronation Day," the author recalls. "The paper decided they'd like to send me along, all dressed up in a hired coat and a hat. I also borrowed a scarf from this girl I was interested in at the local rep called Sheila Mitchell." He continues, "So, I learnt a little about what happens in a coach and four and I decided to use that as a background together with a story I had covered when some American fire prevention officers came to a conference in Britain. In those days, the 1950s, most people didn't fly, they came by liner instead. In my book I had a coach and horses waiting to meet them at Southampton, and the plot developed from there."

Keating tried to find different, curious, and original settings for each of the books that followed, and the fifth was supposed to be just another in a series of one-off novels. However, in an attempt to break into the American market, he set the book, *The Perfect Murder*, in India and made the protagonist a Bombay policeman called Ganesh Ghote.

"What American publishers complained about," the author explains, "was that my books were too British. In those days they weren't altogether as much in favor of the cozy as they are nowadays, and when it won the Gold Dagger, and was subsequently published in America, everybody said, 'Oh you should go on with Inspector Ghote.'"

It made perfect sense to continue with the sleuth because India was very much in the news at the time. Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister, was a popular world leader, and the Beatles were visiting the country on spiritual retreats.

Having never visited India himself when he started writing *The Perfect Murder*, Keating was given much information by Wally Olins, a prominent advertising executive who had just returned from Bombay. The Keatings—Harry by now had married Sheila—met Olins when he gave them a lift to a party.

"In those days"' Keating recalls with a smile, "what you did if anybody was giving you a lift was you gave them a drink—as you do *not* do now! I can see him standing there with whatever drink I'd given him and I said 'You've been to India, I've been thinking of setting a crime novel there.' 'Marvellous idea,' Olins said, 'any help I can give you and I'll cable Bombay.'"

Once he had decided on the location, the author read everything he could about India. Keating says, "One day I was sitting in the corner reading a geography book about India when suddenly this man came into my head. I was going to call him Ghosh because I thought of him as being—as I am too—naïve. I heard him saying 'Oh gosh! What is that?' In the answer I could then explain to the reader whatever unlikely bit of Indian lore it was. I sent a short synopsis to my friend Wally Olins and he answered me in a panic saying, 'You say this book is set in Bombay but Ghosh is a Bengali name. It is as wrong as calling a French detec-

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Source: The St James Guide to Crime and Mystery Writers

tive Ivan Ivanovich!' It was Wally who suggested 'Ghote' which turned out to be quite a good name except that nobody knows how to pronounce it. So in the early days we used to add G-O-T-A-Y in brackets after his name on the blurb of the book jacket, and even that isn't quite right because the first sound is a breathed G. I remember once being interviewed by Marghanita Laski, a famous lady known for her very firm opinions, and she said, 'You pronounce it "Hokay," don't you?' I was too shy to say, 'Well, not quite as violently as that.' People still come up to me and say I love that Inspector Goat."

Ghote is very much linked to the author's own personality. "Like Ghote," he says, "I am reasonably shy and diffident myself and, though we both do manage to overcome it, I like to think that the shy get their rewards. Ghote gets his reward by discovering things brasher policemen do not. I put myself into this Indian and, when he's faced with a situation that I have devised for him, I ask myself, 'What would I feel?' I then translate this into what an Indian policeman hopefully might feel."

Some ten years after H.R.F. Keating had written the first Ghote novel, he finally visited India. A war with neighboring Pakistan had cancelled an earlier planned visit. One morning in 1975, a letter arrived from Air India. The company, hearing that the author had never visited the country he had written so much about, offered him a return flight to India. Keating's immediate reaction was not what one might expect. "I thought, 'When I actually smell some of those horrible smells and see the beggars with sores and everything, will it put me off?' I think it might have done except that I had actually imagined it so firmly that I didn't have the cultural shock that people frequently get when they see that side of India," the author says.

Six months after returning from his trip to India, Keating went back, this time with a BBC television crew in tow. "They made this documentary

NOVELS AS EVELYN HERVEY

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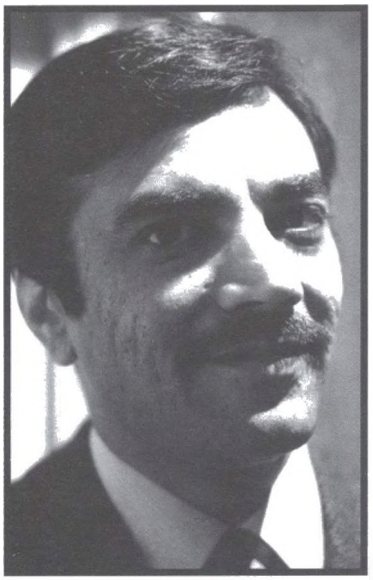
which was about me, Bombay, and the Bombay police, and it was a very nice experience," Keating remembers.

Throughout the Ghote novels the Bombay detective has acquired several sidekicks to accompany him, with Axel Svennson, in *The Perfect Murder*, as the first. "Again I was attempting not to be too English for the American publishers. Instead of an Englishman, I went for European of some other sort. I didn't want to make him American because I wasn't too comfortable with the speech patterns. There were a lot of Scandinavian influences around at that time, and it was shortly after the death of Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary-General of the United Nations," Keating explains. *Dead on Time* is one of his favorite Ghote novels because of a female helper who is always late. He also mentions the American sidekick in *Inspector Ghote Caught in Meshes*. The American was created by the author in the hope that the book might attract Hollywood attention. "I asked a friend who wrote film scripts, 'If I want this book to be attractive to filmmakers, what should I put in?' The friend thought for a moment and said, 'Well, of course you must have a pretty girl, and then you must have a part for Gregory Peck.' So I named Ghote's American co-hero Gregory—nudge, nudge—Strongbow. Many of my books have had some mild interest from film people, but never that one."

The book that was adapted for the big screen was *The Perfect Murder*, a film produced by Ismail Merchant (*A Room with a View, The Remains of the Day, Shakespeare Wallah*). Keating has mixed feelings about the experience. "Going out for the shooting of *The Perfect Murder* and actually hearing Indian actors saying these lines, some of which were exactly as they are in the book—that was fantastic. Also, I got to see a good deal more of Bombay because the whole thing was done on location."

Keating wrote the script with the director Zafar Hai and they got on well together. However, *The Perfect Murder* had a downside. "Since it was his first



ZIA MOHGEDDIN, THE FIRST TELEVISION INSPECTOR GHOTE.

feature film," Keating says, "Zafar was a little inexperienced. As a director, you've got to be tough with your actors and Zafar was very sweet but not very tough. So from that point of view it wasn't entirely successful. I, on my part, had never written a film script. When we were working on the first draft together, he stared at me with his big brown eyes and said, 'Harry, there's something called the grammar of film...,' and I had blithely ignored the grammar of the film. Though gradually, under his tuition, I did learn a little about the effect of a cut, a fade, and all of that, but I really would have been happier if the film had been made by more experienced people."

Ghote also appeared on television. The first program was an adaptation of *Inspector Ghote Hunts the Peacock,* which was scripted by Hugh Leonard, the Irish playwright; Zia Mohgeddin played the Bombay detective. Thames Television also produced an original synopsis written by Keating. "They suggested I bring Ghote over to Britain because they didn't like the notion of working in India," Keating explains. "I devised a plot where Ghote, played by Simon Dastor, comes over to Britain. It also starred Irene Worth, and it was so successful that they asked for a further six episodes, but when I came to write the script for the second one, I found I wasn't a TV writer." Several other scriptwriters, including Rex Harrison's son Carey, wrote further treatments, but Thames lost interest and the series idea was dropped.

Less well-known, and created earlier than Ghote, is Mrs. Craggs, a charlady who made her first appearance when Keating was asked to write five stories for BBC Radio's *Woman's Hour.* The writer wondered, "Five... What five?" before coming up with the idea of the five senses. "I vaguely had the notion of a charlady. Since she was successful on the radio, I then put Mrs. Craggs in the book *Death of a Fat God.*"

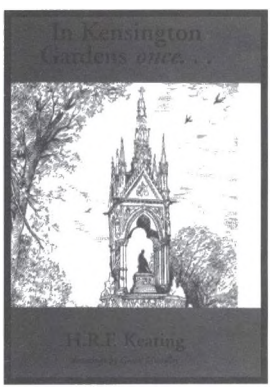
Over the years, Keating wrote numerous stories about Mrs. Craggs. They were published in various crime fiction magazines, and together they appear in the collection *Mrs. Craggs: Crimes Cleaned Up.*

Another female series-protagonist created by the author is Victorian governess Harriet Unwin, written under the pseudonym Evelyn Hervey. "They came about when my agent said to me, 'Harry, could you diversify and make us a bit more money?'" Keating says with a smile. "We were having a lunch which went on and on, and got boozier and boozier. First of all, I said 'I'll write them under another name,' and then I wondered, 'Why don't I write them under a female name?'. After another glass of wine, it became 'Why don't I write under a name which could be both male or female?' So that is how Evelyn Hervey came into existence. Hervey was one of my father's names," Keating adds.

As a longtime reviewer of crime fiction, and also chairman of the CWA, Keating seems an ideal person to ask why, in Britain, the genre does not seem to receive the attention it enjoys in the United States.

"I suppose some of it is Agatha Christie's fault," says Keating. "I've a great admiration for her work, but she was so successful with seemingly undemanding plots... When I meet people at parties and they ask what I do, they always say 'However do you think up those Agatha Christie plots?' It's an immediate reaction."

As for the lack of reviews in newspapers and magazines, Keating generously says, "It could be said that I collaborated in this. When *The Times* asked me to review, they asked me to write about 300 words on one book, and then get in as many capsule reviews as possible. I think the then-literary editor said, just off the cuff, thirty words each. I took this as a challenge. Could I say something about a book in thirty words? I allowed myself the title and publisher, they didn't count, and in tight circumstances I would write thirty-one or thirty-two words. Words I could reasonably put a hyphen in between counted as one. Perhaps when readers of *The Times* saw these nine books reviewed in a column space of less than nine inches they vaguely thought, 'This can't be all that important or good,' but it was a very good exercise in saying what a book was actually about, what its virtues were."



When reviewing, Keating would judge the books based on the promise of their contents. "I could make myself be equally enthusiastic about a spy story, a hard-boiled novel, or a cozy, as long as they were written truthfully. I tend not to like very violent plots because I often feel the authors put in violence for the sake of it. A book I'm very fond of is Len Deighton's *Violent War,* which is set in Los Angeles at the time of the riots. It has scenes of horrifying violence, but he wrote it because he wanted to look at violence rather than wanting to give his readers a thrill."

Having written traditional crime fic-

tion for years, H.R.F. Keating did a complete turnabout in the early '90s and wrote the first in a series of police procedurals with hard-boiled elements. Inspiration came from a newspaper headline. "I was walking along," he says, "and I saw the front-page of this newspaper: MILLION POUNDS POOLS WIN!. I started thinking what could I do with a million pounds and realized that it wouldn't be all good getting that much money. Then I thought 'Maybe I could write about that?' So I had this detective inspector who accidentally wins a million pounds, and I wrote about the complications that entails." Having written *The Rich Detective*, Keating decided he would write about various other detectives who have particular dilemmas in their work. Since *The Rich Detective* he has written about a good, a bad, and a soft detective respectively. The last will be published in January '98.

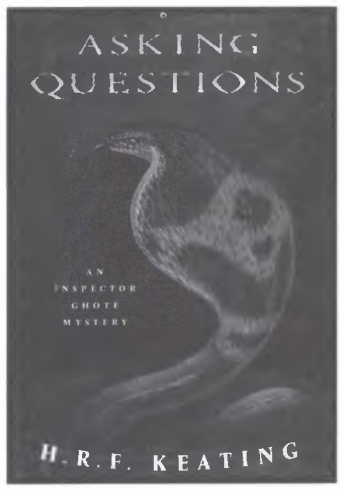
Fans of Keating's cozier Ghote police procedurals might find the four-letter words in these far grittier novels shocking, and there are also less-than-happy endings to contend with. "I didn't want to make them hard-boiled for the sake of putting in viciousness," the author says. "I wanted to make them as real as possible. In fact my editor was a bit iffy about the ending of the first one but I insisted on having it. I think she just had doubts because they were such a departure."

H.R.F. Keating's most recent book is *In Kensington Gardens Once*, a collection of short stories published by Flambard Press in Britain, and Crippen & Landru in the United States. "I often walk in Kensington Gardens before breakfast and one morning I suddenly realised that I had written four or five stories set in the gardens—one them is a Mrs. Craggs. Usually short stories disappear into limbo once they have been published in a magazine and, because I liked some of them particularly, I decided to collect them and I eventually persuaded Peter and Margaret Lewis of Flambard Press to do the book." Accompanying the stories are twelve illustrations by Gwen Mandley, a friend of the Keatings.

Keating is now working on his latest Ghote novel. "I've had it in my head for a long time. A year or so before he died, Julian Symons asked me what the next Ghote was going to be called—at the time I thought this was going to be the next book—and I said *Bribery, Corruption Also*. 'Good title!' Julian said, and the title was set in stone from that moment on."

As illustrated in *Bribery, Corruption Also*, the germ of Keating's ideas for novels lie in human behavior. "This is how I really start: I want some aspect of human behavior which interests me particularly, and in this book it is bribery. We tend to think of it as a bad thing, especially in the media. It actually can be quite a good thing. It oils the wheels of society, and it gets things done. Of course there is a moment where bribery turns into corruption and becomes something negative, but where do you draw that line?" Having decided on the subject, Keating writes a first draft, and once that is completed he will go over it again adding detail. Once he actually starts writing, completing a manuscript will take about six months.

When H.R.F. Keating was asked to diversify, his first thought was, "I can't



give up Ghote," and fortunately for his fans, he agreed to alternate his Ghote series with other novels. "He develops along with me I think. I've found that this character was someone you could confront with quite different situations and he would discover different things about himself and about life by doing that. He really gets broader with each successive book," Keating concludes. ■

Circumstantial Evidence

By

Kathryn Kennison

Writers are endlessly fascinating creatures—imaginative, creative, bright, and witty. This column is devoted to mystery writers and their works, both the books that give us so much pleasure and the writers themselves.

Ralph McInerny once said, "I don't work, I'm a writer." That's not exactly true; Ralph seems to be working all the time. He is director of the Jacques Maritain Center and the Michael P. Grace Professor of Medieval Studies at the University of Notre Dame where he is now writing the Gifford lectures for delivery at the University of Glasgow in 1999. These lectures on natural theology are part of a 200-year-old tradition at four Scottish universities—Edinburgh, Aberdeen, St. Andrews, and Glasgow—and have featured such luminaries as William James, Gabrielle Marcel, Josiah Royce, Alfred North Whitehead, and Alfred Toynbee. Ralph's new Notre Dame series debuts in the fall with *Upon This Rockne,* to be followed next year by *Irish Tenure.* The working title for the next Fr. Dowling is *Hic Jacet.* In the following, Ralph talks about the writing process:

> The time came when he looked around and realized that he was the oldest person in the room, and the subject was the past.

"That sentence formed itself in my mind a week ago, at a time when I simply did not have the time to write the story of which it would have been the opening line. It's not that I had a clear idea what would have come next, but there are moments when one can begin and moments when the moment has passed.

"Some writers say they devote a lot of thought to their writing, beforehand, or between bouts of actual writing. I try to drive from my mind all thought of what I am currently working on, except of course when I am working on it.

"Writers, like snowflakes, differ from one another. I retain great curiosity about how others do or have written—the places, the amount, the instruments. Do they work from an outline or just begin?

"I have always been fascinated by writers who plan their story before they begin it, make an outline, think of the characters, know when the plot will veer this way or that. Sinclair Lewis wrote a lengthy treatment before beginning a novel, sometimes 25–30 pages single spaced. From time to time, I have attempted this method.

"A couple years ago, on a flight to the coast, I began to write what I thought of as my 'Mauriac novel,' proceeding as if it were a screen treatment. I moved forward through the story, larded it with dialogue, sketched out crucial scenes, built to a whammo ending. Thirty-four pages, single spaced. From time to time, I take it out and look at it. Then I put it away again. I will never write that novel. Too bad. It would have been...well, of course, all unwritten novels are better than written ones.

> There came a time when he looked around and realized that he was the oldest person in the room, and the subject was the past.

"Ah, yes."

Donald Westlake's most recent book *The Ax,* is, in the words of *Publishers Weekly,* "a mesmerizing chiller." It will also be terrifyingly real to anyone who has lost a job due to corporate downsizing and experienced firsthand the desperation of a middle-aged, middle manager who suddenly cannot support his middle-class lifestyle, and has little chance of finding anything. It's dark, morally ambiguous, and full of carefully suppressed rage that turns mild-mannered family man Burke DeVore into a calculating serial killer. I asked Don about the genesis of this novel.

"My father was beaten by the Depression, and never quite recovered. All the time I was growing up, he had temporary or marginal jobs—traveling salesman, bookkeeper, state government clerk, real estate agent. We were poor white-collar, which meant we could never relax and *show* poverty.

"The more aware I became of the recent social spasm of downsizing, the more I was reminded of my father, except that his case was general. Everybody was battered by the Depression, and some came out of it better than others. But these current people don't have that common experience of being suddenly marginal in every way; in society, in economics, in class. They're facing it alone, without even the thin relief of the shared boot-camp of the Depression.

"I thought, when does the silent desperation, the simple desire just to go on belonging, turn to anger? Who would finally get angry, and where would the anger lead? Burke (murder by strangulation) Devore (devour) is victim and victimizer, in a society self-destructing."

Look for Don's new Richard Stark novel, *Comeback,* featuring career criminal Parker, in October from Mysterious Press. This is the first Stark novel since 1974, and will be followed by *Backflash* in 1998. There are no Dortmunder novels in the immediate future, but he, and his hapless band of inept crooks will be back eventually.

Peter Lovesey and his lovely wife Jax moved in June from a village near Bath in England's West Country to Chichester, on the south coast. "We both love the sea and we're just a short walk from the harbor now," Peter says, "and instead of two buses a week, we have three every hour going into

town." But what are the prospects for his prize-winning Bath detective, Peter Diamond, soon to appear in his fifth novel, *Upon a Dark Night* (Mysterious Press)? Will Diamond transfer to Chichester? "Unlikely," says Peter. "It took me 10 years to get to know Bath well enough to write about it. I'm close enough to return there on research trips. And from this safe distance, I can let outspoken old Diamond be as rude as he likes about that genteel Georgian city." The first in the Peter Diamond series is Anthony award winner *The Last Detective*. Second in the series is *Diamond Solitaire,* followed by *The Summons* and *Bloodhounds,* both of which were awarded the Silver Dagger by the British Crime Writers Association.

Meanwhile, back in New York, you can scrape **Shelly Reuben** off the ceiling, she's so high on the new book she just finished. It's called *The Last Fire on Sabbath Street*. The title begs the question—where was the first one? How many have there been? And where on earth is Sabbath Street? We'll find out in due course; she just turned the book over to her agent.

In June, Shelly told aspiring authors about fire at this year's Of Dark and Stormy Nights workshop in Chicago, sponsored by the Midwest Chapter of MWA—kudos to Bill Spurgeon for yet another workshop well done! Also in June, she was a guest speaker at the Landscapes of Mystery conference at Penn State University. Look for her this fall at the Mid-Atlantic Book Fair and Convention in Philadelphia, hosted by the tireless Deen Kogan. Shelly will be attending with her husband and arson guru, Charlie King. After Charlie's recent surgery, he's back to working his usual 10- to 12-hour days, and once again up to his elbows in ashes and soot.

This summer, Shelly will be researching her next book with the New York State Police and the New York City Ballet. This is the woman who gave us the Edgar-nominated *Julian Solo,* and the arson novels, *Origin and Cause* and *Spent Matches,* which cover classic cars and the Pre-Raphaelite painters, respectively, and arson. So who knows *what* to expect from troopers and tutus!

William Marshall has been writing for nearly 30 years and has quite a following—and deservedly so. His novels *The New York Detective* and *Faces in the Crowd* are both wonderful mixtures of crime, comedy, tragedy, history, and bathos set in 1880s New York City. I asked Bill how he and his wife, Mary, are keeping busy these days, and he said:

"At the moment, I'm working away on the 16th and last Yellowthread Street mystery called *To the End* set in the days of the pre-June 1997, Chinese takeover of Colonial Hong Kong—in fact, set in the very last week of it; and planning with the next Yellowthread Street, to keep my gang of lunatics on at the Yellowthread Street Police Station, Hong Bay, no longer as the personifications of British law and order in the place, but instead as the personifications—representing only they and God knows what—of the...wait for it...*Confucian Harmony Squad.*

"As Captain Kirk said in one of the Star Trek movies when asked how he felt facing impossible odds and the end of all civilization as we know it, 'Hmmm. Sounds like fun....'

"On a personal level, after 16 books in the old pre-takeover Hong Kong series and the happy prospect of more in the new one, and nine and a half years living in the United States (a record for anywhere!) planning to head off to Asia and points west for a year or two to recharge. And also, and very close to my heart, spend some time with my 2-year-old granddaughter in Australia who I've never seen, and, for as long as I can get away with it, appear very old, very wise, and, most difficult of all in what I do for a living, very staid and respectable.

"Then, once the game is up, I plan to come back home to Pennsylvania and wait for her to visit me and try her best to appear very old, very wise, and—probably the most difficult for her if she's anything like her mother, my daughter—very staid and respectable!

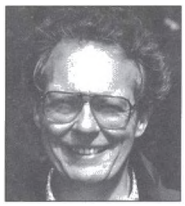
"What the hell. Like all we happy readers and writers of mysteries—always ready to be shocked, surprised, amazed, and delighted—I'll believe in almost anything!!"

Bill also told me, to my dismay, that there are no immediate plans for another New York Detective novel, but hinted that the siren song of Manhattan might be too great to resist when they return to the United States in two or three years. Hope springs eternal....

Not long ago I read *Virgin Heat* by **Laurence Shames**, and found it to be the sweetest Mafia story I ever read. It's about Angelina, steadfast and true, who, at age 17, believes that she has found her one true love in Sal. Then he disappears, after providing the evidence that sent Angie's Mafia don father to prison for nine years. The consequences for Sal include extensive reconstructive surgery to alter his appearance, a new line of work, and a new place to live far from New York City, all compliments of the Federal Witness Protection Program. Just as Dad comes back to reclaim his rightful position in the family and the mob, Angie stumbles across a clue that will ultimately lead her to Sal in his new identity. There's a kind of "once-upon-a-time" feeling to this novel that leads inevitably to a somewhat skewed happily-ever-after ending. Nobody does this better than Larry, whose other delightful books include *Scavenger Reef, Florida Straits, Sunburn,* and *Tropical Depression,* all set (for the most part) in Florida, but not the same Florida as Hiaasen, Willeford, Hall, and MacDonald. Shames's Florida is a promised land for refugees from cold, bleak northern climes looking for second chances at life and love. I asked Larry what he and his wife, Marilyn, have planned for the next few months.

"I leave Key West on June 4 and will pass the summer shepherding the next novel, *Mangrove Squeeze,* through revisions and into production for a March '98 release (Hyperion); I also expect to be writing a screenplay of *Sunburn,* which is in the process of being optioned for the second time. The question of *where* I'll be doing this remains deliciously unsettled. Top contenders are Santa Fe and western North Carolina. What my wife and I require is this: someplace awesomely beautiful, with clay tennis courts, good trout fishing and hiking, three congenial restaurants, a place to buy arugula, a decent wine merchant, and maybe a summer opera season. As some of my characters might say, 'Zis too f***in' much t'ask?' "

That's the news for now. See you here in the next issue. ■



Novel Verdicts

By Jon L. Breen

Explanation of symbols:

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

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

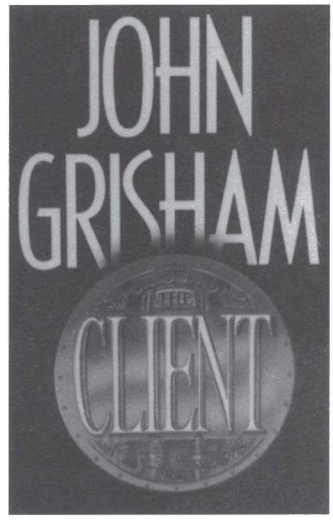
1/4: One-quarter or more devoted to courtroom action.

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

C: A collection of short stories or novelettes.

Peter Ackroyd
The Trial of Elizabeth Cree
New York: Doubleday, 1995. **(B)**
Transcript extracts from the 1881 trial of Elizabeth Cree, accused of the arsenic murder of her husband, alternate with a narrative of the search for the Limehouse Golem, a Jack-the-Ripper-ish serial killer, and with first- and third-person accounts of Elizabeth's eventful life, including her acquaintance with British music-hall legend Dan Leno. Karl Marx and novelist George Gissing also appear. Not really a courtroom book, but an elegantly written literary thriller that packs a real wallop in its surprise ending.

John Grisham
The Client
New York: Doubleday, 1993. **(B)**
Eleven-year-old Mark Sway, who witnessed the suicide of New Orleans lawyer Jerome Clifford, has some dangerous information: where the body of murdered U.S. Senator Boyd Boyette was hidden. As a result, both the U.S. attorney and the mob are after him, and he seeks help from unconventional child advocate attorney Reggie Love. Grisham's fourth novel, following the non-courtroom bestsellers *The Firm* and *The Pelican Brief,* was better as a movie—the book is padded and the young hero is only sporadically convincing—but the courtroom action is fine. In a Memphis Juvenile Court hearing before Judge Harry Roosevelt, possibly the best-realized character, the U.S. attorney, who wants the judge to compel Mark to tell what he knows, charges the child with obstruction of justice. Later, there is a brief sequence in Federal Court in New Orleans where the new lawyer of Barry the Blade Muldanno, accused of the Boyette murder, requests a continuance. (Characters repeatedly claim Boyette was the first U.S. senator to be murdered while in office. What about Robert F. Kennedy?)



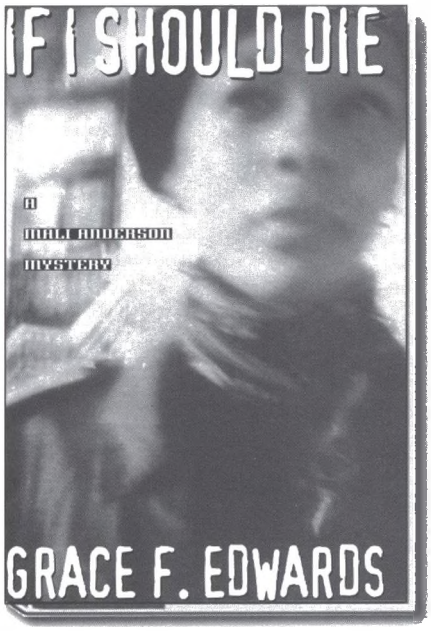
Harry Stephen Keeler
The Defrauded Yeggman
New York: Dutton, 1937. **(B)**
Keeler ventures into the "future war" genre. In 1942, Mexican revolutionary Madman Lopez declares war on Harleysburg, Texas, the town that had made the mistake of selling his deceased brother's skull. The Pickford Motion Picture Palace is the site of a court-martial for espionage of three hoboes. The names under which the defendants are tried are John Doe, Robert Roe, and Copernicus X—this was, I hasten to point out, years before the prominence of the Black Muslims. After 32 pages of court action, including expectedly loose procedure and some lovely parody of legal language, one of the defendants explains himself with an almost entirely unrelated story for the balance of the book, and action never returns to Harleysburg. A publisher's note advises the reader to watch for the sequel, *10 Hours,* also published in 1937, which would clear up some "circumstances extraneous to the novel...." Readers either hail Keeler as a one-of-a-kind yarnspinning genius or wonder how he ever got published—put me in the former camp. (Through the courtesy of Keeler expert Francis M. Nevins, I'll be able to cover all the master's courtroom fiction in the second edition of *Novel Verdicts,* to be published by Scarecrow Press in late 1997 or 1998.)

Margaret Lawrence
Hearts and Bones
New York: Avon, 1996. **(B)**
Hannah Trevor, midwife of Rufford, Maine, turns detective when a young wife is raped and murdered and the principal suspect is the father of Hannah's illegitimate daughter, wealthy Daniel Josselyn, an English nobleman who had left the British army to become a Revolutionary War hero on the side of the American patriots. Though Hannah occasionally displays too much of a present-day sensibility, as in her carefully carried-out plan to raise a child on her own, this is a deftly written, plotted, and researched historical novel. Fourteen pages are devoted to a transcript of Josselyn's testimony and the decision of a 1777 Continental Army court-martial arising from a wartime incident in the village of Webb's Ford. The rather ironic nature of the charges is not revealed to the reader until the decision. ■

"The best crime fiction about Harlem since Chester Himes...

Grace Edwards is a gifted writer who has mastered her craft."

—Eleanor Taylor Bland, author of *Keep Still*



Meet Mali Anderson—serious grad student, feisty ex-cop and Harlem's most stunning sleuth. She has her hands full caring for her orphaned nephew, her jazz musician father and her very Great Dane, Ruffin—not to mention a romance with a handsome cop who's as mysterious as he is suave. From the stylish townhouses of Strivers Row to the city's hottest jam sessions, to its vicious crack houses, *If I Should Die* introduces one of the most engaging Uptown girls ever to probe the mean streets of the city.

Douglas R. Desvernay

"Grace Edwards...offers a vibrant, varied backdrop for this gritty tale and its sharp-edged, appealing heroine."—*Publishers Weekly*

"With style, and her wise and elegant sleuth, Grace Edwards captures the mood and bittersweet flavor of contemporary Harlem."
—Valerie Wilson Wesley, author of *Where Evil Sleeps*

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Murder  Is Their Business

BY SHARON VILLINES

Digging into the Archives of Detective Fiction

The Archives of Detective Fiction is a site on the Internet, composed of many web pages, that provides information about mystery, detective, and crime fiction that can be legally collected, copied, and made available to the general public. Author biographies and bibliographies, lists of award winners, indexes to fanzines, bibliographies of history and criticism, sample texts, full texts, dictionaries, links to geographic sites, current news—anything and everything related to the subject. A demonstration site is currently up at <http://www.esc.edu/archives/>, and there are tons of donated information from scholars, collectors, and authors awaiting data entry and formatting for the site.

The Archives also produces a regular newsletter and will also be doing Books-on-Demand—printing out texts that are in the public domain or for which the Archives has copyright permissions.

In its name, the Archives uses the word "detective" as shorthand in describing the type of information it collects, but the Archives is meant to be inclusive of many mystery forms. The detective, as a function, is central to the genre. The crime has to be discovered and resolved by the detective or by the reader as detective.

The genesis of the Archive

The idea for the Archives began several years ago when I began researching detective fiction. I was shocked to find how little of it is in print or available in libraries. There are whole decades of authors and bodies of individual author's works that are only available in private collections—or, if older books are found, they are rotting on the shelves, victims of the cheap paper they were printed on. Pulp fiction takes on a contemporary meaning.

While it seems that most lending libraries' shelves are filled with mysteries, they are more likely to shelve current bestsellers and award winners. One can find Raymond Chandler's collected works, but it's harder if not impossible to read his contemporaries to see what he was reading or to understand why his work was so outstanding compared to his peers. Most first novels also are not in libraries. Even for contemporary authors, one can find later works, but not the first one or two.

Archives of Detective Fiction

For information:
Archives of Detective Fiction,
SUNY–Empire State College,
225 Varick Street,
New York, NY 10014.

My original idea was to put books on CD-ROM disks so they could be both preserved and studied. In digital form (computer files), the texts of all the mysteries published in 1936 would fit on one slender disk. But computer disks still required a library for storage and allowed access in only one place. I wanted to be able to save and provide access to *all* authors and *all* publications, to everyone, everywhere. I was looking for a form that would be widely accessible, a form that would be so easy to learn that it would not require a special temperament or a degree in computer science. The first time I saw web pages in 1994 or '95, I knew that I had found it.

I wrote the first proposal in early 1995, as a faculty member at SUNY Empire State College. We had begun a center concentrating on educational technology and I suggested that we might want to use an on-line reference library as a demonstration site. In fall 1996, the college agreed to a small start-up grant to see how it developed.

I wrote and rewrote proposals and budgets for over a year. It took two weeks just to get the equipment and software delivered across town to the right office. I learned how to design web pages from scratch, and the idea grew. I realized that the Archives could literally store films of interviews with writers. Oral histories. Photographs. Images of letters and original manuscripts. The covers and title pages of first editions. Facsimile copies as well as the full texts. All this in a space the size of a file cabinet in the corner of my office. It was fabulously tempting.

By December 1996, I had the first pages up. It's still a very small sampling of what will be a comprehensive on-line reference library. We have one book available, Anna Katharine Green's *The Leavenworth Case: A Lawyer's Story*, originally published in 1878. And two of Poe's short stories are available; a third will be up shortly.

Files are being built on contemporary authors with comprehensive biographical and bibliographical information and sample chapters. The web-savvy Sarah

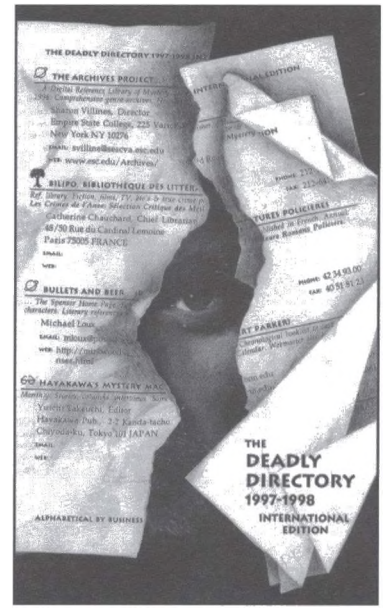
Sharon Villines is the editor and publisher of Deadly Serious Press which publishes *The Deadly Directory, 1997-1998 International Edition*, a telephone and address book of the world of mystery, detective, and crime fiction.

Smith is the best example of a contemporary author with files in the Archives. There are also pages up for Joan Drury, and a Canadian author, J. Robert Janes, whose work Soho Press is reprinting. I've also posted the authors' marketing contacts. Several publishers send review copies and all the biographical information they have. The more information the Archives receives from authors, publicists, and publishers, the faster it can be posted, and the publishers are credited as donors.

I am also working with several people who are donating files. William F. Deeck is donating his many excellent magazine indexes (we may have to dedicate a wing to him) and Mike Nevins is working with me on donating some of his critical articles. Others are researching individual authors. Many people associated with conferences are sending me lists of award nominees and winners.

Corrections to standard reference works are also posted. It is impossible to publish an error-free bibliography and authors get repeated queries about them. Having them posted in a publicly accessible place helps readers, researchers, librarians, and the authors. I've been posting corrections and additions to my own publication, *The Deadly Directory*, and it is a wonderful way to keep a periodic publication current.

Of course all this takes time; I often spend two to four hours a day just responding to queries. The Archives



will have to become an institution to be successful. I am honored to have begun the Archives but it must evolve into a community project to survive. I envision an organization like a library that is supported by memberships, donations, and sponsorships. ■

DIARY OF AN Edgar

BY LAURIE R. KING

Every year without fail, when the crocus are struggling through the snow in Central Park and the swallows in South America are beginning to think about Capistrano, the list of nominees for the various categories of Edgar awards is announced. Euphoria for the few, shrugs of the shoulder for the most, and much scratching and shaking of heads ensues: How on earth did this one make it onto the list? And why didn't that one get nominated?

I cannot speak for other years and other committees, because one of the strengths of the Edgar awards is that the choice is subjective, determined not by an inflexible set of rules or an unchanging committee of greybearded elders, but by a different group of writers each year. The hard-boiled P.I. novels on one list are nudged aside the following year by cozies or intellectual thrillers, and hopefully it balances out in the long run.

The process may seem confusing, though, by the very nature of its changeability. So I, and the editor of *TAD*, thought it might be of interest to give an insider's view of the Edgar awards, in this case the prize for the 1996 Best First Mystery by an American Author, from assembling the committee to presenting the award in New York on the first of May.

I am in the final stages of the corrections on *A Letter of Mary* and about to leave for a summer in England when I make the mistake of phoning Priscilla Ridgway, executive director of Mystery Writers of America, to ask her a question, and before I know it I find myself volunteering to chair the Best First committee. Only fifty books, she assures me, or maybe sixty, spread out over four or five months, and the award did so much for my own career, after all, and look, if I do the Best First, I can't very well get dragged into the Best, now can I, with its list of 300+ submissions? And besides, Aaron Elkins, the overall Edgars chairman, is really anxious to have me.

I fall for it, as she knows I will, and with little more than a week before I leave the country I scramble to assemble a committee, in and among the myriad other tasks. Some day I will learn to say No....

Priscilla faxes me a list of people who have volunteered at some point to serve on a committee (usually when they first became MWA members and didn't realize what they might be in for.) I go through it feeling a mixture of kid-in-the-candy-store glee ("I want this one and this one and—") and the trepidation that comes with knowing that a series of strangers are going to turn you down. Some names spring right out at me, others make me think of someone who isn't on the list but might be willing, so I scribble names, consult Priscilla, remove a couple of people who have recently served, and boil it down to a preliminary half dozen.

What I want, I decide, is a group of fairly new writers, and a mix of people, places, and styles. Most of all, however, I want writers who really know how to write, the kinds of people who produce strong, self-confident fiction, who take their job seriously but with gusto, with a sense of humor and, more important, humanity in their work. I think about writers I've met or heard speak, writers I know mostly through their work, and get to work on the telephone.

Of the first five I try, I am rejected by only one, who is already on a major committee, which leaves me with a committee so stellar, I feel guilty that I've greedily snatched up all the best: Harlan Coben, Sue Henry, Abigail Padgett, and Steven Womack. Men and women, all of us old enough to have been around the block once or twice but young enough to remember why, geographically scattered, gay and straight, and comprising a range of styles from hard-boiled P.I. to reluctant amateur to police professional. I am proud, and pleased, and actually looking forward to this. I send them each a fax saying so, and wishing them a happy summer, pack my bags, and forget about it all for a month.

I return from England to find that the first books have yet to arrive, despite Priscilla's letter to the publishers exhorting them to begin immediately submitting all books with a pre-June publication date. I envision the horror of fifty books landing on my doorstep over Thanksgiving weekend, to be read and judged by January 1, and urge her to send out another letter cleverly intimating that the sooner we get the books, the more attention we can pay to them. I am also visited with a brief moment of pity for the Best committee, assuming they are in the same position, with some 300 books to read in that same span of three months.

(Let's see—300 books at, say, a brisk 8 hours per book is 2400 hours, which even at 10 hours a day would still take, hmmm, 35 weeks, or at 12 hours a day... Actually, I am later to find, other committees structure themselves in different ways, and the Best committee, faced with such an avalanche of books, have been forced to specialize, with each of their five already busy members being assigned a particular style to review, such as cozies and police procedurals, and then sending their recommendations to the group as a whole. England's CWA, by contrast, has simply limited the number of books a publisher can submit.

Any way you do it, judging even a minor awards category is a massive commitment of volunteer time and energy, a sacrifice of a writer's own work for the sake of the genre as a whole.)

The first books finally come, shiny new books by shiny new writers, then a few more, until we have fifteen submissions distinguished only by their hackneyed plots and heavy use of clichés. I have uneasy conversations with some of the other committee members, and phone Priscilla to ask, half-joking, if we absolutely have to give an Edgar in the Best First category this year. I am later to find that this very question has shaken Britain's Crime Writers Association to its core, when its Best First committee refused to give a 1996 Creasey award, causing much criticism and the creation of an alternative award for the year. I half agree with the criticism, but still, my name and those of Sue, Abby, Harlan, and Steve are in effect going onto this winner, and I for one have never given a cover blurb or recommendation for a book I don't like.

Priscilla, bless her, reassures me that it is MWA policy not to interfere with the decisions of the committees, that if indeed the publishing world has, in our opinion, decided to produce nothing but rubbish this year, we are not required to pick out one bit of garbage as being marginally less odious than the rest. It would not, in fact, be the first year one prize or another was not given. Shortly after this Aaron Elkins writes to say the same thing. I feel relieved at the answer, although the idea of having to take that position and flatly condemn all the new authors of 1996 makes me feel more than a little queasy.

However, I should not have worried, because soon enough the gems begin to appear.

I am to discover that one of the most

Same Song

DIFFERENT VERSES

Other mystery awards committees reported issues with criteria and other complexities with their work similar to the Edgars concerns reported by Laurie King.

"There are no set guidelines for the Anthony Awards; there is not even agreement on what the categories should be—they change from year to year," said Bruce Taylor, owner of San Francisco Mystery Bookstore and one of the organizers of this year's Bouchercon. "We are trying to revise the Bouchercon bylaws and establish permanent categories and voting procedures."

"Because Agatha nominations originate from the fans who have registered for the [Malice] convention, the greatest challenge of the Agatha Committee is to convince more participants to submit Agatha nominations," said Linda Pletzke, chair of Malice Domestic's Agatha Awards Committee and assistant chief of the ordering division at the Library of Congress. "If the participants only realized how important only one or two more votes are to the outcome of the final ballot, they might make a greater effort to assure that their favorite works have a chance to be included." Pletzke added that the committee also is confronted with the difficulty of determining what works fall into the Malice category, since the Agatha Awards are only presented in the mystery subgenre honored by Malice Domestic.

Kate Charles, immediate past chairman of the Crime Writers Association of the UK, faced considerable controversy during her tenure about the John Creasey Award, and had news to report about the Daggers. "The CWA Dagger awards have always been judged quite differently from the Edgars, by a panel of independent reviewers and critics appointed by the CWA," Charles said. "In the past several years, there have been one or two hiccups with the judging of the John Creasey Memorial Dagger for best first novel; last year a failure to award a Creasey Dagger led to charges from some quarters that the CWA was not doing enough to nurture and encourage new writers."

To address these concerns, Charles noted that one of her last acts as outgoing chairman was to implement a new judging procedure. The judging, which was formerly done by the same fiction judges who awarded the Gold and Silver Daggers, has now been "spun off" to a new panel consisting of former award winners: Val McDermid (Gold Dagger 1995), Paula Gosling (Creasey Dagger 1978; Gold Dagger 1985), and Andrew Taylor (Creasey Dagger 1982), thus emphasising the CWA's commitment to new writers.—*ed.*

interesting aspects of being on this committee is also its most unexpected: the singular privilege of discovering strength and beauty in the most unlikely places. Books I would never have picked up in a bookstore, when given a compulsory twenty pages' reading, take me over and run with me to the very end. A paperback original on fly fishing by David Leitz brings to the task a fine grasp of elegant, simple language often found wanting in best-selling authors. A couple of slick, glossy books that shout BIG ADVANCE! and MAJOR CAMPAIGN! turn out to be refreshingly straightforward and human. There are even a handful of real hard-core macho fantasies, bristling with guns and karate chops and vigilante revenge, that I read with—I admit it—pleasure.

Good, competent novels all, a credit to the efforts of the industry; but it isn't until I pick up an unassuming little book from a small press in Dallas that I feel the first prickle of excitement, the feeling I have had when reading for the first time new writers such as Nevada Barr and Carol O'Connell.

Bonita Faye is not an obvious candidate for Best First Mystery. For one thing, it is written in the prickly dialect of a poor white Southern woman, the sort of language that normally hurts the eyes and leads to instant dismissal. For another, it is not really a mystery (more on this problem later). It is, however, within the broadest definition of crime fiction, it has been submitted, and it is good. Margaret Moseley has such a strong grasp of her character, such a powerful voice, that *Bonita Faye* speaks long after the next book has been taken up.

I have my first Possible.

October 1996

More Possibles follow, the Post-its that emerge from their pages saying simply "Gorgeous" and "Solid" rather than the

more usual comments that stick out of the others ("Characters good, motivation shaky"; "Loses track of themes in the last quarter"; or even, "Trees died for this?").

Conversations with the other committee members reveal a level of agreement that surprises me, considering our differences. We also agree that it is a great temptation at least to nominate Poe's "distant relative" Robert Poe for an Edgar, but alas, *Return to the House of Usher* doesn't quite justify it.

The UPS deliveries continue, we happily read away, and toward the end of the month a letter from Aaron, sounding plaintive and a bit nervous, asks, "Is everything going well out there?" It seems that the various committees he is overseeing are more self-contained than he had anticipated. No blow-ups, no stormy resignations, no pleas for intercessions with publishers, film-makers, or other committee members. Poor Aaron, all dressed up in his constabulary role with no place to lay his truncheon. I write to let him know that yes, we are hard at work, that we haven't forgotten about the Edgars committee. Little chance of that.

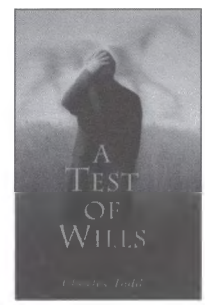
November 1996

A number of books that I have seen reviewed as firsts over the past few months have not arrived yet, and I decide to begin the pursuit. Priscilla gives me names and numbers for the publicists at the applicable houses, most of which, as she warns me, are out of date, condemning me to some hours of phone tag and garbled voice mail messages.

This active solicitation of books, I should note, is not a requirement of the chair, and indeed, it shouldn't be. However, I know that there have been several books in past years that might very well have been nominated had their publishers submitted them. In some cases the house has a new publicist who doesn't know the system, or who sees a letter from MWA saying that the deadline for submissions is December 1 and assumes that this means the books are to be submitted on December 1 (which, in fact, puts them past the cut-off date, by the time they arrive.) Some publishers choose not to enter a specific title that they are marketing as mainstream fiction, no matter how neatly it may fit into the genre. There are any number of reasons why an excellent book such as David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars* or Caleb Carr's *The Alienist* does not appear on the list of nominees, in spite of all the efforts of MWA to get the word and the rules out, but when that happens, it is the writer who loses. So I persist, despite an odd lack of interest on the part of some houses and a frustrating lack of knowledge at others. Is *This Far No Further* John Wessel's first novel? After four transfers I reach a person actually in charge of awards submissions at Simon & Schuster (which has paid a lot of money for the book) who doesn't know, but says cheerfully that she'll send it to us anyway, just in case. Avon tells me a title I'm asking for isn't one of theirs, although I later find it is. Random House can't tell me if Rachel Canon's *The Anniversary* has a 1996 publication date. St Martin's, on the other hand, is a little too enthusiastic, and sends us a smattering of books by English authors, which we have to redirect to the Best commitee. And so it goes.

Then again, some of the books I request turn out to be something other than first novels. "Margaret Lawrence" and "Val Davis," for example, both of whom I have seen praised as bright new lights on the mystery scene, turn out to be new in name only. As I had some months before written a cover blurb for Lawrence's *Hearts and Bones,* under the impression that this was a brand new writer, I feel ever so slightly duped, but never mind, it's a good book anyway—and indeed, later she appears as a "rival" to my own *With Child* in the Best Novel category.

(I should note here that three of the books that survived the first cut to make our "long-short" list were works that had been requested by us, one of which became a nominee. This may seem a terribly hit-and-miss approach to a major award, trusting to the bone-headed persistence of the committee chair in tracking down should-be submissions,



but not even Priscilla Ridgway can force the publishing houses to send out their books, and unfortunately, new writers often don't know to ask until it is too late.)

One of the books we receive in this final drive for completeness creates dissent in the ranks. *The Queen's Man* is clearly a mystery, and a very well written one at that, with none of the common flaws of the first-time author. This is hardly surprising, since the author is a writer very thoroughly established in the field of historical romance. *The Queen's Man* is Sharon Kay Penman's first actual mystery, and although the title for this Edgar is often given as Best First Novel, the actual rules clearly state that "First-time mystery authors are eligible for the Best First Novel by an American Author if previously pub-

lished works are in no way related to crime/mystery." The author of 100 non-crime novels would qualify; the writer of one technical article on forensic pathology would not. Faxes fly and e-mail zip as we argue about the spirit of the award as opposed to the rubrics of definition, but in the end *The Queen's Man* is included—and ultimately nominated—despite the strong opinion held by a number of committee members that the prize should be a means of encouraging new writers, not of rewarding the odd mystery by an already established writer. (Would Jane Smiley qualify for *Duplicate Keys*? Ron Hansen for *Atticus*?) We badly want to ask for a rewording of the rules by the MWA Board, which would also mean redirecting several books over to the Best Novel committee, but it is already December, far too late to do either of those things. We grumble, but in the end decide to allow the nominations to stand—and to write a strong letter to the Board as soon as it is all over. (I will add that our voice has been heard, and the definition of what qualifies as a First Novel is being rewritten for the 1997 committee.)

December 1996

By the first week in December we have closed submissions to all but those books actually in transit. We have 78 candidates, a stack more than six feet high, and if we have not each read every word in every book, we have at least given each one twenty pages or so before putting it aside.

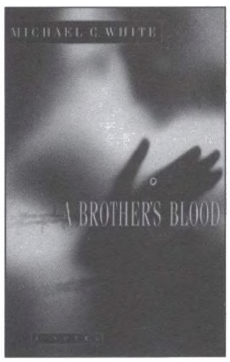
As soon as the first weeding-out process begins, we find ourselves confronted by another problem, one that I mentioned earlier: How closely do we need to define a mystery? I personally hold a very loose definition (a fact that will surprise none of my readers) but during our discussions by fax and phone, Sue Henry emerges as a believer in sterner rules, insisting that a mystery should have a crime that needs solving, an investigator, and at least some of the paraphernalia of clues and suspects. The other three members take positions somewhere in between us.

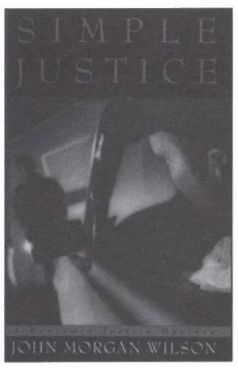
When it comes time to make our preliminary recommendations, two books in particular fall into this gray area: *Bonita Faye,* as mentioned before, and an elegant police procedural that follows a career rather than a single case, *Dry Fire,* by Catherine Lewis. Eventually, again, we agree to differ.

At this point, we could vote and be done with it. However, we all know how easy it is to dismiss a book with an offensive cover or difficult type, or a book we happened to pick up on a bad day. For that reason, I have decided to do a "long-short" list, with each of us submitting six or seven of our favorites, in no particular order. We will all then reread the others' choices, taking a second look at what we might have discarded for any number of reasons. To my astonishment, this produces a list, not of the forty or even thirty titles I fear from this group of five strong-minded individualists, but a tight little list of seventeen. Some are single nominees, some have two or three votes, *Bonita Faye* has four. Our December short list reads as follows:

Rachel Canon, *The Anniversary*
Jameson Cole, *A Killing in Quail County*
John Gilstrap, *Nathan's Run*
Kent Harrington, *Dark Ride*
Clay Harvey, *A Flash of Red*
Michael Kimball, *Undone*
Charles Knief, *Diamondhead*
Catherine Lewis, *Dry Fire*
John Ramsey Miller, *The Last Family*
Margaret Moseley, *Bonita Faye*
Steven Oliver, *Moody Gets the Blues*
Sharon Kay Penman, *The Queen's Man*
Greg Rucka, *Keeper*
Charles Todd, *A Test of Wills*
Paul Watkins, *Archangel*
Michael White, *A Brother's Blood*
John Morgan Wilson, *Simple Justice*

We retreat into our Christmas holidays with a stack of books that has at least been reduced to less than two feet in height, to look at again and see if we agree with our colleagues, or if we think they're nuts.





January 1997

Having spent a couple of weeks puzzling over each other's choices, on Jan. 9th I ask for a vote of six, this time ranked by preference. This will not be the final choice, but will give us a definitive ballot: We're going to reach consensus on this if it kills me.

Choices that were difficult before now become impossible: Does *Bonita Faye*'s strong voice put it above the equally vivid personality speaking in Steven Oliver's *Moody Gets the Blues*? Whose presentation of a young boy in distress is more powerful, John Gilstrap's *Nathan's Run* or Jameson Cole's *A Killing in Quail County*? Similarly, *Simple Justice* and *A Test of Wills* are both about inner demons; which writer handles the theme in a more believable, more moving way?

The December long-short list has

proven a valuable tool. Taking our fellow members' recommendations seriously, a number of us have revised our opinions, sometimes dramatically. *Simple Justice* stakes its claim, and Michael White's *A Brother's Blood,* a slow-moving, lyrical story, repays a careful read a thousandfold. We all agonize, shuffle our choices, put off sending the ballot, and finally, as the deadline approaches, throw up our hands and let our much-reworked lists stand.

We have been asked to submit, by the end of January, the names of the winner, four runners-up, and one alternate (in case one of the five is disqualified for some reason—which has happened.) So I assign numerical values to the ranked choices, six points for first down to one for the alternate, and eliminate the lower-scoring eleven. We have our finalists.

As with the committee itself, this is an interesting and diverse list of books, concerning: a gay male journalist in Los Angeles; an uneducated Southern woman; a twelfth-century English investigator; a lesbian rookie cop; a Scotland Yard inspector rocked into near-madness by the trench warfare of the First World War; and an aging, physically unattractive, and not terribly intelligent woman in rural Maine. The authors are equally diverse (other than all being American, of course) from publishing houses large and small, and aside from there being no paperback originals on the final list (several were submitted) it is not easy to discern a pattern.

That is because the pattern is quality: Each of these writers knows what he or she is about. The authority with which they write about their characters—their "voice," for lack of a better term—is in each case unflinching, unflagging, and vivid. Whether the character moves through the gay bar scene of L.A. or the green countryside of a long lost England, that personality is powerful, unchanging, and real.

At first, I was concerned that we should perhaps be more methodical about the whole process, that I should come up with a scheme by which we could give points for characterization, setting, dialogue, and the

rest—or at least draw up guidelines, suggesting what we were looking for in our books.

Then I happened to re-read an essay by the critic John Gardner, in which he talks about *Sophie's Choice,* a book he had given a slightly negative review until, with the passage of time, he realized that he could not rid his mind of scene after vivid scene. He is forced to revise his opinion of Styron's book, speculating that perhaps the tenacity of a work of fiction in the mind is, in the end, "the most obvious mark of a masterpiece." If John Gardner could come up with no better means of judging a book, who am I to try?

Shortly before I set off on the first leg of the tour for *A Letter of Mary,* I fax out the final ballot. When I return home for a brief stopover the following week, I collate the results. Again, the degree of similarity in our votes both surprises and pleases me. I phone the other committee members, who all seem satisfied with the final vote, swear them to silence, and fax the result off to Aaron and Priscilla.

February 1997

I am on tour when the Edgars list is announced, and to my astonishment, I hear that my own 1996 book, *With Child,* is a nominee for Best Novel. I also begin to hear reaction to our list, and catch rumors of a mad scramble for first editions of the first novels, and see the early proposals for Best Firsts by other reviewers and journals. Some of the titles are old friends, others I have to search for in my mind, so early were they rejected, and the inner dialogue I had thought ended begins anew: I usually agree with this reviewer—why did I put that book aside? Was this one really inferior to the chosen five?

I write notes to our five nominees to congratulate and thank them, and suggest we all get together for a drink after the Edgars award banquet the first of May. Their return letters sound dazed.

May 1997

I meet the nominees at a pre-dinner reception in the hotel, introduce them to each other and to the committee members present, and to anyone else I can lay hands on. The mystery community is not a big one, but writers are a slippery lot, and for these five (for whom I feel a definite proprietary interest) it may be some time before they have another chance to meet established writers such as Tom Cook (whose beautiful book *The Chatham School Affair,* incidentally, goes on to win the Best Novel award later that evening.)

After champagne, we all dive out into the crush, to be claimed by our respective agents and editors. The Edgars banquet is a big, posh affair attended by writers, publishers, agents, and you name it. A highly edible meal is served with ruthless efficiency to several hundred men and women, most of whom are either table-hoppers too busy or nominees too nervous to eat.

Tension builds beneath the happy chatter, for the awards have to wait until the coffee is on the table. Once begun, however, they move quickly from Best Television Screenplay through the junior fiction categories, short stories, and Paperback Original (which one of our committee members, Harlan Coben, wins, for *Fade Away*) and on to Best First Novel. Scattered through the room sit five people, outwardly merry but inwardly clenched solid, whether braced against winning or against losing is impossible to say. Five writers, three men and two women, whom I feel I know although we have barely met, sit screwed tight as the list is read. When John Morgan Wilson's name is announced for *Simple Justice,* relief and disappointment rush in to four nominees, and John gets to his disbelieving feet and goes forward to accept his statue.

July 1997

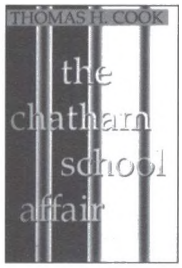
As you read this, the committee to judge this year's Edgar awards is taking shape. The first books are poised to arrive, the five committee members are earnestly or distractedly, according to their natures and the amount of time on their hands, looking forward to seventy or so shiny new books from shiny new writers.

Next February, the nominees will be announced, and on April 30, with the eyes of the mystery publishing world on him or her, the winner will come forward to make a speech. And the swallows in South America will be arriving from Capistrano. ■

The 1997 Edgar Allan Poe A

Best Novel

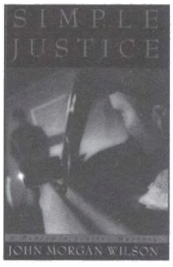
* *The Chatham School Affair*
by Thomas H. Cook
(Bantam)



With Child
by Laurie R. King
(St. Martin's)
Hearts and Bones
by Margaret Lawrence
(Avon)
Pentecost Alley
by Anne Perry
(Fawcett/Columbine)
Mean Streak
by Carolyn Wheat
(Berkley)

Best First Novel by an American Author

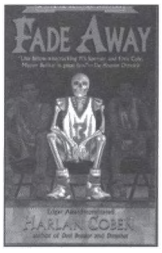
* *Simple Justice*
by John Morgan Wilson
(Doubleday)



Bonita Faye
by Margaret Mosely
(Three Forks Press)
The Queen's Man
by Sharon Kay Penman
(Henry Holt)
A Test of Wills
by Charles Todd
(St. Martin's)
A Brother's Blood
by Michael White
(HarperCollins)

Best Paperback Original

* *Fade Away*
by Harlan Coben
(Dell)



Silent Words
by Joan M. Drury
(Spinsters Ink)
The Grass Widow
by Teri Holbrook
(Bantam)
Walking Rain
by Susan Wade
(Bantam)
Tribe
by R.D. Zimmerman
(Dell)

Best Fact Crime

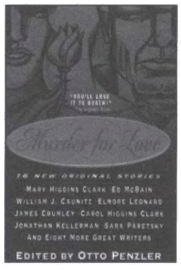
* *Power to Hurt*
by Darcy O'Brien
(HarperCollins)
Outrage
by Vincent Bugliosi
(Norton)
Fall Guys
by Jim Fisher
(Southern Illinois University Press)
No Matter How Loud I Shout
by Edward Humes
(Simon & Schuster)
Trespasses
by Howard Swindle
(Viking)

Best Critical/ Biographical Work

* *The Secret Marriage of Sherlock Holmes*
by Michael Atkinson
(University of Michigan Press)
Detecting Women 2: A Reader's Guide and Checklist for Mystery Series Written by Women
by Willetta L. Heising
(Purple Moon Press)
The Blues Detective: A Study of African-American Detective Fiction
by Stephen F. Soitos
(University of Massachusetts Press)
Agatha Christie: A to Z
by Dawn B. Sova
(Facts on File, Inc.)
Elusion Aforethought: The Life and Writing of Anthony Berkeley Cox
by Malcolm J. Turnbull
(Bowling Green State University Popular Press)

Best Short Story

* "Red Clay"
by Michael Malone
(*Murder for Love*, Delacorte)



"My Murder"
by David Corn
(*Unusual Suspects*, Vintage Crime)
"The Dark Snow"
by Brendan DuBois
(*Playboy*, Nov.)
"Kiss the Sky"
by James Grady
(*Unusual Suspects*, Vintage Crime)

Award Nominees and Winners

"Hoops"
by S.J. Rozan
(*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* Jan.)

Best Young Adult
* *Twisted Summer*
by Willo Davis Roberts
(Atheneum)
Who Killed Mr. Chippendale?
by Mel Glenn
(Lodestar)
Mr. Was
by Peter Hautman
(Simon & Schuster)
Flyers
by Daniel Hayes
(Simon & Schuster)
Hawk Moon
by Rob MacGregor
(Simon & Schuster)

Best Juvenile
* *The Clearing*
by Dorothy Reynolds Miller
(Atheneum)
The Last Piper
by Helen Cavanaugh
(Simon & Schuster)
The Case of the Wiggling Wig
by E.W. Hildrick
(Simon & Schuster)
Gaps in Stone Walls
by John Neufeld
(Atheneum)
Cousins in the Castle
by Barbara Brooks Wallace
(Atheneum)

Best Television Episode
* "Deadbeat"
written by Ed Zuckerman &
I.C. Rapoport
("Law & Order," NBC)
"Slave"
written by Rene Balcer & Elaine Loeser
("Law & Order," NBC)
"Causa Mortis"
written by Rene Balcer
("Law & Order," NBC)
"Every Picture Tells a Story"
written by Paul Haggis
("EZ Streets," CBS)
"ID"
written by Ed Zuckerman
("Law & Order," NBC)

Best Television Feature/ Mini-Series
* "Brotherly Love"
written by Jimmy McGovern
("Cracker," A&E)

Robbie Coltrane, star of "Cracker"

"Best Boys"
written by Paul Abbott
("Cracker," A&E)
"True Romance"
written by Paul Abbott
("Cracker," A&E)
"An Autumn Shroud"
written by Malcolm Bradbury
("Dalziel & Pascoe," A&E)
"Darkness Visible"
written by Ashley Pharoah
("Silent Witness," A&E)

Best Movie
* *Sling Blade*
written by Billy Bob Thornton
(Miramax)
Le Ceremonie
written by Claude Chabrol
Fargo
written by Joel & Ethan Coen
(Gramercy)
Trainspotting
written by John Hodge
Lone Star
written by John Sayles
(Castle Rock/Columbia)

Best Play
no nominees or winner this year

Grand Master
Ruth Rendell

Ellery Queen Award
François Guerif

Robert L. Fish Memorial Award
"The Prosecutor of DuPrey"
by David Vaughn
(*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,* Jan.)

Raven
Marvin Lachman

The 1997 Edgar Allan Poe Awards

On May First, the Mystery Writers of America celebrated the best in the mystery writing field at the 52nd annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards with a dinner and ceremony at the New York Hilton. Events leading up to the gala event included panels, cocktail parties, and bookstore events featuring author signings.

Paul Petruccelli

MWA President Joan Lowery Nixon, a past Edgar winner in both the Young Adult and Juvenile Books categories, addresses the guests.

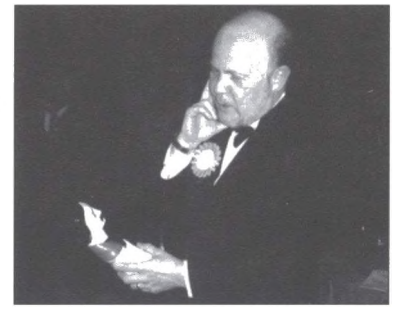
John Morgan Wilson proudly displays his award for Best First Novel. (*See page 266 for more about the Best First Novel award.*)

Posing with actor Sam Waterston (2nd left), "Law & Order" scripters Ed Zuckerman, Rene Balcer, and I.C. Rapoport shared four of the five nominations in the Best TV Episode category.

Paul Petruccelli

French publisher François Guerif received the Ellery Queen Award. Among his contributions to the mystery world is his precisionistic efforts in English–French translation.

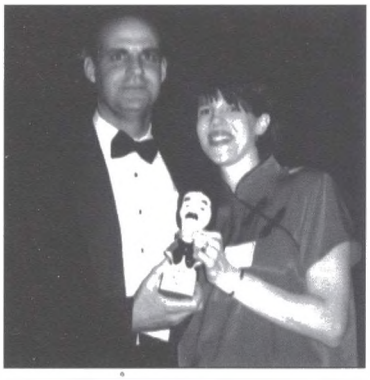
(ABOVE) *TAD* COLUMNIST RIC MEYERS (L) AND ACTOR ROBBIE COLTRANE DISCUSSING MOVIES AND TELEVISION.
(RIGHT) COLTRANE ACCEPTS THE EDGAR FOR BEST TV MOVIE ON BEHALF OF WRITER JIMMY MCGOVERN.



MICHAEL MALONE, WINNER OF THE BEST SHORT STORY EDGAR, PONDERS HIS NEW POE.

DIANE PLUMLEY OF MURDER INK WITH CHARLES TODD, NOMINEE FOR BEST FIRST NOVEL.

S.J. ROZAN, AUTHOR OF THE LYDIA CHIN/ BILL SMITH P.I. SERIES. A NOMINEE FOR BEST SHORT STORY.



HARLAN COBEN AND HIS WIFE ANNE, POSE WITH THE LATEST ADDITION TO THE COBEN FAMILY, HIS EDGAR FOR BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL, AND PREVIEW THE UPCOMING ADDITION, BENJAMIN COBEN, WHO WAS DELIVERED ON JUNE 5.

PAST MWA PRESIDENT & GRAND MASTER DONALD WESTLAKE INTRODUCES ELLERY QUEEN AWARD RECIPIENT FRANÇOIS GUERIF.

A LIVE INTERACTIVE INTERNET SESSION ALLOWED ATTENDING AUTHORS TO "TALK" WITH COMPUTER USERS ONLINE, ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD DURING THE EDGARS BANQUET.

THOMAS COOK (R), WINNER OF THE BEST NOVEL EDGAR CELEBRATES WITH MYSTERIOUS BOOKSHOP OWNER AND '94 ELLERY QUEEN AWARD WINNER OTTO PENZLER.

A MURDEROUS ROW: *TAD* CONTRIBUTORS: (L–R) MARVIN LACHMAN, JACKIE ACAMPORA, DON SANDSTROM, AND JON L. BREEN.

MALICE DOMESTIC

On May 2–4, MALICE DOMESTIC IX, the annual convention in Bethesda, Maryland, that honors traditional mysteries, marked a number of firsts.


Packed House

It was the first time Malice "murdered" its founder, Mary Morman, at the opening ceremonies, and devoted an entire track of programming to the solving of the "crime." Author and real-life police officer Hugh Holton boasted with pride, "I got the murderer to confess to me."

It was the first convention to welcome Agatha Christie's grandson Mathew Prichard to present at the banquet named for his grandmother the Styles Award for Best Unpublished Short Story to author Marjorie Eccles. It was the first to host Lifetime Achievement Award winner Emma Lathen, aka Mary Jane Latsis and Martha Henissart, who remarked at the Agatha Banquet, "It seems a small step from Lifetime Achievement Award winner to Ghost of Honor."


Toastmaster Joan Hess

Over 725 authors, fans, editors, dealers, agents, and others attended. On May 3, the Agatha Awards, voted by the convention attendees, were presented in stylish fashion by Pam and Jerry North (aka authors Parnell Hall and Carole Nelson Douglas) in 1940s evening dress.


"Emma Lathen" signing

Guest of Honor: Carolyn G. Hart
Toastmaster: Joan Hess
Fan Guests of Honor: Jack and Judy Cater
Ghost of Honor: Richard and Frances Lockridge

Lifetime Achievement Award winner: Emma Lathen

Styles Award for Best Unpublished Short Story (sponsored by Agatha Christie Ltd.): Marjorie Eccles

St. Martin's Press/Malice Domestic Contest winner: Robin Hathaway

AGATHA AWARD WINNERS AND NOMINEES

* denotes winner

BEST NOVEL

* Margaret Maron

Up Jumps the Devil

(Mysterious)

Earlene Fowler

Kansas Troubles

(Berkley)

Teri Holbrook

Grass Widow

(Bantam)

Margaret Lawrence

Hearts & Bones

(Avon)

Sharan Newman

Strong As Death

(Forge)

Linda Pletzke & Anne George

BEST FIRST MYSTERY NOVEL

* Anne George

Murder on a Girl's Night Out

(Avon)

Nancy Bell

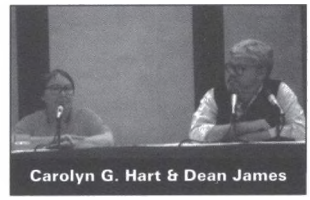
Biggie and the Poisoned Politician

(St Martin's)

Terris McMahan Grimes

Somebody Else's Child

(Dutton)



Carolyn G. Hart & Dean James

Dale Furutani

Death in Little Tokyo

(St. Martin's)

Lillian Roberts

Riding for a Fall

(Fawcett)

BEST NONFICTION WORK

* Willetta Heising

Detecting Women 2

(Purple Moon)

Elaine Raco Chase & Anne Wingate

Amateur Detectives: A Writer's Guide to How Private Citizens Solve Criminal Cases

(Writer's Digest)

Ron Miller

Mystery: A Celebration

(KQED Books)

Barbara Reynolds, ed.

The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers: The Making of a Detective Novelist

(St. Martin's)

Jean Swanson & Dean James

By a Woman's Hand, Second Edition

(Berkley)

BEST SHORT STORY

* Carolyn Wheat

"Accidents Will Happen"

Malice Domestic 5

(Pocket)

Jill Churchill

"The Bun Also Rises"

Malice Domestic 5

(Pocket)

Toni L.P. Kelner

"The Death of Erik the Redneck"

Malice Domestic 5

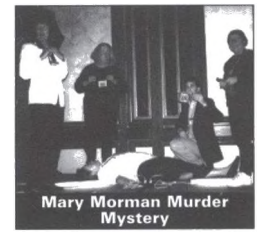
(Pocket)

Peter Lovesey

"A Parrot Is Forever"

Malice Domestic 5

(Pocket)



Mary Morman Murder Mystery

Eve K. Sandstrom

"Bugged"

Malice Domestic 5

COOK'S TOUR

BY BARRY DONNELLY

Thomas H. Cook may just be the best kept secret in mystery writing today. Though he has written 13 novels, two nonfiction ("true crime") books and has been nominated for four Edgars (and won this year for *The Chatham School Affair*), Cook has yet to have a best-seller and his early books are virtually impossible to find. Yet he remains one of the best reviewed crime novelists working today, and has been named Alabama's "Writer of the Year."

Why hasn't Cook's critical acclaim translated into greater commercial success?

The answer is simple: Cook refuses to play by the rules. Where most crime novelists adhere to a formula, often using a regular series character, Cook does neither. Instead, his novels run the gamut from police procedurals (*Blood Innocents, Tabernacle, Sacrifical Ground,* and *Streets of Fire*) to P.I. novels (*Flesh and Blood, Night Secrets,* and *Evidence of Blood*) and from psychological dramas such as *The City When It Rains* and *Mortal Memory* to Gothic remembrances of crimes past like *Breakheart Hill* and *The Chatham School Affair.*

Despite their variety, however, Cook's novels do feature two common elements: a bleak, often alienated view of the world and protagonists who struggle to make their lives meaningful despite the forces arrayed against them. In his books, the world is a dark and unmerciful place with disillusioned heroes who, as a result of life's failures, are often emotional outcasts. At the same time, virtually all of Cook's protagonists are motivated by some over-riding passion that elevates their lives above the routine and mundane. In Cook's earlier books, this trait manifests itself in the character's professionalism, but in his later work, the hero's passion often yields to obsession, usually with disastrous consequences.

Cook's first two crime novels, *Blood Innocents* (1980) and *Tabernacle* (1983) touch on some of the themes that his later books would explore in more detail. In the former, John Reardon is a New York City detective investigating the slaughter of two rare deer in a children's zoo which seems to be linked to a subsequent double homicide of two young women. In the latter, Tom Jackson is a Salt Lake City police officer who, like Reardon, bucks the conventional (i.e., expedient) departmental wisdom in a case involving a serial murderer.

Both are archetypal Cook heroes: alienated and alone. Reardon, for example, is just getting over the death of his wife as the novel begins. He has lost his sense of purpose and direction as well as his passion for life and replaced them with a professional dedication to his craft and an unshakable sense of integrity, though in the end, even that seems to fail him:

> ...Reardon knew there were only two unforgivable sins: one of them was despair. Standing on the sidewalk amid the early-morning jostling of pedestrians, his shoulders hunched and combative, his face locked in an animal grimace, Reardon suspected that he might be edging toward the unforgivable. (180)

Jackson is a disillusioned cynic who comes to Salt Lake City from the NYPD after his partner gave up a witness in exchange for money, a betrayal that ultimately led to the execution of both the witness and his nine-year-old daughter. Like Reardon, Jackson's over-riding professionalism, coupled with the fact that there is nothing left in his life except "the job," infuses him with a relentless dedication that ultimately leads to tragedy.

In *Sacrificial Ground* (1988), the first of

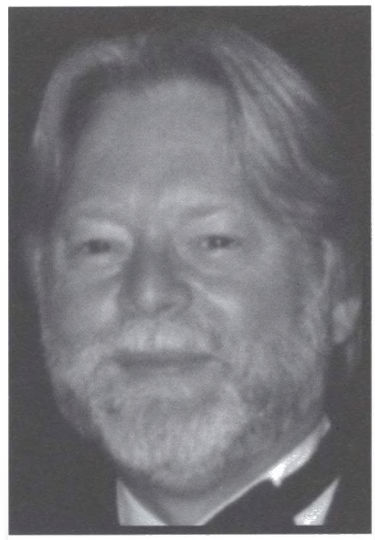
Barry Donnelly teaches English at St. Joseph Regional High School in Montvale, New Jersey. His essays have appeared in *The English Journal, NOTES Plus, The Blueshirt Bulletin,* and *TAD.* He has just completed a young adult science fiction novel.

three books about Frank Clemons, the hero is an Atlanta cop investigating the death of Angelica Devereaux, a young woman who died after several injections of lye, apparently intended to abort her pregnancy. Like Reardon and Jackson, Clemons struggles with personal demons: among other things, he has a drinking problem, precipitated by his daughter's recent suicide and his now failing marriage. And like Reardon and Jackson before him, Clemons tries to regain some semblance of purpose in his life through his work.

While *Sacrificial Ground* is arguably one of Cook's strongest novels (and an Edgar nominee), its plot and characters are unusually bleak and despairing. The story's description of the descent of the victim into a world of "performance art" where she willingly agrees to be used and finally abused is chillingly depicted, while the novel's witnesses include one character who is dying of cancer and another who deliberately precipitates Devereaux's murder in a fit of rage over an imagined betrayal. Even Clemons's slowly developing relationship with the victim's sister, Karen Devereaux, proceeds with an undertone of despair (in the end Clemons leaves the Atlanta force to live with her in New York, yet even this sequence has an abruptness that hints at its ultimate outcome, and by the start of the next book the inevitable dissolution has already taken place).

The second novel in the series, *Flesh and Blood* (1989), finds Clemons operating as a P.I. in New York and is by far the best mystery of the three; the story is extremely complex, yet it plays fair and is meticulously developed. The third book, *Night Secrets* (1990), which focuses on two cases unconnected except for Clemons's involvement in them, is somewhat less satisfying as a mystery since it relies heavily on the ability of Clemons's partner to supply critical information with unlikely ease. However, it is more directly interested in Clemons's battle with his inner demons and is very reminiscent of Lawrence Block's Matt Scudder novels.

In the end, though, the principal theme of the three Clemons novels remains that of alienation: the inability of people to make emotional connections with others when it really matters. Clemons's progressive detachment first from his wife and family, and later from Karen Devereaux is the most conspicuous example, but there are several others. Angelica Devereaux's isolation makes her vulnerable to the deceptions that finally claim her life. Hannah Karlsberg, the woman whose life Clemons investigates in *Flesh and Blood,* is similarly characterized as a loner and outcast, though her isolation is revealed to have had a more disturbing origin. And *Night Secrets* features two characters isolated by moral (and cultural) dilemmas. Clemons's "day case" concerns Virginia Phillips, a woman whose unusual behavior prompts her husband to initiate an investigation, while the "night case" centers on a mysterious gypsy woman called the Puri Dai, who confesses to the murder of a woman she was living with and refuses Clemons's offer of help. The two cases ultimately dovetail when Clemons provides Virginia Phillips with a way out of her dilemma that at the same time ties the responsible party in "the night case" to another murder more likely to draw police attention.



TOM COOK

Taken together, the Clemons trilogy chronicles the character's progressive spiral into isolation and emotional detachment and his apparent salvation in the end. Clemons's generally alienated view of life is probably best expressed in this passage from *Night Secrets*:

> He could feel the evil bubble growing in him, the one that made everything a little emptier than it already was. It had started with Sarah's death, deepened with his divorce, then deepened more as his love for Karen had gone dry and passionless. It drifted toward him from out of nowhere now, as if no longer needed to be called up by any particular thing, but simply occupied its place as a steadily darkening presence, filling him with hissing accusations about the way he'd lived his life. (133)

However, the book is also about Clemons's redemption: his partner conveniently manipulates computer records so that Clemons can adopt the gypsy's daughter in place of his own dead child:

> Then his eyes settled upon the little girl...heard once again the wail that he'd first heard in Atlanta, the one that had risen above that sacrificial ground he had fled so many years before....She took a small, graceful step toward him, and as he rose to meet her, Frank realized that it was this, and not some mythical case, which all that he'd done wrong now prepared him to do right. (253)

Streets of Fire, which was published the same year as the final Clemons book, is very much a departure for Cook: its hero, Ben Wellmann is one of the few "traditional" heroes featured in Cook's recent work. The novel, which is set in Birmingham, Alabama, in May 1953, centers on Wellmann's investigation into the death of a 12-year-old black girl that coincides with race riots precipitated by the presence of Martin Luther King. Wellmann's investigation eventually reveals a conspiracy within the police department that involves nothing less than an assassination attempt on King himself.

As his name suggests, Wellmann is a classic hero: he knows what is right, stands up for it without hesitation and ultimately succeeds, though not without consequences. The events recounted in the novel leave him feeling betrayed and disillusioned by the corruption and racism of his peers:

> That was all part of what he had not bargained for in 1949, when he'd come on with the department. He'd not bargained for the violence of

recent days, whether it was on the streets or in the countryside or simply in someone's hate-filled mind. But more than anything, he realized suddenly, he had not bargained for doing wrong, being asked, being ordered, to do what he knew was wrong. (326–7)

and he finally resigns from the force at the end of the novel. However, he experiences none of the brooding introspection that plagues Cook's later characters, and though he is isolated and alone, he in not emotionally crippled like Clemons.

The City When It Rains (1991) may be Cook's most heartfelt novel. Though nominally a mystery centering on freelance photographer David Corman's unofficial investigation into the suicide death of a young woman named Sarah Rosen, this, more than any of the other books, is a character study (and a decidedly uncommercial one at that). David Corman is a true loner: isolated, obsessive, self-destructive. He embodies a view of the world that no one else seems to believe in. Broke and approaching homelessness, Corman clings to his passion for the "night work" (i.e., his efforts to photograph the grim underbelly of the city) as something meaningful and important and holds in contempt the efforts of his friends, who offer him a more conventional job (shooting the parties of the rich and famous for the society pages of the paper), and his wife, who has decided to attempt to regain custody of their daughter.

Corman's portrayal here is, at best, ambiguous. Like Salinger's Holden Caulfield, he is fascinated with the seamy side of life, but he is also desperate for the happy ending, for a world where things turn out right. In chapter seven of the book, Corman monitors a police radio transmission of their pursuit of an EDP (emotionally disturbed person) with a gun. After several tense moments, the man is subdued without incident, his weapon nothing more dangerous than a water pistol. Corman thinks,

Something had turned out well. A threat had been met, mastered and the feeling which followed was unexpectedly sweet and exhilarating. He felt a barely controllable urge to wake Lucy up, tell her that somewhere nine floors above the sleeping city, the beast had been driven back. (53–4)

And while the reader is asked to admire Corman's passion for his work, commitment to his artistry and insistence that what he does is meaningful, he is also dangerously close to being a lunatic whose obsession with the "dark side" of life in the streets is so strong that he is willing to endanger his daughter's childhood.

Much of the novel's power comes from Cook's attempts to contrast the plight of Sarah Rosen's father with Corman's. Near the end of the book, (in a conversation that again echoes Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*) Rosen discusses his efforts to shield his daughter from the hard realities of life and eventually reveals his failed attempts to head off his daughter's misfortunes. Corman thinks that in Rosen

The passion of fatherhood had taken on a mystery beyond what could ever be described to someone else. It had become heroic in its refusal to accept what all fathers had heretofore accepted, that they could not rid the world of its dark snares, nor provide safe passage through them for their children. (249)

Rosen's impassioned "confession" convinces Corman that the pursuit of safety is a mistake and solidifies his determination to fight his ex-wife for custody of his daughter. Embracing a lifestyle that is the total anti-thesis of what his wife (and probably most of Cook's readers) considers "nice," Corman is very much the troubled Cook hero: unorthodox, outcast (at least in terms of "conventional society"), obsessive and overwrought. In the end, *City When It Rains* is typical of the complex ambiguity of Cook's novels in that Corman's fascination with his harsh night side of the city is never reconciled with his desire for the happy ending.

Shifting gears, Cook's next two novels, *Evidence of Blood* (1991) and *Mortal Memory* (1993), both feature a major character who is a true-crime writer researching a past murder and a protagonist for whom this research has a direct and devastating impact.

The theme of *Evidence of Blood* is repeated several times by the main character who constantly asks himself "It's better to know, don't you think? No

THE COOK BOOKS

The Killing of the Fallow Deer, 1979

Blood Innocents, 1980

The Orchids, 1982

Tabernacle, 1983

Elena, 1986

Sacrificial Ground, 1988

Streets of Fire, 1989

Flesh and Blood, 1989

Night Secrets, 1990

Evidence of Blood, 1991

The City When It Rains, 1991

Mortal Memory, 1993

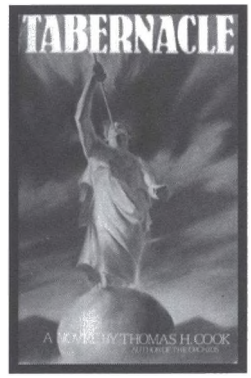
Breakheart Hill, 1995

The Chatham School Affair, 1996

matter what?". The protagonist, Jackson Kinley, is the author of several nonfiction crime books who returns to his home town for the funeral of a friend, the town's sheriff, Roy Tindall. He discovers that Tindall was looking into a 25-year-old murder at the time of his death, and Kinley decides to follow up on the investigation himself.

Certain facts are well-documented. In 1954, Charles Overton was convicted of the murder of Ellie Dinker, despite the fact that her body was never found. Overton supposedly killed her after a chance meeting on the roadside when his car broke down. The damaging evidence against him was a tire iron with the girl's blood on it and a pair of her shoes which were eventually found in his truck. Overton did little to resist the charges, and is eventually executed. However, Kinley's invesigation raises several questions about Overton's part in the murder and eventually leads to a remarkable and personally devastating conclusion.

Evidence of Blood is a compelling novel. Cook does a masterful job of recreating the trial transcripts and slowly disassembling an apparently convincing case against Overton despite the passage of time and lack of witnesses. And the book, of course, provides Kinley with an ironic answer to the question "Isn't it better to know, no matter what?" But while the plot is a tour-de-force that bears more than a superificial resemblance to the novels of Ross Macdonald (whose books deal with the investigation of crimes initiated in the distant past and frequently hinge on the revelation of concealed identity), *Evidence of Blood* is mostly concerned with recreating the past,



while Macdonald's books deal with the impact of the past on the present.

Kinley, however, remains representative of Cook's other heroes. He is a loner and an outsider, especially at first. His principal passion remains his work, his relentless investigations into the past and his belief that knowing the truth is best regardless of the consequences. The ending of the book suggests that even these discoveries have done little to dissuade him from the truth of this philosophy.

Mortal Memory, on the other hand, is a very different sort of novel indeed. Here, plot yields to character, almost as if Cook had decided that, having dealt with the story from the writer's point of view, now it was time to tell the same story from the perspective of the victim.

Steve Farris is an architect whose mother, brother, and sister were all killed by his father 25 years earlier. A true crime journalist approaches Farris for her book about fathers who murder their families. Like Cook's other protagonists, Farris allows his initial interest in the writer and their "mental" recreation of the past to give way to an obsession. It is an indulgence that leads to a stunning personal tragedy and a dramatic revelation about the crime upon which his life has become centered.

The book creates a mesmerizing, if increasingly unsympathetic portrait of Steve Farris, whose imaginings about his father's hopes and longings transform him into very much the kind of man he thinks his father might have been: someone disillusioned by his life who, alienated and out of love with his family, desperately indulges a secret passion in an effort to elevate his life above

its constricting routines.

In fact, the book is mostly about the need to reclaim passion in the ordinary routine of life. Farris, for example, finds his own life growing increasing routine and displeasing:

> In the family room I watched television with my wife and son, talking occasionally, laughing when they laughed, but only out of duty. The force that had once compelled me to such small acts of devotion was already losing speed. (108)

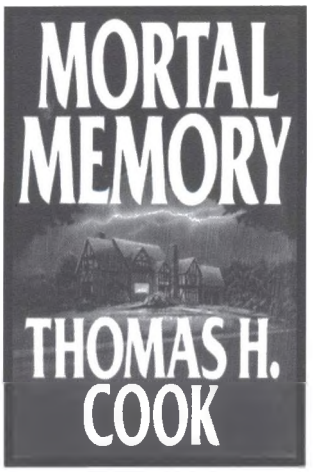
However, his relationship with the writer, Rebecca Soltero, inspires a passion that gives his life a vitality he lacked before, even as it threatens its stability. When the interviews are about to end, Farris comments:

> ...the phrase Marie (his wife) had used, "back to normal", lingered uncomfortably in my mind. For Marie, it meant the return to a precious predictability and routine. To me, however, it meant the end of something exciting and full of unexpected discovery. (203)

Thus, his obsession cripples him emotionally, driving him farther and farther from his family and his responsibilities, ultimately destroying everything that is important to him in the process.

Mysteries are often said to be reassuring because they postulate a world where order is restored to moral chaos, but if that is so, Cook's novels, and *Mortal Memory* in particular, are not very effective. Farris, for example, is finally left with nothing; his life is ruined. Ironically, his father, William Farris, turns out to be the antithesis of his son's expectations and Farris's realization of his colossal misjudgment leaves him totally isolated, robbed even of belief in the one certainty to which, in his grief, he had dedicated his life. Though *Evidence of Blood* is a better mystery, *Mortal Memory* may be a more affecting novel because it deals with the impact of the past on the present.

Cook's most recent novels, *Breakheart Hill* (1995) and *The Chatham School Affair* (1996), are remarkably similar in plot, style, and theme. They remain united to his two previous novels by a common thread, the impact of the past on the present, but explore a new idea at the same time: the consequences of a



single moment of weakness on the entirety of someone's life.

Breakheart Hill is a remarkable book because for all its power and emotion, it is built around the simplest of plots: a teenaged boy is jilted by his high school sweetheart. Devastated by her "betrayal," he authors a single malicious rumor that leads to a terrible tragedy.

The novel is narrated by Ben Wade, the same teenaged boy who, as an older man, is now a doctor and an icon of the community. But the book is about the consequences of his momentary lapse of judgment and weakness. Because of his lie, his girlfriend's life is irrevocably changed, as are the lives of many of his friends. Ironically, only Ben escapes the tangible consequences of his involvement, at least as far as the community knows. His secret is never revealed, though he is clearly another alienated figure, a guilt-riddled man, tormented by the consequences of his adolescent passions.

The Chatham School Affair revisits some of these themes in a somewhat different context. Young Henry Griswald is the son of the headmaster of Chatham School in the 1920s. A new teacher, Elizabeth Channing, comes to the school and enflames everyone (but most especially Henry and her colleague Leland Reed) with her passionate nature (her credo is that "life is best lived on the edge of folly"). Reed is smitten and builds a boat, apparently upon which to sail away with Miss Channing, setting off a sequence of events that changes both Henry and his home town forever.

Both books have a mournful, forbidding tone, foreshadowing an inescapable catastrophe; each is underscored by the narrator's sense of regret and the knowledge that he is deeply, if not deliberately, responsible for the central tragedy of the novel. In this regard, they are remarkably similar to John Knowles's classic *A Separate Peace*, another book in which a single moment's weakness has mortal consequences. In the last pages of that book, Knowles writes about the human tendency to project one's own weaknesses, fears, and insecurities on others and so to attack themselves by attacking those around them. He concludes the book with the observation that his characters

> Constructed at infinite cost to themselves these Maginot Lines against this enemy they thought they saw across the frontier, this enemy who never attacked that way—if he ever attacked at all; if he was indeed the enemy. (*A Separate Peace*, 256)

He might as easily have been talking about Ben Wade and Henry Griswald. Indeed, both of Cook's novels end with the protagonists, now grown men, confronting the surviving victims of their past mistakes in an attempt to try and come to terms with their guilt.

Stylistic concerns aside (and Cook's exquisite styling, in terms of both language and structure, is a key element in the success of his work), the final appeal of Cook's last few novels rests in their ability to generate catharsis, that "release of fear and pity" initially defined by Aristotle in his reflections on Greek tragedy. The earlier novels deal with professionals whose passions are immersed in their jobs; their inability to see the right thing done despite their passion is finally their undoing and the source of our sympathy for them. But the later novels (especially *Mortal Memory, City When It Rains, Breakheart Hill,* and *Chatham School Affair*) all deal with flawed characters whose weaknesses are all too human. Like the mythological Icarus, they fly too close to the sun in pursuit of their passions. Their inevitable downfall is truly the stuff of tragedy because it evokes in the reader both pity at their failures and a fearful reminder that in their very ordinariness, their misfortunes could all too easily have been our own. ■

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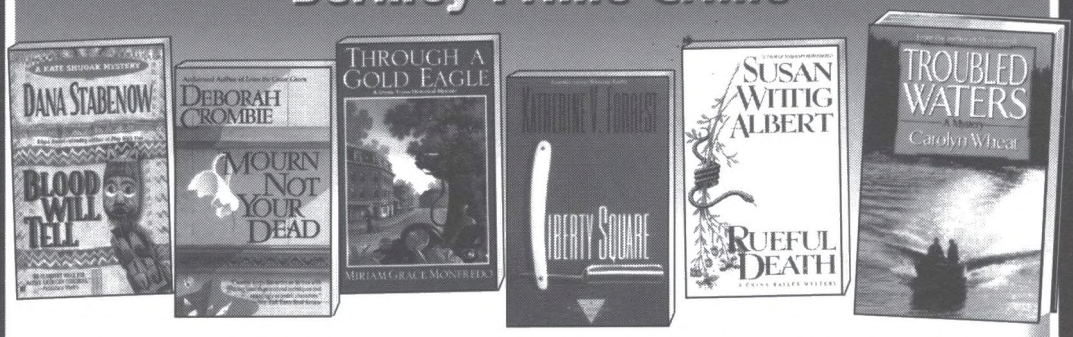

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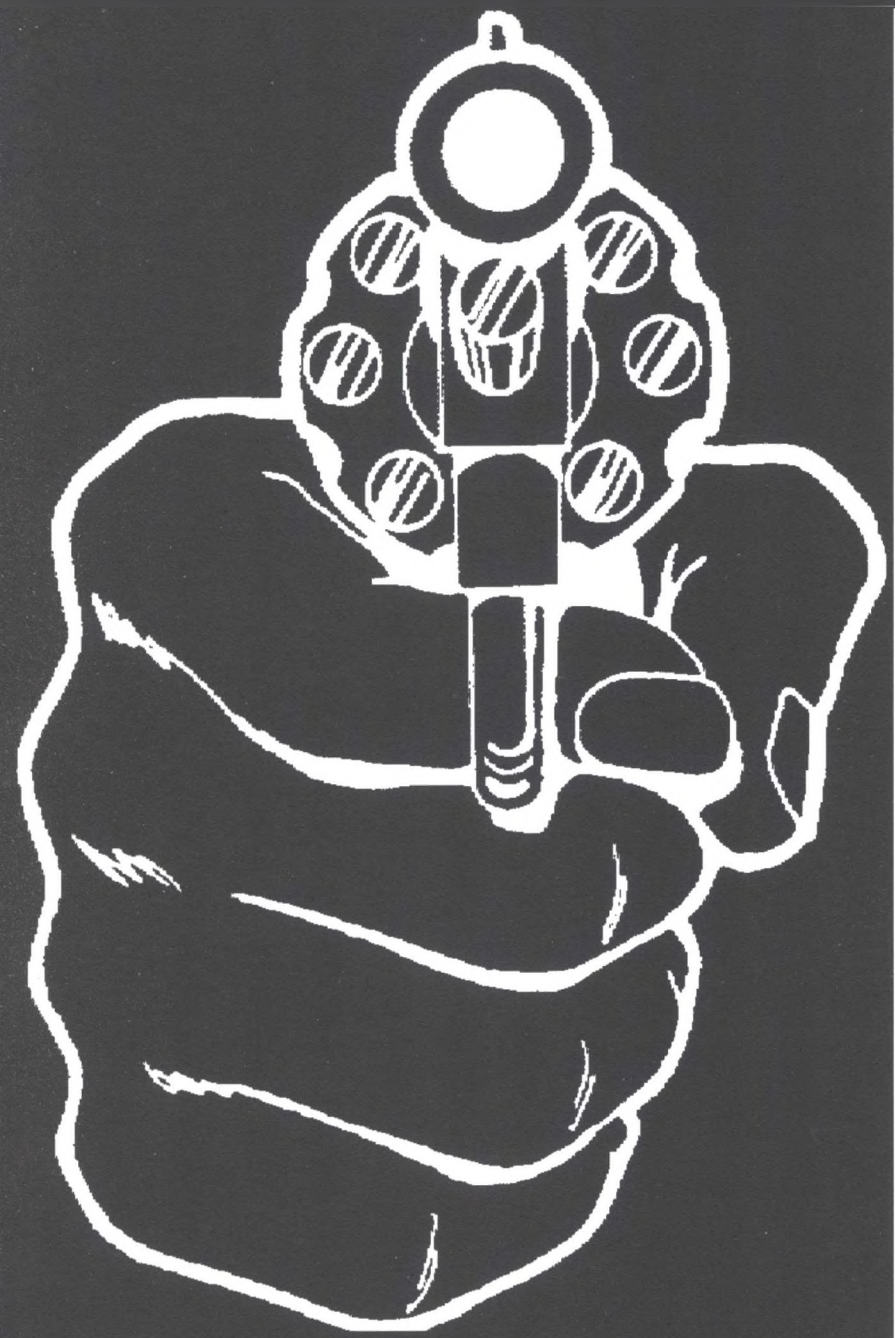
RUDOLPH FISHER AND THE



BY CHARLES HEGLAR

In serious discussions of the Harlem Renaissance, scholars have necessarily mentioned Rudolph Fisher as short story writer, satiric novelist, and personable wit at the various Harlem gatherings of the 1920s. Almost as an afterthought, a few critics have briefly noted his 1932 detective novel, *The Conjure Man Dies: A Mystery Tale of Dark Harlem*; others have ignored it. However, Fisher's detective novel deserves greater attention for mapping the possibilities for later African American writers in the genre. Two writers in particular show Fisher's influence; both Chester Himes and Walter Mosley revise and innovate upon the setting, characters, and several other elements found in *The Conjure Man Dies* as they, like Fisher, attempt to address African American concerns within the detective genre.

AFRICAN AMERICAN DETECTIVE

While *The Conjure Man Dies* was not the first black effort in detective fiction,[1] it was the first novel-length effort in the genre by a black author using a predominately black cast of characters in a black setting and it serves as a focal point of this essay. This discussion is limited to the first detective novel written by Fisher, Himes, and Mosley partly because of Fisher's untimely death. Even though each of the three planned a continuation of the fictional exploits of their detectives, Fisher's death at the age of 37 cut short his plan to write a series of novels featuring Dr. John Archer and police detective Perry Dart.[2] On the other hand, Himes and Mosley have had greater success in developing their series. Himes began his series of novels with police detectives "Coffin Ed" Jones and "Gravedigger" Johnson in 1957 with *For Love of Imabelle,* and this duo reappeared in seven other novels in what Himes called his "Harlem Domestic" series. Mosley initiated a series pairing Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins and Raymond "Mouse" Alexander with *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990) and, to date, he has published five other novels featuring the pair.

Aside from Fisher's untimely death, there are other good reasons for centering discussion on *The Conjure Man Dies, For Love of Imabelle,* and *Devil in a Blue Dress.* The first novel of a series is perhaps the most important one in establishing the detective's credibility; subsequent installments in the series rely on traits introduced in the first work. In the same way, the first novel establishes boundaries for the characters which later novels in the series must respect. Finally, the first novel gives significantly more attention to the setting within which the protagonists operate. An examination of Fisher's detective novel along with the first in the series by Himes and Mosley reveals Fisher's influence on the two and the important revisions which changing times, places, and perspectives suggested to Himes and Mosley as they followed him in using the detective genre to explore black urban life.

Fisher was prescient in placing his detective fiction in a black urban milieu. Obviously, an urban setting is common to many detective stories; the anonymity of the city lends itself to the need for a knowledgeable agent who can cross boundaries in search of a truth. While many critics date the inception of the detective genre from Edgar Allan Poe's stories of C. Auguste Dupin, John Reilly makes a crucial point when he notes that "[a]s for white authors of mystery and detective fiction, until recently, they have used Black Americans either as incidental characters or in ridiculously stereotyped roles." What Fisher's novel makes clear is that a black urban milieu is necessary for black detective fiction, especially when the black spatial setting is combined with a temporal setting prior to the Civil Rights Movement, because such a time and place empower and privilege a black agent of detection. Such a black sleuth can explore segregated and secretive areas where institutional racism makes white policemen or detectives ineffective since their color makes them ironically conspicuous. The black urban milieu also demands a black detective to validate the search for truth because the impartiality of the justice system is highly problematic given the implications of the institutional racism of *de facto* and *de jure* segregation for the periods during which the plots of the novels unfold.

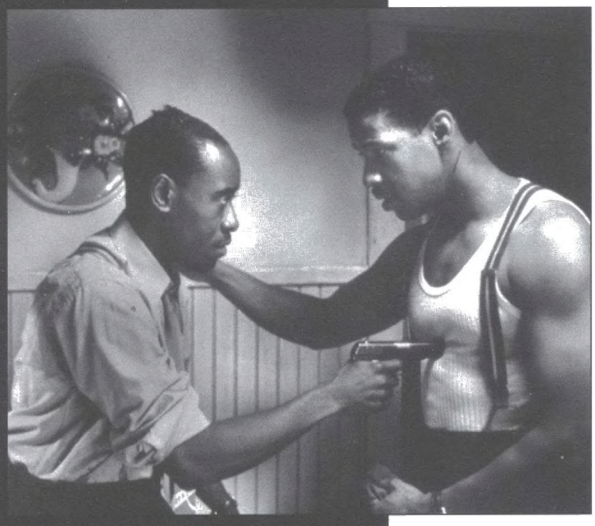
Fisher set his detective novel in 1930s Harlem, when it remained the black urban Mecca of the early 20th century, a place where a black physician and a black police sergeant can become the central agents of detection rather than marginal figures or the usual perpetrators. Ironically, although Fisher built a reputation as Harlem's contemporary interpreter in his short stories and his first novel, *The Walls of Jericho* (1928), *The Conjure Man Dies* assumes, rather than depicts, this urban setting. Instead, the novel is largely confined to the dark, maze-like building where a murder takes place. Fisher tended to follow classic detective formulas; he was especially fond of the "closed box" mystery—a mystery requiring the detective to discover how a crime could be committed in a space which seems to seal off any exit route for the criminal. Following this formula, Fisher presents the major portion of his novel within the limits of the dark building where Archer and Dart bring light without the intrusions of the larger society.

Himes follows and revises Fisher in setting *For Love of Imabelle* in the changed Harlem of the 1950s, a place he imaginatively reconstructs during his expatriate life in France. While Fisher saw Harlem as a Mecca for a broad range of blacks ranging from immigrant sharecroppers to professionals, Himes moves away from Fisher's classic mystery formula—with its underlying optimism about the detective's ability to bring order out of a temporary disorder within a controlled, confined space—to a hardboiled realism of predators and prey. Himes's Harlem has become a threatening, uncontrolled sea inhabited by "the voracious churning of millions of hungry cannibal fish." In part because he wrote the novels in France as a homesick expatriate, Himes did not tacitly assume his French audience's knowledge of Harlem as Fisher, writing in Harlem, could. Instead, Himes's work is full of fanciful Harlem types and the remembered details of Harlem life. The dress, the walks, the food, the

Charles Heglar is Assistant Professor of English at the University of South Florida. His specialty is African American literature.

Coffin Ed (Raymond St. Jacques) and Gravedigger(Godfrey Cambridge) on home turf in *Cotton Comes to Harlem*

amusements of Harlemites fill the page, giving a nostalgic sense of place and atmosphere to Himes's demimonde, for, aside from his detectives, there are no black professionals in this construction, unless one counts as professionals criminals and grifters. Within the confines of a dark building, Fisher built his novel around interrogations and musing discussions; his novel was thoughtful rather than active. In contrast, Himes describes a world of constant motion within the broad confines of Harlem in *For Love of Imabelle*: there are chases, abrupt shifts in scene from chapter to chapter, and a sense of protean change as hustlers promise to raise $10 bills to hundreds and black nuns are revealed to be confidence men in drag.



Uneasy partners: Mouse (Don Cheadle) threatens Easy (Denzel Washington) in the movie version of *Devil in a Blue Dress*

While Mosley retains the black urban milieu, he moves the site of investigation westward to the black community of 1940s Los Angeles. Fisher's and Himes's black urban settings resulted from the migration of Southern blacks northward to New York. The confidence and optimism with which Archer and Dart solve a mystery and restore order reflect Fisher's optimism in the early phase of black migration from the South which preceded the Great Depression. Himes, on the other hand, reflects the growing pessimism of the unrealized dreams of later migrants; he gives Harlem less of a mysterious atmosphere and much more of a sinister ambiance. In Himes's Harlem, "confidence" is not the sign of the trained professional but the "mark" of the confidence man. In contrast to Fisher and Himes, Mosley's black milieu arises from the migration of blacks from the South to California, a relatively new section of the country with the promise of a better life for blacks in the years after World War II. Interestingly, Mosley's setting lacks black policemen or professionals; instead, "Easy" and "Mouse" are freelance detectives, motivated by the money they can claim by entering dangerous situations where their blackness gives them an agency denied to rich whites and their minions.

The incidents each author uses to initiate a plot calling for a detective reveal significant parallels and differences among the three writers. Fisher initiates his plot with a crime, the murder of the mysterious African "psychist" N. Frimbo. Because the murder was committed in a locked room and all of the people who had recently seen Frimbo are conveniently still within the building, Archer and Dart can solve the crime through interrogation and analysis without searching the cityscape. Himes also begins his plot with a crime, a confidence scheme to raise the denomination of currency. "Coffin Ed" and "Gravedigger," however, must search through an exotic Harlem to capture the elusive felons. Since Mosley's detectives have no legal authority, his plot starts with the pursuit of a missing person, and *Devil in a Blue Dress*, like *For Love of Imabelle*, is full of motion as Easy seeks a woman known as Daphne Monet in the black clubs and shops of post-World War II Los Angeles. However, since a white man hires Mosley's detective to find an apparently white woman, Easy occasionally moves beyond the black areas of Los Angeles into the white world of wealth and government. In further contrast to the police detectives of Fisher and Himes, Easy has an adversarial relationship with the police, who are ignorant of the segregated black world of Watts.

Mosley's tone is also more complex than the optimism of Fisher or the hardboiled realism of Himes. Because Fisher writes of his own time and his immediate surroundings, he can tacitly

characters who confidently move to demystify the puzzle of Frimbo's death. Unlike the spatial, but contemporaneous, nostalgia of the expatriate Himes, Mosley evokes a temporal-spatial nostalgia; his first-person narrator, Easy, reflects back on the 1940s from the perspective of the present; his narration is frequently marked by such phrases as "back then" and "back in those days." Viewed from the present, the Watts area that once was is both a remnant of past hopes for the attainment of the American Dream and a source of present despair after the riots of the 1960s and the gang violence of the 1990s.

While Fisher, Himes, and Mosley use significantly different tones in presenting their tales of detection, each of the three authors chooses to pair two black men as agents of detection. Fisher's optimism is reflected in his decision to team two titled members of the Talented Tenth: a doctor and a police detective. True to W.E.B. DuBois's philosophy of racial uplift, the goal of both is to work through the institutional means of the larger society to solve crimes in Harlem. Like Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, to whom minor characters frequently compare him, Archer says of himself that as a physician "[a]ll my training and all my activities are those of a detective" in search of the metaphorical criminal, disease. Thus, the doctor's detective work is a sociological complement to his physiological work as a physician. Archer's heavy reliance on science and inductive reasoning also emphasizes his belief in an "objective truth" which is accessible to all who have been trained in the methods of science—in sharp contrast to the superstitions preyed on by Frimbo, the conjure man of the title.

Despite his claims of being only a "consultant" to the police detective, Archer, in fact, directs Dart, who has risen to the rank of detective sergeant through merit and his intimate knowledge of Harlem as a native "Manhattanite," "who knew Harlem from lowest dive to loftiest temple." As a writer with a tendency toward classic mystery formulations, Fisher's pairing of Archer and Dart is reminiscent of Doyle's Holmes and Watson or Poe's Dupin and his unnamed amanuensis. However, unlike the passive recorders of those duos, Dart's status on the police force gives a legitimacy to his and Archer's operations that reinforces their mutual desire for recognition from the larger society. The mystery of the conjure man's murder and associated events function as a way for these members of the Talented Tenth to prove themselves, or as Archer says to Dart, "I'd like to see you and the local boys get the credit for this whole thing—not a lot of Philistines from downtown."

Significantly, although Himes abandons classic mystery formulas, in which paired detectives were fairly common, for a hardboiled style, which conventionally emphasizes a lone male detective, he retains the pairing of black males which Fisher initiated. However, Himes's style and inclination required the elimination of the rational optimistic doctor in order to pair two Harlem police detectives. In Himes's world of false realities generated by confidence men, his detectives rely on "street

smarts," rather than formal education, to maintain a semblance of order. In contrast to Fisher's titled doctor and sergeant, Himes's characters are known by their street names, "Coffin Ed" and "Gravedigger," instead of the ones they would use in polite or institutional settings. Given Himes's depiction of Harlem as "a sea of cannibal fish," Coffin Ed and Gravedigger need the institutional sanction of badges to authorize their own violent counter tactics. They act as two halves of a whole; Harlemites expect the other when they see the one. It is as though a lone male is too vulnerable to the dangers and instabilities of Himes's setting and needs the bond of a cohort. Reflecting the hardboiled realism of the 1950s, they do not see their work as a proof of self-worth; instead, both use legal and extralegal means to arrive at a form of justice which is satisfactory to their personal standards of behavior rather than those of society. This shift in standards is clearly reflected in the different resolutions of Fisher's and Himes's novels. While Fisher's story ends with the institutional punishment of the murderer, Himes's novel ends with the poetic justice of death in a violent conflict and extralegal banishment from Harlem.

In contrast to Himes, who elaborates on the police element of Fisher's major pairing, Mosley's team of detectives borrows from a second pair of detectives which Fisher used as a humorous background element. *The Conjure Man Dies* also included the private detective team of "Bubber" Brown and "Jinx" Jenkins as comic relief and as an amusing contrast to the two serious sleuths, Archer and Dart. Both Bubber and Jinx had appeared in Fisher's first novel, *The Walls of Jericho* (1928), as members of a black moving company operating in the financially rosy Harlem of the twenties. By 1932, when they reappear in *The Conjure Man Dies,* hard times have forced Bubber to consider private detective work, and his suspicious friend Jinx tags along. In contrast to the logical analysis of Archer or the common sense of Dart, Bubber is a half-informed, superstitious comic foil. In Fisher's novel, street smarts need the discipline of formal training; a street name is, in Fisher's Harlem, a marker for the uninformed, while the professional titles of doctor and police sergeant signify expertise. Interestingly, Bubber's background and street smarts do provide him with the familiarity and anonymity to search the night spots of Harlem in ways that neither the police sergeant nor the doctor can, and, thus, he is the center of the few scenes outside the confinement of the building where Frimbo's murder takes place.

While *The Conjure Man Dies* was not the first black effort in detective fiction, it was the first novel-length effort in the genre by a black author using a predominately black cast of characters in a black setting.

Mosley's detective pairing seriously explores the possibilities of two working class males who are neither trained in the sophisticated disciplines of medicine and logic nor licensed as institutional agents of justice. Easy Rawlins is a veteran of World War II who has moved to California from Texas to work in an aircraft factory; Mouse Alexander is a childhood friend whom Easy depends on in dangerous situations. Both Easy and Mouse operate within the black community of Los Angeles according to personal standards of justice; as with Gravedigger and Coffin Ed, their street names mark them as insiders with access to the segregated black world of Watts. However, Easy is less interested in maintaining a semblance of order, as are Himes's police officers, than he is in profit and poetic justice once he discovers the full context of situations in which he is intentionally deployed as a pawn by his paying clients.

In *Devil in a Blue Dress,* the recently unemployed Easy is coerced through financial need into locating Daphne Monet for DeWitt Albright, a mysterious and dangerous white male. Although well paid, Easy is poorly informed about the object and purpose of his quest. Unlike Fisher and Himes, who confined their action to Harlem with only guarded references to the larger society, Mosley's detective finds the impetus and context for his quest in the political corruption and social conditions outside of Watts. In Fisher's pairing, Archer more or less directed Dart, while Himes portrayed Coffin Ed and Gravedigger as halves of a whole; however, Mosley depicts Easy and Mouse in a relationship that is more like that of ego and id—hinted at in Mouse's unrepentant murder of his stepfather for which Easy, as unwitting accomplice, feels so guilty that he joins the army to fight in the war. While Easy plans with a combination of street smarts and folk wisdom, he needs Mouse's instinctive, ruthless violence to survive. Even though Mouse is never entirely under Easy's control or direction, Easy is forced to admit that "the only time in my life that I had ever been completely free from fear was when I ran with Mouse."

While the decision to pair the agents of detection is the most striking similarity among the three authors, point of view is perhaps the area of greatest difference. Fisher and Himes use the third-person and Mosley uses the first-person narrative voice to guide the reader through an exotic, black milieu. However, even between the narrations of Fisher and Himes, there are significant differences. Fisher's third-person narration is largely centered on the activities of Archer, and the author frequently intrudes to shape the reader's opinion and evaluation of situations.

For example, in delineating Bubber Brown's lack of mental facility as a detective, Fisher's narrative persona writes that Bubber "had rolled along, a frankly bow-legged man, and the mind behind the blank features had rolled likewise, a rudderless bark on a troubled sea of indecision."

Himes refuses to enter the thinking or explain the motivation of his characters as Fisher had; instead, his narrator focuses on external description and action. Rather than foregrounding any one character as Fisher did with Archer, Himes's narrator shifts from scene to scene and character to character to give a panoramic, surreal sense of movement and false appearances. This technique also has a tendency to disorient the reader, leaving only Coffin Ed and Gravedigger to evaluate characters and situations. In fact, it is only late in *For Love of Imabelle* that the motives of and relationships between characters become clear.

While Fisher and Himes give the flavor of Harlem speech through dialogue, their third-person narrative voices mark a clear separation of a knowledgeable, outside teller from his tale. In contrast, Mosley employs an inside teller, a first-person narrative voice which speaks "in the natural, 'uneducated' dialect of [Easy's] upbringing" in Texas. Of course, such a personal voice also gives a folk inflection to the narration that is missing from Fisher and Himes. As a result of this narrative position, the reader tends to rely on Easy as guide and arbiter of standards; his sense of justice offers the only closure available from his perspective because he "didn't believe that there was [institutional] justice for Negroes." In addition, Mosley's construction of a first-person retrospective narrator adds to the sense of individual longing for a time and place that contrasts sharply with his present.

A final point must be made about the implications of the three authors' shared emphasis on induction rather than deduction as a method for discovering the criminal or finding a solution. Although induction is the common method of detective fiction, African American writers use the method, in contrast to deduction, to make a telling point about the larger society. Since deduction begins with a theory and works to integrate particular details, it is most frequently presented in black detective novels as the method of institutionalized, but uninformed, authority; deduction, in such a context, supports the racist theory which assumes that blacks are criminals and blindly works toward designating some individual within the group as the perpetrator. On the other hand, the black agents of detection employ induction, which works from the accumulation of facts to an explanation; this method recognizes differences among members of the same race as well as a broader range of possibilities in terms of motivation and action. Each author's pair of detectives works to unravel a mysterious murder, or stop a confidence scheme, or find a missing person by accumulating information without the blinders of an imposed theory. It is the only way they can arrive at a universal or a poetic instance of justice.

Beginning with Fisher in the 1930s and continuing to the present with Himes and Mosley, each author manipulates the detective genre to explore black life in his use of setting, mood, pairing, and induction. Fisher deserves much fuller recognition for and investigation of his germinal role in exploring the potential of this popular form in the depiction of black life. By placing his neglected novel in a comparative context, it also becomes possible to more fruitfully analyze the works of Himes and Mosley. ■

Notes

[1] John McCluskey, Jr.'s research reveals that John Edward Bruce published "Black Sleuth" as a serial in the 1907–1908 issues of *McGirt's Reader* (xii).

[2] Fisher did complete one long short story, "John Archer's Nose" (1935), in which Archer and Dart reappeared. Interestingly, the detective fiction of Fisher, Himes, and Mosley has moved from the novel to more dramatic forms. Fisher adapted his detective novel for the stage before his death in 1934, but it was not performed until 1936; to date, two of Himes's detective novels have become films: *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) and *A Rage in Harlem* (1991)—which was adapted from *For Love of Imabelle;* so far only one of Mosley's novels, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) has come to the screen, but the success of the film suggests that other "Easy" Rawlins films may follow.

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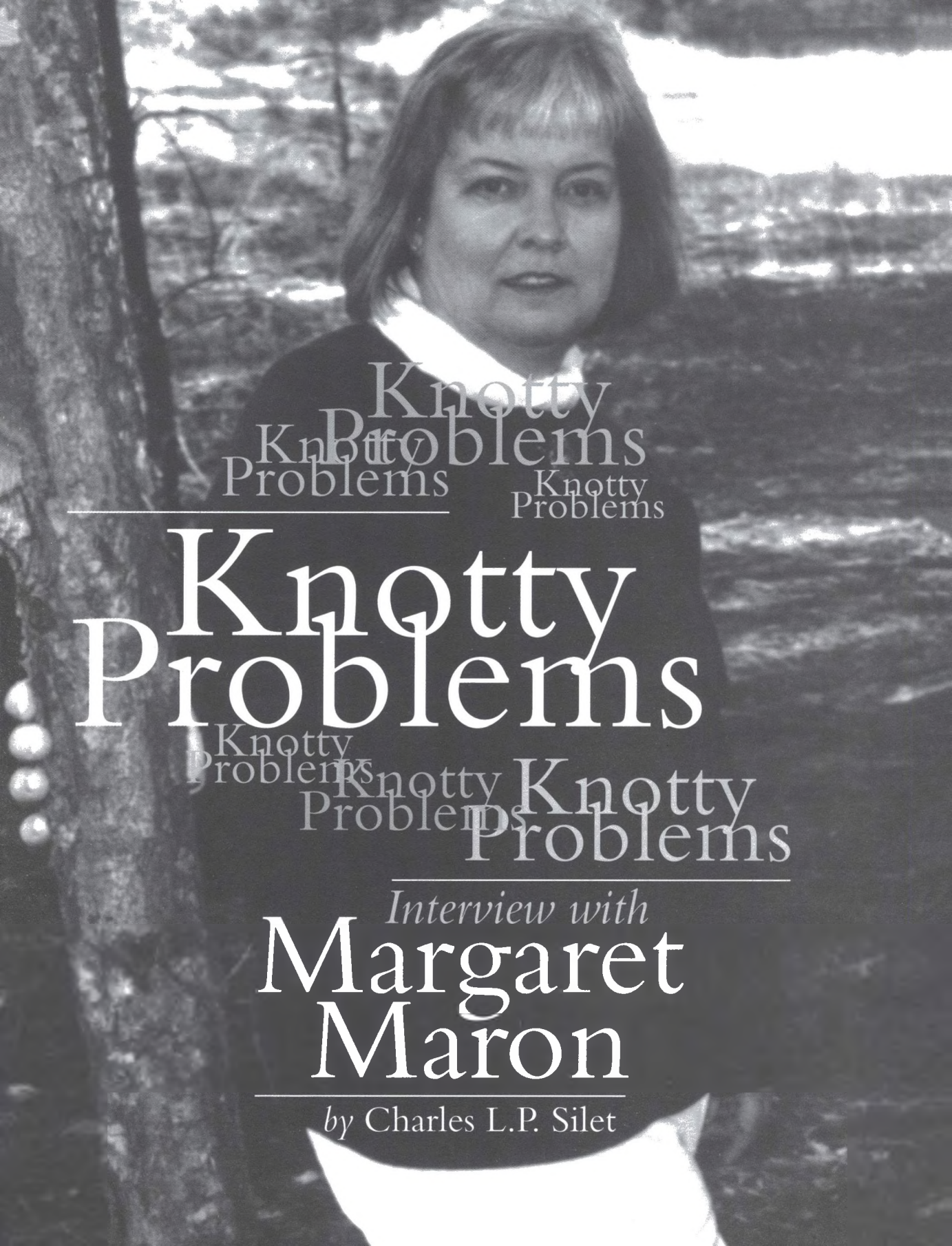


Knotty Problems

Interview with

Margaret Maron

by Charles L.P. Silet

One of the significant aspects in many of today's crime stories is their intense focus on characters, their relationships, their families, and their communities rather than puzzles—and puzzle-solvers. Women mystery writers have been largely responsible for fostering this trend, and Margaret Maron has been one of the most prominent.

Although her more recent series starring North Carolina native Deborah Knott provides good examples of the latest version of the "family" crime novel, Maron began her career as a mystery writer with Sigrid Harald, a single, emotionally-restricted police lieutenant in the New York Police Department's homicide division. That original series, now somewhat in abeyance, followed the central character through nine books as she fell in love and blossomed emotionally while solving crimes in the tightly-knit art world of the city. Maron examined Harald's search for connections with her own family amid her developing personal relationships—a theme which Maron is more fully exploring in her Deborah Knott novels. Maron conceived of Knott as the opposite of Sigrid Harald. Deborah is self-confident and deeply circumscribed—at times almost suffocatingly so—by her family and its place in a mythical North Carolina county. The novels focus on her interconnections with both family and place as she solves crimes in her position as a judge. In writing such stories, Maron's work now as much resembles that of another southern writer, William Faulkner, as it does the traditions of the genre out of which they evolved.

In a Winter '94 *TAD* article on Maron's North Carolina series, Art Taylor notes that by focusing on people with families and responsibilities, with pasts and futures, and with lives outside their work, Maron has shifted her novels' emphasis from the classic denouement—the solving of the crime—to moral issues. By "displacing the plot or puzzle" she forces the reader to think about the world of her characters who "insist on living on...long after the case

Charles L.P. Silet teaches film and contemporary literature and widely reviews and interviews in crime and mystery fiction.

itself has been closed."

In her professional life, too, Maron has been committed to the idea of community, actively serving in a variety of capacities in a number of mystery writers' organizations. She is the past president of Sisters in Crime, a member of the Board of Directors of the Mystery Writers of America, president of the American Crime Writers League, and an active member in the Carolina Crime Writers Association.

TAD: Tell me a little about your background.

MARON: I was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, and when I was still a child, we moved back down to the family farm in a community southeast of Raleigh. I grew up riding the schoolbus to a local rural school where all 12 grades were in the same building, 34 in my graduating class. I attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and transferred to Chapel Hill but married before finishing. [Joe] was a naval officer from New York and we went off to live in Italy for three years before returning to Brooklyn where he got his master's and taught art at Brooklyn College.

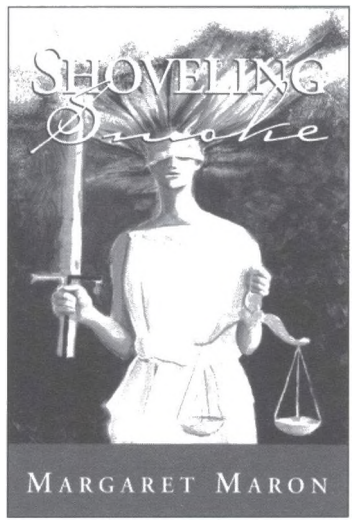
TAD: What got you interested in writing?

MARON: Who knows where these things start? I was a voracious reader rather early on. My mother had once taught and she had tried to write some fairy tales for her children. One day when I was about nine or ten, I was rummaging in an old trunk, came across these stories, and was almost as thunderstruck as Saul on the road to Damascus. It had never dawned on me that there was a connection between the written word that gave me so much pleasure and ordinary, walking-around people.

What probably confirmed my desire to write was reading Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Renascence" at 11 and learning that she'd written it at 19. I thought, "Hey, I can do this." Then I discovered a sad fact of life: it's very easy to write bad poetry—anybody can write stuff that rhymes and scans; but writing good poetry takes a special genius.

I grew up reading mysteries. Mother read all the classic, traditional American and British writers and some of the softer-boiled authors like Nero Wolfe, Erle Stanley Gardner, and Ellery Queen. I also loved science fiction and history. I'd read anything on any printed page set before me.

TAD: When did you decide to write crime fiction?



MARON: Well, I always knew I wanted to write "someday," but I didn't get serious about it until we were living in Brooklyn. (I was fortunate enough to have a husband who gave me the time and space to develop.) When I decided to find out if I could write salable prose, I actually gave myself a writing course. I brought home all kinds of how-to books from the public library, including John Ciardi's *How Does a Poem Mean?* and the whole *Paris Review* Writers at Work series. They helped me understand that mechanics didn't matter as much as perseverance, that old "apply seat of pants to seat of chair" and just write. I tried my hand at everything: serious New Yorker-type stories, Ogden Nash-type light verse, science fiction, how-to-do-stuff articles—but everything I sent out came right back by return mail. Then I hatched a short mystery story (write what you like to read, right?) and when I sent it out, it didn't immediately come bouncing home untouched by human hands. It was actually read by somebody at *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* who wrote on the rejection slip, "Not this time but let us see more." I was just as excited by that rejection slip as if it'd been an acceptance. I tightened and polished the story some more and sent it off to *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* and they bought it in 1968. That was my first mystery acceptance.

TAD: You published *One Coffee With* in 1982. What did you write between 1968 and then?

MARON: Short stories. For almost 12 years. I certainly wasn't making a living, but it was enough to claim office expenses on my income tax and I did occasionally sell a non-mystery short story to magazines like *Redbook* or *McCall's*. Don't forget that I started out a poet, and for me poems are short. When I couldn't do poetry, I did stories and most of my short stories are truly short—under 3,000 words. I was scared of the novel; was absolutely sure I could never write one. Robert Louis Stevenson, who was also afraid of the long form, described it as a feat of almost superhuman achievement and I was with him. Then the short story market dried up so badly in the seventies that I backed into writing a novel. *One Coffee With* started out as a short story with a character named Lt. Peter Bohr. It grew into a longer story, then a magazine novelette, then a book-length novelette. By the third rewrite, Lt. Peter Bohr had morphed into Lt. Sigrid Harald. My agent liked the characters, the style, and the story but said, "It's too short by half." So I doubled it again by interpolating a subplot about an artist's missing notebooks.

TAD: Where did the book's art material come from?

MARON: While we were living in Brooklyn, my husband taught in the Art Department at Brooklyn College and I substituted as the departmental secretary for nine months. Seeing how poisons and caustics were handled so cavalierly in the workshops made me realize what a perfect setting this was for murder.

Everybody also worried about tenure and that made another good plot device. Although my husband now has white hair and somewhat physically resembles Oscar Nauman, Nauman was actually based on another professor there, as is Vanderlyn College based on B.C. I just leveled a few square blocks on the East River and set it down in lower Manhattan.

TAD: Tell me something about your central character Sigrid Harald. What is she like? What makes her tick?

MARON: Sigrid Harald took the worst features from two very attractive and gregarious parents. Her mother was a Southern belle who became a respected photojournalist. Her father was a blond Viking who was killed in the line of duty when Sigrid was a toddler. She is quite shy and emotionally blocked. Although she knows she's competent in her work, she's very insecure in her femininity and in social and personal relationships. From the beginning, I had planned this as an interlocking series and I tried to construct a character who could grow emotionally over the life of the series, something that hadn't been done all that much up till then. Dorothy L. Sayers and Ngaio Marsh allowed their characters to age and take on grown-up responsibilities, but Hercule Poirot ended almost as he began. Same for Nero Wolfe and Perry Mason. Archie Goodwin stayed a lecherous mid-30ish bachelor and Ellery Queen remained the perennial good son and boy wonder. Pam and Jerry North began as a screwball married couple and never got past the cocktail hour. Philip Marlowe, the Continental Op, the list goes on. This is not to fault them. Maybe most readers prefer it that way. But I wanted to do a pivotal year in my character's life, a year in which she becomes involved with a much older man, falls in love, and learns to accept her femininity, to discover that she is desirable and worthy of being loved and that she can enter into a mature relationship as a full and equal partner.

It took me fourteen years to bring her year full cycle from *One Coffee With* to *Fugitive Colors*. In addition to the plots of each book, there's also an *uber-plot*, so to speak; and each book adds a little more information about the overall story of how her father actually died and what part her mother and her boss played in his death. Although each book stands alone, if the eight are read in sequence, you can better follow the developments. For instance, the officer on her squad who proves to be the rotten apple in *Past Imperfect*, the seventh book, makes a brief revealing slip in the third book.

Books by Margaret Maron

Sigrid Harald series

One Coffee With, 1981

Death of a Butterfly, 1984

The Right Jack, 1987

Baby Doll Games, 1988

Corpus Christmas, 1989

Past Imperfect, 1991

Fugitive Colors, 1995

Deborah Knott series

Bloody Kin, 1985

Bootlegger's Daughter, 1992
[Agatha, Anthony, Edgar, Macavity winner]

Southern Discomfort, 1993

Shooting at Loons, 1994

Up Jumps the Devil, 1996 [Agatha winner]

Killer Market, 1997

Shoveling Smoke: Selected Mystery Stories, 1997
[includes both Harald and Knott stories]

TAD: You've now completed eight books in the series but where do you go now that Oscar Nauman died in the last one?

MARON: When I finished *Fugitive Colors*, I thought his death was an accident. Now I wonder if it wasn't murder. If I write another Sigrid Harald book, she'll probably have to go out to California and decide for herself which it was. There are still a lot of unresolved loose ends: the three women in his life before Sigrid, one of whom tried to kill him when he first came to New York. In addition to a large estate, he may also have left an illegitimate child. I don't know. I do know that it sounds affected to speak as if these characters are out there with a life of their own, independent of my devising, but sometimes that's what it feels like. They definitely know things I don't.

In the very first Deborah Knott story, "Deborah's Judgment," Deborah mentions someone named Lev Schuster. I didn't have a clue as to who he was, but she needed to say something about "schmoozing," not a common word in my rural South. So she says in the story that she didn't realize that Lev's vocabulary was still affecting her speech. I thought, "Who the hell is Lev Schuster?" I didn't find out till *Shooting at Loons*, when he turns up and proves to be someone she once lived with. Names will pop out or specific objects, like her late mother's old Zippo lighter, and I'll know there's a story attached, but I won't have the foggiest idea what it is.

To go back to whether or not there'll be another Sigrid book, I honestly don't know. I do have her at a point where I can stop. As I say, if I go back, I'd have to explore Nauman's past. Who knows? It would be interesting, but you can't do everything in one lifetime.

TAD: You seem to use the art world to comment on the mystery story. You have Buntrock, an art critic, compare Sigrid to a Nauman painting: a seemingly simple surface which conceals unexpected complexities. Is that a description of your own writing?

MARON: It's hard for a writer to describe her own writing. I prefer to let

others do the sorting and classifying. I do like to write clearly, and it often turns out that after I've finished a book, I can look back and see a theme, but I've never consciously started with one. Like a Nauman abstract, some of the simplest writing can conceal great depths. I've always admired the way Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* seems so clear and artless. Yet when you go back and read it as an adult, you see so much you missed the first time. I try to write clear and accessible prose, but I also try to put in things which my readers can stumble upon and perhaps be delighted by—not just intellectual ideas, but playful things as well. I am captivated when a writer like Walter Satterthwait lets a character at a 1920s house party casually ask, "Is Rebecca de Winter expected?" Not enough to distract, but it does make the scene resonate. In my own case, the Sigrid Harald books have a huge running joke. The only two people who've caught it are my first Canadian editor and J. Allen Simpson, who writes the Peggy O'Neill series as M.D. Lake.

TAD: Are you going to tell me?

MARON: Nope.

TAD: Then tell me why you have Sigrid fascinated by northern European art—Dürer, Cranach, Holbein—and not much interested in Nauman's abstract painting?

MARON: "Fascinated" is perhaps too strong. Sigrid grew up going to the great art museums in New York, but I doubt if she'd given art too much thought before she met Nauman. It's the man who fascinates her, not the art; but because he's so forceful, she feels compelled to take a stand in his field. She doesn't understand the abstract. It strikes her as anarchic and anarchy makes her uneasy. She's a total pragmatist who prefers the concrete and specific, so she takes her stand where her nature is rooted—on the side of the analytical, the detailed, the realistic, her "Gothic" side, if you will. She tries to like Nauman's work, but really can't. He understands this and is so touched by her struggle and her honesty that when he admits to himself that he loves her, he makes a portrait of her in silverpoint (á la Holbein) and gives it to her as a Christmas present. I have on my wall reproductions of a pair of engravings, which come close to reflecting the difference between Sigrid and Oscar Nauman. One is Dürer's "Adam and Eve," done in 1504. The other is a Raimondi "Adam and Eve," engraved about the same time. The Dürer is austere, dark, tightly focused—typical late Gothic, while the Italian is all sensuous curves, space, atmosphere, and controlled abandon—high Renaissance. To me, one is intellect, the other emotion.

TAD: *Bloody Kin* has been described as a transition novel between the two series.

MARON: It is. *Bloody Kin* was set down here because I wanted to write about my little patch of North Carolina. It's set right here on the family farm although I did invent a fictional county with its own sheriff and deputy sheriff. These felt so right that when I came to write the Deborah Knott series I saw no reason not to keep using them. Besides, I like to pick up old story threads and I recycle endlessly. *Bloody Kin* had two minor characters from *Death in Blue Folders* and one of those two had a tiny cameo in *Bootlegger's Daughter*

TAD: But you already had the New York setting and the wonderfully venal art world atmosphere in the Sigrid books. Was it hard to give that up?

MARON: I do miss writing about New York and I wish there were some way to spend more time there. On the other hand, this is home. There's something very satisfying about writing out of current personal experience. In one of the books, Deborah and her father walk out on a moonlit night and Deborah is reminded of a time she and her family walked out like that on a warm June night and heard corn growing. This isn't something I could use in a New York book. A tree may grow in Brooklyn, but not much corn grows in Central Park. I enjoy writing about rural things, and let's face it: I simply don't know the daily rhythms of New York anymore the way I now know the rhythms here.

TAD: After *Bloody Kin* came out in 1985, when did you realize you wanted to do a second series set in North Carolina?

MARON: Bantam had the first series and by the time I'd finished *Past Imperfect*, they'd gotten so backed up in their publishing schedule, that I had time to write something else. Odd. I never considered that before. If those books had been published on schedule, I might never have sat down and created a second series character.

Anyhow, Sara Ann Freed, who was my friend before she became my editor at Mysterious Press, had read *Bloody Kin* and kept bugging me to write another North Carolina book. And I wanted to write about the South, about the attachment to the land, and to family. Sigrid's closest relatives are her mother and her mother's mother. I deliberately gave Deborah a big, gregarious family whose members actually like each other. And I wanted to tell stories about how North Carolina is changing right out from under us, going from agrarian to high tech with suburbanization at full tilt. There's much about the state that I didn't know and I thought it'd be fun to make my character a judge and send her out to explore. I wanted her to be of the law so that she wasn't a total amateur sleuth. As a judge, she can command cooperation from those in law enforcement.

TAD: So who is Deborah Knott? How does she differ from Sigrid Harald?

MARON: She was deliberately conceived to be Sigrid's polar opposite. Sigrid was a loner, an only child, uncomfortable with emotions. Deborah likes being a woman, has a wide circle of friends and comes from a large, loving, extended family of brothers, sisters-in-law, nieces and nephews, cousins and aunts, with a bootlegging daddy in the center. One of my readers suggested that Deborah's family feels like the oceans and the mountains, that they're her bedrock. Which they are. They've let her grow up confident and opinion-

ated, secure in her place. On the other hand, a big, nosy family can be claustrophobic, too, the way they hover and advise and criticize and suggest.

There's also the difference between the immediacy of Deborah's first-person voice as opposed to the distancing of third-person narrative in the Sigrid books. First person can be a little constrictive because it doesn't let me tell the reader anything that Deborah doesn't know. She has to see or hear all the propelling action. With third-person, I could have all kinds of things going on that Sigrid never even suspected. In *Fugitive Colors*, she never realizes that the young black woman has been sabotaging the art gallery. Nobody knows except the reader, an old artist, and the girl herself. I can't do that in the Deborah Knott books.

TAD: You mentioned writing in the Southern tradition. Questions of kinship, a sense of place, the land, the importance of the past—why are these traditional concerns of Southern writers?

MARON: Part of it, I think, comes because we lost the war. If you're the victor, you can be magnanimous in your victory and get on with your life. But if you're the loser, you have to explain to yourself why you lost, so you rationalize, you veer between guilt and rage and scalding humiliation, and you keep telling stories to make sense of it. That may be where part of our storytelling tradition comes from. Certainly it helped strengthen whatever tendencies were already there.

TAD: There are also Biblical overtones in the North Carolina books.

MARON: Oh, yes! I love the language of it. I know it drives religious people up the wall to have the Bible thought of as literature and not God's holy word alone, but the King James Version is an inspired book. When one of the preachers here tried to preach from a revised text, one of the old timers huffed, "If the King James Bible was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for me." I'm with him. Was it Flannery O'Connor who said that the South is God-obsessed? I was brought up Southern Baptist, and there's no way you can ever get that voice out of your head. If you grew up reading the Bible—and the Sunday school I went to encouraged us to read it all the way through every two years—that language works its way right down into your bones.

> I'm glad to see social issues in fiction and I'm glad to see more regionalism across the genre

TAD: Tell me about one of your latest Deborah Knott novels, *Up Jumps the Devil*.

MARON: It was written in response to unregulated growth here in central North Carolina. The low rate of unemployment in the Research Triangle has attracted thousands of new residents and they are now spilling out into the countryside. We had an interstate come through here and what ten years ago was nothing but a crossroads in the middle of tobacco and soybean fields is probably going to incorporate within the next year or so. We're becoming one subdivision after another and it just doesn't seem as if anybody's in charge or paying attention to what's happening about ground water, run-off, the loss of wetlands and farms. At the same time, you have farmers who don't want anybody telling them what to do with their land if it's now more valuable as real estate. Some want to continue to farm as their fathers and grandfathers did and tobacco is still the big cash crop. At one point, I had Deborah's brother Adam, who's left the farm and gone out to California, say, "You people are sitting on seven million dollars." Deborah's floored when she actually multiplies how many acres of land her family owns by how much land is going for because they still think of themselves as relatively poor dirt farmers. In 1970, raw farm land was $350 an acre; now, it's anywhere up to $20,000 an acre. Farmers ask, "Why shouldn't I have a part of that?" I don't know where it's going to end. Which wouldn't upset me if I thought our politicians knew. If we're going to sell our birthright for a mess of pottage,

somebody has to question how much that pottage is going to cost us.

TAD: You've said you don't want to preach in your novels, but crime fiction does seem to deal with social issues almost by necessity.

MARON: I think it adds a dimension and richness to them. I'm glad to see social issues in fiction and I'm glad to see more regionalism across the genre so that I can read about people and places and issues unfamiliar to me—Susan Dunlap's Berkeley, Robert Crais's Hollywood, Nevada Barr's wilderness areas. I think it was Carolyn Hart who pointed out that crime novels will probably be a rich source of social history in years to come. You have to spot the anomalies in order to solve the crime, so by their very nature, today's crime novels tend to describe society as it now is.

TAD: We now can expect a new Deborah Knott book?

MARON: Yes, *Killer Market* will be out in August. The title comes from a phrase used in the High Point wholesale furniture market. When retailers place lots of orders, the vendors say, "Boy, it was a killer market!"—a ready-made title. Traditionally, North Carolina has been a big furniture center. They have the International Home Furnishings Market twice a year in High Point, a little town of about 70,000 people. For nine days in April and again in October, the town doubles in size. Thousands of people come from all over the world. The town has over seven million square feet of showroom space. It's like Paris or Milan in the fashion industry. This is where buyers come to see what's on the cutting edge of fashion. Just picture the largest furniture mall you can imagine and then cube that: you have wicker cheek by jowl with reproductions of English Chippendale next to California painted furniture next to Mexican tinware. Deborah's in the process of getting her own house, so I thought it would be fun to send her over there with no clue as to how huge Market is. She can't find a place to stay because hotel rooms book up months in advance. There is absolutely no room at the inn, which leads to some interesting situations. A sales manager is murdered and Deborah becomes an active suspect. There are no real issues here as in other Deborah Knott books. This is probably the purest, most straightforward murder mystery in the series.

TAD: What is the next one going to be about?

MARON: We'll be back in Colleton County, back among her family, and yes, I'm finally going to include a family tree for those who can't keep her brothers straight. There are several things I want to look at in this novel. I want to learn more about the young black ADA who prosecutes in Deborah's court. Why is she so uptight, so rigid with first offenders, so hard on her own race in the courtroom? And I want to look at the conflicted feelings farmers have about growing tobacco. It's still the biggest cash crop, but most farmers know in their heart of hearts that it's addictive and causes cancer. At the same time, it brings in so much money that there's nothing else they can legally raise that will provide that level of return.

I think I'd like to write a mystery play, something that would be accessible and fun...

TAD: You often use epigraphs to introduce your chapters. Why?

MARON: I like the contrasts and the irony, although the connection to the chapter's action is sometimes very arcane. When you write, you do many things for your own amusement and this is a case of amusing myself as much as anything else. Those 1437 quotes from Cennino Cennini in *Fugitive Colors* were wonderful. He's almost like a Julia Child, the way he gives recipes for mixing paints and drawing proportions. Technique then was halfway between alchemy and science—and I enjoyed contrasting the 15th-century viewpoint of art as vocation and the 20th-century reduction of art to commerce.

TAD: There are often artificial distinctions made between "genre" fiction and "mainstream" fiction. Do you see much difference yourself?

MARON: Not really. People love to categorize. We even talk about categories within the genre itself. And there's that whole male/female thing where some feel that women's books aren't as important because a crime novel should be grim and violent to be realistic, while others hold that domestic concerns portray mainstream society more accurately than endless serial killers. Anybody who wants to call a book a mystery has my permission and that goes from the very softest romantic suspense all the way up to post-apocalyptic splatter punk. I'm very egalitarian about this. To me, good writing is good writing whenever it engages the emotions and doesn't insult the intelligence. I've seen some wonderful science fiction that matches anything in mainstream and the same with mysteries. I don't get too hung up on categories. When anybody asks what I write, I say murder mysteries. I've never felt the need to run from that tag.

TAD: You're a past president of Sisters in Crime. Has that organization been effective in gaining recognition for female crime writers?

MARON: Absolutely no question about it. In the past ten years of SinC's existence, women have gotten more recognition, more review space, more shelf space in airports and chain stores,

which in turn has brought bigger contracts for female writers and created an atmosphere which welcomes more women into the field. And I credit this directly to the efforts of hardworking SinC committees—our promotional materials, our Books in Print catalog that goes out to thousands of potential buyers, our speakers bureau, our support networks across the country, etc., etc. SinC has more active mystery writers than any other organization so we have a high visibility in the mystery world which we have tried to use to promote the whole field, not just our own members.

TAD: You've won several of the most prestigious awards for crime writing. What does winning those awards do for a writer?

MARON: It can really jump-start any writing career. And not just winning. Even being nominated is an enormous help. Every year at Malice Domestic (and this year at Bouchercon), I moderate a newcomer panel composed of the nominees for Best First Novel. I love welcoming new people into our genre. This year, I had a letter from one nominee who said that she wasn't sure she could continue writing to the detriment of her day job. Then she was nominated. Now her publisher's more interested and she just signed a contract for three more books. Awards do make reviewers notice you more, it would be foolish to pretend otherwise. And publishers and editors are pleased. It's great to be a winner, but editors are happy just to have their authors nominated. I read for the Edgar committee this year and we received around 400 submissions for Best Novel. To be nominated, to be one of five people out of four hundred? That's a pretty big achievement. You can put that on your books for the rest of your life: "Edgar Nominee," "Agatha Nominee," "Anthony," "Shamus."

TAD: You mentioned earlier that you had a collection of short fiction coming out?

MARON: *Shoveling Smoke*. Douglas Greene at Crippen and Landru has begun publishing limited editions of short stories. He does a print run of about 250 hardbound books which the authors sign, and he also tips in by hand a page of original draft manuscript which the authors provide, complete with crossed-out passages and alternate phrases inked in. Then he does about 1,500 trade paperbacks of the same title. He's providing a real service to those of us who write short stories since most of our publishers don't like to do single-author collections. I have about 45 stories, so we've selected about 20 for *Shoveling Smoke*. One of them is a previously unpublished Deborah Knott story.

TAD: What's the attraction of short fiction?

MARON: It's short! If you have an idea that's not book-length or want to explore a new character, you can do it in under 3,000 words. One of my favorites is called "Deadhead Coming Down," about a bored long-haul truck driver who occasionally pulls off the interstate and finds someone to run over. It's a grizzly little story—about 1,500 words—and it was fun to do, but it was much too slight to carry a whole book. Stories also keep your name green between books and often they take on a life of their own when they're reprinted in different anthologies. It really tickled me when Bill Pronzini and Jack Adrian selected "Deadhead" for an anthology titled *Hardboiled Detectives*. Me? Hardboiled?

TAD: Is there anything you've not done that you've always wanted to do?

MARON: I used to daydream about turning Thomas Mann's *The Holy Sinner* into a stage play even though I've never written a play. Finding an actor who could portray Pope Gregory when he was a hedgehog on a desert island might be a challenge, though. (Not to mention clearing copyright restrictions.) Now, I think I'd like to write a mystery play, something that would be accessible and fun, that could be done by local little theaters across the country. Other than that? No, I'm one of those boring people who happen to be content with their lives. I love my husband, son, and daughter-in-law, and I'm utterly besotted with our brand new granddaughter. I'm living on the home place, I have warm and supportive friends, and I'm getting paid to do the work I've always wanted to do. As my sister-in-law would say, anything else is "gravy on the tree." ■

By Rachel Schaffer

Armed (with Wit) and Dangerous

Sue Grafton's Sense of Black Humor

There is an infamous stereotype in American society (if not worldwide) that women have no sense of humor—or at the very least, that their sense of humor is not as well developed as men's. Feminists, in particular, are notorious for their humorless attitudes toward their political and social beliefs.

However, Don L.F. Nilsen[1] supports the common rebuttal to these stereotypes: "...men are the ones who have promoted such a belief, not because women don't enjoy humor, but because their humor is different from men's humor." Within psychology, according to Alice Sheppard,[2] "humor is implicitly defined as a male realm": male humor is taken as the norm, and male preferences for topics and standards of what is funny are used as bases for comparison in psychological studies.

Research shows sex-based differences in humor-related behaviors, primarily in the degree of social acceptability of men's vs. women's expressing humor. If it is true, as much humor research indicates, that "humor [is] the expression of an aggressive impulse"[3] and that "jokes subvert, and therefore comedy attacks control,"[4] then there is a logical explanation for the seeming lack of humor among women: women are not *supposed* to be aggressive, to disparage others, or to seek control. In fact, from childhood on, they are actively discouraged from exhibiting such behaviors.

Yet marked changes can be seen in attitudes toward women and humor in the work of female mystery writers, who freely use aggressive humor in their writing as well as writing about aggressively humorous women. Just as male authors and detectives (notably Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett) have long used humor for a variety of reasons, so do their female counterparts today. No better exemplar exists of how women's humor has grown as a key element in women's writing than in Sue Grafton's alphabet detective series featuring P.I. Kinsey Millhone. Kinsey is a strong, independent, feminist version of the traditional hard-boiled detective, with one additional ingredient that spices the recipe and makes this series a favorite of many readers: Kinsey's (i.e. Grafton's) use of humor in general and black humor in particular.

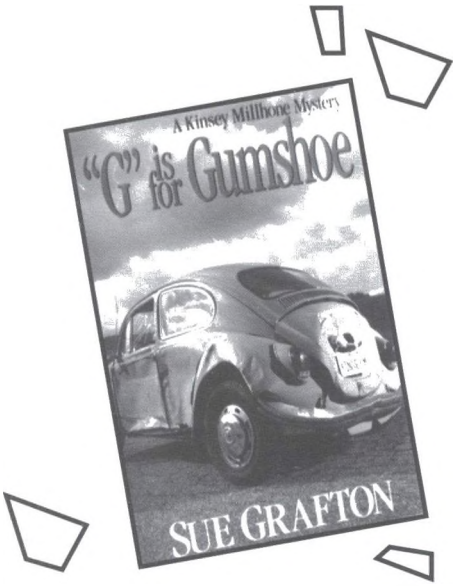
Kinsey, who lives alone and revels in her solitude, freedom, and independence, is the strong but definitely not silent type. She is a woman with attitude: she always has a crack to make, whether an acerbic comment on life's little idiosyncracies or on the dangers she so often faces. Her use of black humor, in particular, is both tool and weapon, revealing much about her personality; her attitude toward people, work, authority, and life; and her method of coping with her fears and disappointments.

Black humor arises from the unexpected juxtaposition of a serious topic, such as death, pain, or loss, with a nonserious, irreverent attitude toward it. The reader expects one kind of reaction from the protagonist and instead finds the opposite. Enid Veron[5] defines black humor as "a brand of grim comedy characterized by the mingling, in varying degrees, of the ludicrous and the terrible." The ludicrous is easy to see in Grafton's books, and at times so is the terrible.

Kinsey works in a profession where death and dead bodies are commonplace. Where most of us would rather avoid exposure to such frightening realities, Kinsey is forced to deal with them fairly often, and to help herself cope she often uses black humor to keep her emotional reactions in check. Through irony and irreverence, she distances herself from the full emotional impact of dealing with death and corpses, autopsies and funerals: her sense of black humor provides her with emotional and psychological protection.

In the novels, one of the most common catalysts for such humor are funerals: Kinsey comments on the body, the casket, the grave, the mourners, or the service itself, sometimes in shockingly irreverent—and very funny—terms. For

Rachel Schaffer teaches linguistics, composition, and an occasional literature course at Montana State University—Billings. Her primary interest in the mystery field is feminist detective fiction.



example, in *"D" Is for Deadbeat*, Kinsey attends a funeral and views the body in the casket:

I tiptoed across the room to have a peek at him. The color and texture of Daggett's skin looked about like a Betsy-Wetsy doll I'd had as a kid. His features had a flattened appearance, which I suspected was a side effect of the autopsy process. Peel somebody's face back and it's hard to line it all up again. Daggett's nose looked crooked, like a pillowcase put on with the seam slightly skewed.

I was aware of a rustling behind me and Barbara Daggett appeared on my right. We stood together for a moment without a word. I don't know why people stand and study the dead that way. It makes about as much sense as paying homage to the cardboard box your favorite shoes once came in. (93)

Kinsey's comparison of a dead man's face to homey, everyday objects like a doll, a pillowcase, and a shoebox is exactly the kind of incongruity—"the discovery of...unapparent likenesses"—that Frederick Isaac says "creates humor in hard-boiled fiction."[6] But these are particularly *feminine* kinds of comparisons, one a man would be far less likely to make, and this gives Grafton's fiction a very *female* sense of black humor.

During this same scene, Kinsey observes another of the mourners, Essie Daggett, putting on a display of hysteria that offends Kinsey's sense of self-restraint:

[Essie] fumbled for a handkerchief, which she pressed to her mouth as if she meant to chloroform herself.

She was having a pretty good time by now, rolling her head back and forth, reciting scriptures in a high-pitched voice. Barbara and Eugene were working to restrain her and I gathered that Essie had expressed a strong desire to fling herself into the coffin with her beloved. I might have given her a boost myself. (94)

In *"C" Is for Corpse*, Kinsey also comments on the latest in modern grave technology, deconstructing a funereal stereotype through incongruity and irony:

Funeral styles had evolved since my parents were buried and I wondered, idly, what had dictated the change. Technology, no doubt. Maybe death was tidier these days and easier to regulate. Graves were dug by machinery, which carved out a neat pit surmounted now by this low-slung contraption on which the casket rested. No more of this horseshit with the loved ones flinging themselves into the grave. With this new apparatus in place, you'd have to get down on your belly and leopard-crawl into the hole, which robbed the gesture of its theatrical effect. (91)

Kinsey's sublime irreverence extends to funeral services themselves, as she demonstrates later in *"D" Is for Deadbeat* when she describes a minister's funeral sermon:

From somewhere near the back, a woman hollered out "Yes, Lord!" and a second woman yelled out "Buuuuhshiit!" in just about the same tone. The minister, not hearing that well, apparently took both as spiritual punctuation marks, Biblical whoopees to incite him to greater eloquence. (151)

The same kind of irreverence toward conventional voyeuristic reactions to death and tragedy can be seen when Kinsey comments on a group of neighbors flocking to bring food to family members who have just experienced an upsetting incident in *"F" Is for Fugitive*:

On the kitchen counter, I could see a tuna casserole with crushed potato chips on top, a ground beef and noodle bake, and two Jell-O molds.... It had only been an hour and a half since Bailey [the son] fled the courthouse in a blaze of gunfire. I didn't think gelatin set up that fast, but these Christian ladies probably knew tricks with ice cubes that would render salads and desserts in record time for just such occasions. I pictured a section in the ladies' auxiliary church cookbook for Sudden Death Quick Snacks...using ingredients one could keep on the pantry shelf in the event of tragedy. (100)

Funerals are not the only place where Kinsey runs into dead bodies: morgues and autopsies also play a role in her investigations. In *"C" Is for Corpse* she

has two such encounters, the first involving a pathologist, Dr. Fraker, working on human remains:

> For the first time, I cued in to what Fraker was actually doing.... There was a white plastic carton on the counter, a one-pint size, like the kind used for chicken livers in the meat section of the supermarket. As I watched, he dumped out a glistening blob of organs, which he began to sort through with a pair of long tweezers....
>
> I could feel my lips purse in distaste. "What are those?"
>
> His expression was mild, impersonal, and amused. He used the tweezers to point, touching each of several hunks in turn. I half expected the little morsels to draw away from his probing, like live slugs, but none of them moved. "Well, let's see. That's a heart. Liver. Lung. Spleen. Gall bladder....
>
> I didn't think I'd ever look at stew meat in quite the same way.... (191–92)

Here again, Kinsey compares a horrifying subject—dead body parts—to a more common, everyday topic that is both familiar and *comforting* to women, this time food. The comparison to chicken livers and stew meat removes some of the horror from the process confronting her while the incongruity surprises the reader and creates classic black humor.

Kinsey makes the food connection explicit in a later scene, where she is searching a corpse in the morgue for a murder weapon she believes may be hidden somewhere on the body:

> Tentatively, I reached out and eased a hand under Franklin's neck and knees and pulled, slipping him from his resting place onto the gurney. He was surprisingly light, and cold to the touch, about the consistency of a package of raw chicken breasts just out of the fridge. God, I thought, why do I plague myself with these domestic images? I'd never be motivated to learn to cook at this rate. (203)

The last comment is doubly funny, first because of Kinsey's explicit recognition of her own grotesque tendency to compare corpses and food, and second, as regular Grafton readers know, because the *last* thing on Kinsey's list of things to do is learning how to cook; she hardly needs another excuse *not* to.

When Kinsey encounters dead bodies outside of morgues, her reactions may not involve food analogies, but the reader can expect equally macabre images relating to more commonplace and therefore comforting objects. In *"F" Is for Fugitive*, for example, Kinsey is searching around an outdoor hot tub for the body of a murdered teenager:

> The spa had a bi-fold insulated cover pulled over it with a plastic handhold along the rim. I hesitated for a moment and then lifted it.... I wasn't going to put my hand in there, folks. I wasn't going to plunge my arm in up to the elbow, feeling around to determine if Shana's body was submerged in the depths.... At the back of my mind, it did occur to me that if Shana'd been killed and then dumped in here, she'd be floating by now, buoyed by accumulating gases...sort of like a pool toy. I could feel my eyes cross. Sometimes I sicken myself with my own thoughts. (274)

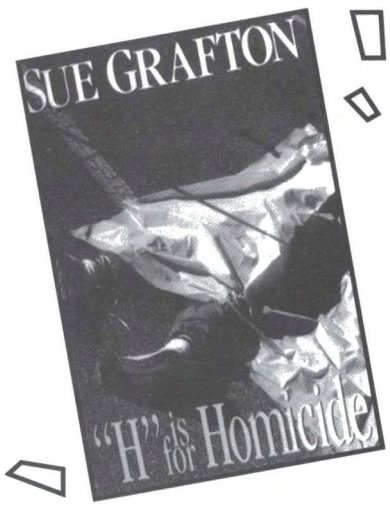
Here, Kinsey actually comments on her own grotesque mental imagery, and her reaction, echoing many of the readers' own, prompts even greater laughter, a tangible release of tension built up

by the suspense of the immediately preceding description.

Kinsey's general approach to handling dangerous situations also makes use of black humor as a defense against threats both physical and psychological. In *"G" Is for Gumshoe,* for example, Kinsey learns that a contract has been put out on her and three other people involved in the conviction of felon Tyrone Patty. Her reaction shows a woman's practical, analytical mind at work, as well as her trademark defensive humor:

> Nobody (that I knew of) had ever put out a contract on me. I tried to picture Tyrone Patty chatting up the subject with a hit man in Carson City. Somehow it seemed strange. For one thing, it was hard to imagine the kind of person who made a living that way. Was the work seasonal? Were there any fringe benefits? Was the price discounted since there were four of us to whack? (20–21)

Who else would react to such frightening news by getting caught up in the practical, mundane details of hit work? This example (and many others throughout the series) demonstrates that Kinsey's reactions to danger are archetypally hardboiled, exhibiting the kind of offhand nonchalance that permits the protagonist to joke about a situation that would send



the average citizen running for cover. But Kinsey's approach is far different from that of Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe: it takes a distinctively feminine path to achieve its humor.

Kinsey manifests a certain hardboiled toughness through humor in other settings, as well, some everyday, some also involving danger. Quite often, she reveals rather sadistic attitudes toward people who annoy her. In more than one novel, Kinsey has also mentioned her urge to bite people who obstruct her efforts to investigate cases, especially civil servants. In *"H" Is for Homicide*, she runs into a brick wall when she tries to wring information from a clerk in the county sheriff's department:

> Situations like this bring up an ancient and fundamental desire to bite. I could envision a half-moon of my teeth marks on the flesh of her forearm, which would swell and turn all colors of the rainbow. She'd have to have tetanus and rabies shots. Maybe her owner would elect to put her to sleep. (34)

Of course, Kinsey isn't the only character in a Grafton novel to exhibit sadism: killers are naturals for that kind of personality quirk, but Grafton's killers also sometimes exhibit their own peculiar form of black humor. In *"G" Is for Gumshoe,* Kinsey draws out the hit man who has been hired to kill her, developing characterization in the process:

> "Why'd you kill Patrick?" [a character who got in the way]
>
> "Why not. He's a dickface."
>
> I glanced over at him curiously. "Why'd you spare Ernie?" [Patrick's elderly boarder]
>
> "That old fart? Who knows? Maybe I'll go back and do him now you mention it," he said. His tone was teasing. A little hit-man humor to show what a devil-may-care kind of guy he was. He'd taken the gun away from my head and it rested now on his knee. (315)

The killer in *"C" Is for Corpse* also has a deadly sense of humor. As Dr. Fraker chases Kinsey through the morgue building, he first sings "Someone to Watch Over Me" and then she hears him "whistling the first few bars of 'I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance with You.' Was this man sick or what?" (210).

Kinsey's inclination toward black humor is one of her most basic personality traits, one tool in her formidable bag of tricks that she sometimes uses for very conscious, pragmatic purposes. In *"G" Is for Gumshoe,* Kinsey is helping

her client Irene Gersh fill out paperwork on her recently deceased mother. Irene is upset because she knows so little about her mother and is having difficulty answering the questions on the form. Kinsey here uses black humor to help Irene keep things in perspective and even comments on her own motivation in using it: "'Irene, you cannot flunk this test,' I said. 'I mean, what are they going to do, refuse to bury her?' I hated to be flip, but I thought it might snap her out of the self-pity" (235).

Kinsey is very much aware of her use of black humor as a psychological defense mechanism against danger, dependency, and loneliness. In *"H" Is for Homicide,* she again comments explicitly on her own habitual use of black humor, this time in connection with a coworker's death:

> I was no better prepared than anyone else. In my line of work, I'm not a stranger to homicide. For the most part, I don't react, but with Parnell's death, because of our friendship, my usual defenses—action, anger, a tendency to gallows humor—did little to protect me from the same apprehensiveness that gripped everyone else. (9)

Kinsey herself recognizes her own personality traits and motivation for using black humor: sometimes as a weapon, either defensive or offensive, and sometimes as a tool, to provoke a reaction from someone else. And sometimes Grafton, through Kinsey, uses black humor to stretch the boundaries of propriety, break the stereotype of women authors as genteel and proper, and elicit a reaction from the reader. Emily Toth[7] claims that "modern women writers consider very few subjects sacred—and there are very few taboos"; Grafton at times illustrates this contention explicitly through blackly humorous references to body functions and by-products not normally mentioned in "polite" society. But again, this is hard-boiled fiction through a *woman's* eyes, and while at times Kinsey is just plain gross, she also realistically links her humor to topics that women can well relate to.

For example, Kinsey occasionally makes use of off-color references to elimination in describing typically female domains, such as clothing and dating, as when she describes her acquaintance Darcy's taste in clothing in *"E" Is for Evidence*:

> She's big on pastel shades, imagining, I suppose, that washed-out colors are somehow more flattering to her than bold ones. She wore a pale-yellow sweater about the hue of certain urine samples I've seen where the prognosis isn't keen. (44)

The majority of Grafton's uses of black humor certainly match the basic purpose of using humor in general, which Alleen Pace Nilsen[8] describes as "a release from a moderate level of tension." When the tension stems from danger and death, the humor naturally tends to be grim—and the tension, along with its accompanying release, may be quite a bit more than "moderate." If, as Nilsen also claims,[9] "humor carries with it a degree of pain" and "we even get a certain satisfaction from *sick* and *gallows* humor," then it is understandable why readers find Kinsey's black humor both funny and satisfying.

Grafton, through Kinsey, uses black humor to stretch the boundaries of propriety, break the stereotype of women authors as genteel and proper, and elicit a reaction from the reader.

Kinsey's use of black humor can also be *empowering*. Susan Bunkers[10] points out "how women can use sarcastic humor to critique the institutionalization of sexual control over women in our culture and to reject the authority underlying such control" and that "humor can function as one avenue for the successful rejection of female powerlessness and for the assertion of female power." Kinsey, as a woman in a male-dominated profession, one in which she frequently encounters skepticism about her abilities to do the job, often uses humor—specifically black humor—to liberate herself from societal expectations of how she should think, feel, and act, both professionally and privately. If Kinsey were to follow traditional patterns of "proper" behavior for women, she would avoid both black humor *and* detective work.

Kinsey's profession is one where she must deal not only with doubts about her abilities, but also with frequent stress and occasional danger. She therefore needs to develop coping strategies just as men in her job do, but she is a woman, and therefore her coping mechanisms take different forms and approaches, ones with which her female readers can well identify. One of her major defense mechanisms, her sense of humor, is produced through a *woman's* psyche and sensibilities, and therefore she sometimes uses traditionally female areas of interest (food, household objects, etc.) as the source of the contrast and surprise needed to create humor. The juxtaposition of homey topics with life-and-death matters makes the contrast between the traditional role of a woman as homemaker and nurturer and Kinsey's role as tough, independent private investigator all the stronger—and more humorous—at the same time that it conveys legitimate power on those traditionally female areas, which Kinsey still acknowledges as part of her life experience.

At the same time, as a member of a hardboiled, male-dominated profession as well as a woman, Kinsey often stretches the familiar, usually well-mannered boundaries of women's humor to include more traditionally male—i.e. vulgar—topics, such as frank observations of everyday behavior and body functions, but from a woman's point of view and with a woman's eye for details. Readers, especially female readers, find it liberating and empowering to see Kinsey crossing the lines into traditionally male areas of both work and humor, succeeding at both without abandoning her feminine perspective or interests. Rather, she makes use of her experiences as a woman to help her succeed in her work and define her own unique sense of humor. Her use of black humor with a feminine(/ist) twist lends support to Maureen T. Reddy's claim that "every feature of male hardboiled detective novels is transformed in women's novels."[11]

Just as humor itself depends on a surprise, a reversal of expectations, so Kinsey surprises her readers through role and behavior reversals, including her use of humor and language. When Kinsey is faced with serious situations involving danger, death, illness, pain, or basic grossness, her most typical reaction is a therapeutic dose of black humor designed to provide a catharsis for readers by forcing them to stop taking life (and death) quite so seriously and remember that this is, after all, only a book—and Kinsey has everything under control. Kinsey's black humor isn't callous; it's a defense mechanism that lets her maintain an emotional distance so that she can continue functioning and get the job done. Readers empathize with her and admire her coping mechanisms and her freedom to say things they might like to but feel they can't. We read mysteries for the vicarious thrill of the chase, to experience danger safely, to vent hostilities through sublimation rather than action. Kinsey, through her actions, her successes, and even her use of humor, empowers not only herself and the female detective in general, but also her female readers. When she speaks her mind and gives free expression to her unique sense of humor, we see in her a role model. As Bunkers[12] aptly analyzes the appeal of women's humor, "Our laughter unites us; it awakens our feelings of self-worth; and it confirms our sense of power." ■

NOTES

[1]Don L.F. Nilsen. *Humor in American Literature: A Selected Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1992, p. 5.

[2]Alice Sheppard. "Social Cognition, Gender Roles, and Women's Humor." *Women's Comic Visions*. Ed. June Sochen. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991, p. 36.

[3]Jaye Berman. "Women's Humor." *Contemporary Literature* XXXI, 2, Summer 1990, p. 254.

[4]William Gleason. "'Her Laugh an Ace': The Function of Humor in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 11.3 (1987), p. 55.

[5]Enid Veron, ed. *Humor in America: An Anthology*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1976, p. 323.

[6]Frederick Isaac. "Laughing with the Corpses: Hard-Boiled Humor." *Comic Crime*. Ed. Earl Bargainnier. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987, p. 24.

[7]Emily Toth. "Forbidden Jokes and Naughty Ladies." *Studies in American Humor* 4.1–2 (Spr/Sum 1985), p. 13.

[8]Alleen Pace Nilsen. "In Defense of Humor." *College English* 56.8 (Dec. 1994), p. 929.

[9]Alleen Pace Nilsen, p. 930.

[10]Susan Bunkers, "Why Are These Women Laughing?" *Studies in American Humor* 4.1–2 (Spr/Sum 1985), p. 89.

[11]Maureen T. Reddy. *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel*. New York: Continuum, 1988, p. 120 (quoted in Patricia E. Johnson. "Sex and Betrayal in the Detective Fiction of Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky." *Journal of Popular Culture*, 27.4 (Spring 1994), p. 98).

[12]Bunkers, p. 91.

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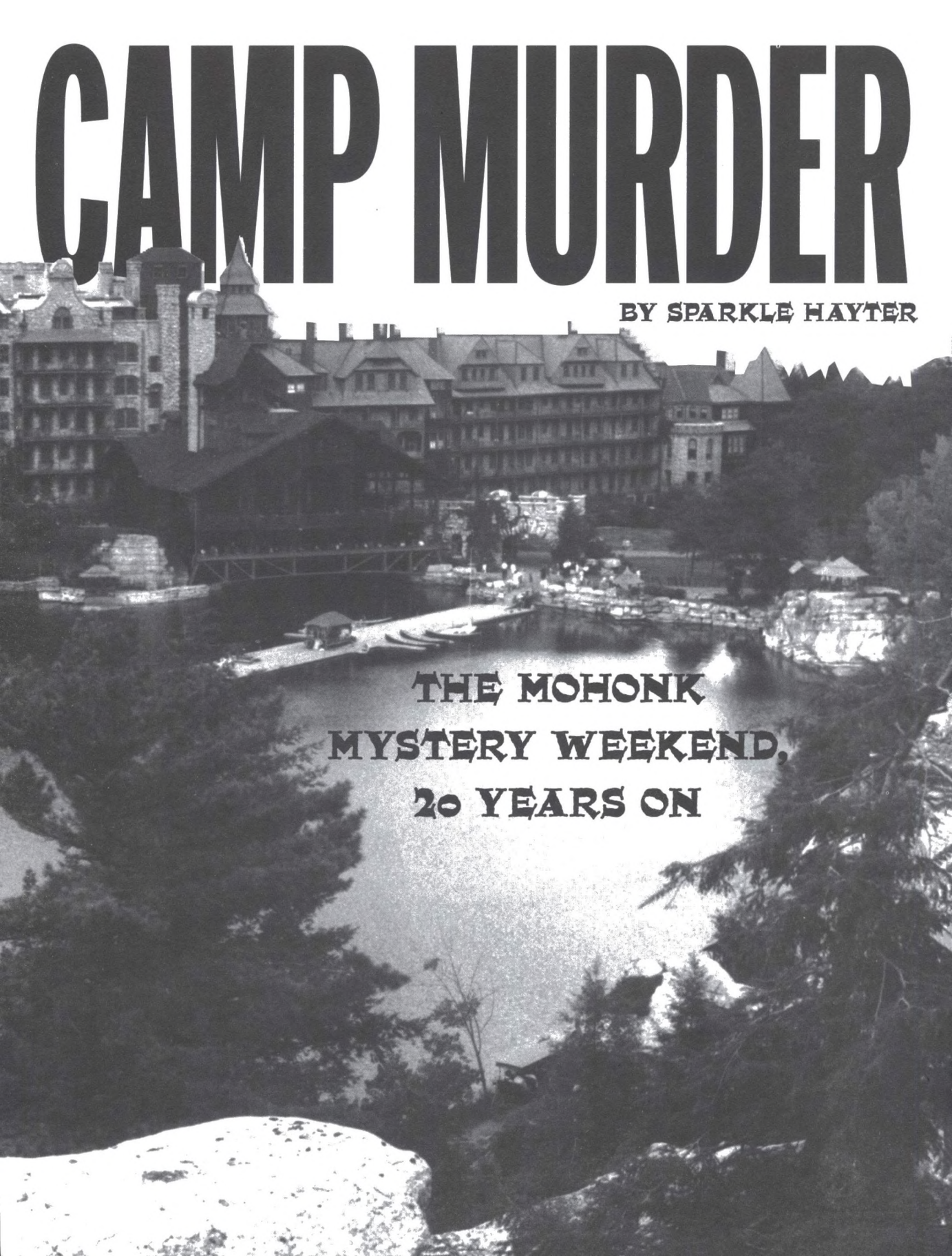
CAMP MURDER

BY SPARKLE HAYTER



THE MOHONK MYSTERY WEEKEND, 20 YEARS ON

It was a Thursday, a cold March day, when I arrived at Mohonk. Ahead, the gothic hotel on a hill loomed... what evil lay in wait for me there? I had a bad feeling—hard not to, knowing how many strumpets, vicars, servants, noblemen, Indian war veterans, riverboat gamblers, and cops had been murdered in Mohonk, and always in the most gruesome ways: a pitchfork through the throat, bludgeoned with croquet mallets, pushed down stairs, electrocution...

Had it only been a year since I was last here, since the housemaid had been killed with poisoned hand cream? Time flies. Last year it was 1890. This year it is 1967...

This year, too, there will be a killer present, and there will be at least one murder before the weekend is over. This I know for certain. What I don't know is who the killer will be.

If the Edgars are, as I've heard one writer describe them, the mystery world's Senior Prom, Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, NY, is its sleepaway camp. Every year, hundreds of people pay good money to solve a murder mystery played out by a small group of mostly famous mystery writers at this idiosyncratic landmark hotel in the Catskills, which has been run by the Smiley family for over a century. This is the mystery weekend that started the whole mystery weekend/dinner/cruise craze, the original. The first program, 20 years ago, was "The Dead of Winter," starring Walter Gibson aka Maxwell Grant, Phyllis Whitney, and Isaac Asimov. The list of other writers who have taken part is enough to humble any mid-list author: William Caunitz, Mary and Carol Higgins Clark, Sue Grafton, Stephen King, Ed McBain, Christopher Newman, Justin Scott, Peter Straub, and Donald Westlake. Julian Semyonov travelled all the way from Russia in 1989 for the mystery, "Gangbusters." Peter Dickinson and Simon Brett flew from the UK to add proper accents to the Wodehousian mystery, "It's Murder, Cheeves."

Mystery venues have included: Shipboard in "The S.S. Mohonkia"; Western themed in "Way Out, West"; A casino in Monaco in "Die Laughing"; New Orleans in "Mardi Gras Murders."

And yes, there is even a mystery novel, *Murder at Mohonk,* about a murder committed during the Mohonk Mystery weekend, written by Max Allan Collins.

Last year, the first year I took part, we did a Sherlock Holmes mystery written by Jon Katz. I played the waif. This year, we are doing a 1960s Woodstockesque mystery, also written by Jon Katz, called "The Day the Music Died." In this one, the rock band, The Where, has come to Mohonk to work on their new album, amid rumors that the leader of the radical group Faction for Action is on the premises.

Not only it is great to be at Mohonk, but it is a kick in the pants to be working with authors like Susan Isaacs (FBI agent R.J. Cleever) and Lawrence Block (drummer Sam Sunburst) this year, not to mention Susan's husband Elkan Abramowitz, a famous defense attorney who will play a famous radical defense attorney, authors William Bernhardt, Harlan Coben, David Handler, Lee Harris, Jody "Daffy" Jaffe, Jon Katz, Valerie Wolzien, and the Mohonk staff, playing an assortment of disgruntled musicians, roadies, and cops, all with shameful secrets and murky motivations.

I play the waif. Specifically, I'll be playing Fadeout, the drugged-out groupie for the band The Where and presumed illegitimate daughter of Janey and Sam Sunburst.

The authors are usually amateurs at this acting business, though they ham it up pretty good. Luckily, we have Kate Ingraham, head of SUNY New Paltz drama, to anchor this mystery. She plays Janey, lead singer of The Where, and will be the first victim, just like last year, when she played Madame Blavatsky.

Thursday night, all the authors and staff gather and rehearse their parts. The stage is set.

Friday afternoon, the participants start to arrive. There has been a tremendous blizzard—the hotel is gorgeous in the snow, and the wind makes the ubiquitous rocking chairs, which line all the hotel balconies, rock spontaneously—very spooky. The downside is, there have been a few cancellations from people who don't want to drive up Mohonk Hill in the snow.

It is worth the price of admission just to see Lawrence Block in tie-dye and granny glasses.

Remarkably, however, most people brave the snow rather than cancel. It is a years-old tradition for some of them. But among those who cancel are Sally Jessy Raphael and her family. Bummer. It would have been interesting to be interrogated by Raphael about my character's deep dark secrets and psychological motivations. As it is, we have some tough pros in the crowd—a New York state supreme court judge and a couple of cops, including a homicide detective. And we have a lot of mystery weekend veterans in the crowd—hard to get anything past them.

On Friday night, after participants have signed up for teams, everyone gathers in the parlor, a small theater, to watch the set piece which will start the mystery rolling. The authors are all in costume, and it is worth the price of admission just to see Lawrence Block in tie-dye and granny glasses. I am required to sit, "stoned" and nodding in a corner during the set-up scene, very frail and insignificant, until I am introduced. At that point, I embrace Janey, the lead singer of The Where, and sit

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Sparkle Hayter works as a waif with a shaky motive and as the author of *What's a Girl Gotta Do, Revenge of the Cootie Girls,* and *Nice Girls Finish Last.*

Mohonk Mystery Weekend
March 14–16, 1997

When The Music Died

Dramatis Personae	Author
R.J. Cleever, FBI agent	Susan Isaacs
Sam Sunburst, drummer for *The Where*	Lawrence Block
Julius Hofferman, FBI agent	David Handler
Nick Hayden, manager/agent for *The Where*	Harlan Coben
Fadeout, groupie	Sparkle Hayter
Sidney Nixon, organic farmer	William Bernhardt
Huron Fonda, backup singer	Valerie Wolzien
Harriet Peacechild, guitarist	Jody Jaffe
Jefferson Byplane, roadie assistant	Lee Harris

Non-authors

Henry Santana, radical lawyer	Elkan Abramowitz
Dan Hearst, roadie	Shawn Rice

back down. A few moments later, Janey collapses and dies. The audience adjourns to the west dining room for a "happening" and "be-in."

The theme, obviously, is '60s—lots of tie-dye, peace signs, psychedelic peace and love stuff.

But I'm not fooled by all this peace and love stuff. Like almost everyone else in the room, I'm wondering, who is the killer? We authors are not told whodunit.

"The writers/characters are really at a disadvantage when it comes to solving the mystery. Unlike the paying guests, we don't get to grill the other suspects since we're busy being grilled ourselves. So we know less about the other characters than any one else," says Jody Jaffe. That said, I was reasonably certain Harriet didn't do it. Her motive—Janey, the murderee stole her songs—wasn't as strong as the other passions in her life, such as animal rights. Now had Janey been wearing a fur coat or eaten bacon for breakfast, then maybe Harriet would've fried her.

The wry David Handler was the killer last year when he played a by-the-rules, anal retentive police detective (actually Professor Moriarty disguised as a by-the-rules, anal retentive police detective). This year he is playing a by-the-rules, anal retentive FBI agent, partnered with Susan Isaacs, but chances are, he won't be the killer again this year, though I wouldn't put money on it as that sneaky Jon Katz might make Handler the killer again just to fool everyone.

Harlan is suspicious of Bill Bernhardt's character, Sidney, the organic farmer/drug dealer. But I have a feeling the killer is Harlan Coben's shifty-eyed agent Nicky, based on nothing more than a powerful hunch. But then, last year I was sure his character, a 19th-century quack doctor, was the killer, and I was wrong.

Saturday—big day—we really sing for our supper here. After breakfast, we have the first interrogation. Representatives of the teams grill all the suspects in different parts of the hotel. Why did Janey speak so gently to me, after shrieking at everyone else in the band? What was my connection to the victim, to Sam Sunburst, Harriet Peacechild, Nicky the agent (Harlan Coben), etc.? I don't always have the answers to the questions, but can't make up information (that would be misleading), and am not allowed to knowingly lie outright about anything. Luckily, I am a stoned-out groupie, so when questioning gets too tough, I have a bad acid flashback and live up to my name by fading out. Last year was tougher; I had to claim short-term memory loss on account of a being kicked in the head by a horse. Still, despite these tricks, the interrogations are gruelling. Even veterans of the mystery weekend find it a challenge, but an invigorating one.

Says Susan Isaacs, "The highlights of the interrogation: The fierce tenacity of a couple of the guests, firing question after question—Bad Cop without any Good Cop partner. The guy who kept ragging me about the FBI: Thank God the story took place in the Sixties, or he would have made me defend Waco and Ruby Ridge."

Others, like Jody, found the interrogations an opportunity for high spirits and catharsis. "My character—Harriet Peacechild—was especially fun for me to play, and not too far of a reach. She's an opinionated, brash, strident loudmouth," Jody says. "The best part about playing her was that I could, as Larry Block said, let my inner brat come out and tirade, tantrum, and be generally obnoxious—also not a stretch for me. Jon Katz told me I should give it back to my interrogators, which I did in spades. I said to one man when he asked if I'd blown up any buildings (a few), 'What are you, some kind of pig?'"

It turned out the man was, in fact, a police officer, with the NYPD in the Bronx.

"Of course, then I spent the rest of the weekend, chasing him around, apologizing, making sure I hadn't offended him. I hadn't," Jody explained. "He said he thought it was funny."

After the first interrogation, we gather in the parlor for a "surprise" press conference. I am asleep on the stage during it, but as it goes on, I awaken and rise. Just when Valerie Wolzien's character is about to blow the whistle on Lawrence Block's character, I grab the gun out of Susan Isaacs's hand, push her aside, and

shoot Valerie. A moment later, I drop the gun, shout that "he made me do it..." and then collapse sobbing to the ground. Elkan Abramowitz rushes to the stage, urges me not to say anything more, and announces he is my lawyer.

Now the place is a twitter... I am the girl of the moment, but now I know I can't possibly be Janey's killer—too obvious. Harlan is looking more and more suspicious.

During the day, Jon Katz takes us all aside to remind us of key bits of information we must reveal during our interrogations. Some of this is red herring stuff, some real clues, but even we don't know which. I am supposed to reveal my revolutionary fervor and talk about the beauty of the Kremlin at night, among other things.

A delicious, all-you-can-eat lunch is followed by writing workshops, followed by tea and book signings in a lounge warmed by a fireplace and overlooking frozen Lake Mohonk (almost all the rooms have woodburning fireplaces). The hard-core mystery solvers skip these events—they are too busy huddling in rooms going over everything that has happened and comparing notes from the morning interrogations. We won't see them again until the afternoon interrogation.

I am very popular during the second round of third-degree, as you can imagine. Why did I kill Valerie? Who made me do it? How did I know I was the love child of the late Janey and Sam Sunburst? What was I doing in Moscow and Leningrad in 1964?

The kids are among the toughest questioners. It's hard to lie to them, and they can get away with asking more daring questions.

Says Susan Isaacs, "The kids were adorable... not buying my story that the gun was pulled out of my hand (I was bigger, after all) and trying to find the words to ask me about my relationship with my fellow agent... 'Uh, were you and... were you like' [deep breath, then trying for a cool delivery] 'having an affair?'"

(Susan got off easy. Last year, a 12-year-old boy asked me outright if my character was having a lesbian relationship with Mary Willis Walker's character, a suffragist journalist.)

1st row: (l. to r.) Lee Harris, William Bernhardt, Valerie Wolzien, Jon Katz. 2nd row: Shawn Rice, David Handler, Sparkle Hayter, Lawrence Block, Harlan Coben, Susan Isaacs, Elkan Abramowitz.

Most of the authors are wrung dry by the time this round is over. They have just enough time to shower and change for dinner and dancing at the Amnesty for Aardvarks Gala Ball in the main dining room. There is a band, people are dressed in Sixties wear—the guys in the kitchen made paprika peace signs on the potato salad... everyone is in high spirits and having fun, but the hardcore sleuths will slip away from the festivities early and work through the night to work out their solutions and choreograph their presentations.

In the morning, the truth will be revealed.

Sunday—the author judges, Bill Bernhardt, Harlan Coben, David Handler, Lee Harris, and me, meet in a secret location at 7 A.M. to hear the solution from Jon Katz. Security is tighter than a rat's... well, you get the idea. Some of the solvers take it very seriously and will go to great lengths to win.

"One year, an overeager team tried to break into the hotel office safe to steal the solution," says Michelle Woodruff, Mohonk events director. Teams try to mislead rivals too, planting false clues around the hotel. So while we meet, hotel security stands guard outside to keep eavesdroppers away.

Once we are all there, and completely secure, Jon announces "The murderer is Fadeout."

Fadeout. That's me.

He then explains why I did it—as leader of the Faction for Action, I had to shut up Janey and Valerie so they wouldn't blow the whistle on the revolutionary organization. Janey was not my mother. Even more disheartening, I am not, as it turns out, the illegitimate daughter of Lawrence Block. That was just my ruse to insinuate myself into the band.

And now, the highlight of the weekend for the authors, the Sunday presentation, when teams get on stage to "perform" their solutions. They get judged on accuracy and on creativity, with two separate prizes given: Do they get creative, with elaborate props and music, songs and poems, dancing, magic, comedy?; How close will the detective teams come to the solution?

Only one team guesses that Fadeout was the killer. They'll win for accuracy. For creativity? It's tougher, but after much debate among the judges, the prize for creativity goes to a team that does a very funny "Laugh-In" spoof/presentation of the solution.

A final lunch and the weekend is over, all too soon. Next year, the Mohonk murder will be a Mary Shelley mystery.

I wonder if they'll need a waif... ■

ORIGINAL SINS

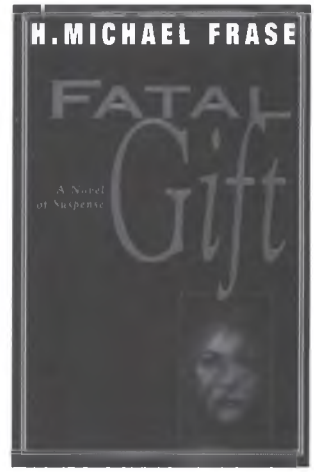
BY MARVIN LACHMAN

William Jaspersohn's **Native Angels** (Bantam, $4.99), 1996 Shamus winner as the best paperback original of 1995, is part of one of the smallest subgenres: books set in Vermont in which the protagonist is a former Boston Red Sox pitcher. The only other book in that select company is George V. Higgins's *Victories*. Following his parents' deaths and his wife's murder, Jaspersohn's Peter Boone gave up his career despite an unbeaten record (seven victories), found the killer, and became a private detective so he could remain part of what he perceives as the struggle between good and evil. This is not the easiest past history to accept, and Jaspersohn uses it to give Boone a holier-than-thou attitude, with a tendency to act as if most people he meets are jerks. You'll also notice similarities to Spenser in Boone: his cooking, wisecracks, and friendship with a Susan Silverman-type guidance counselor. Those reservations aside, Jaspersohn's combination of missing daughter case and murder mystery moves at a rapid pace, with fine observations of rural Vermont, including its weather and its insularity, adding depth to the plot. The ending is a bit corny. Because Boone has not relinquished his love of baseball, it is literally and figuratively out of left field. Still, a good mystery debut.

New Mexico, the setting for Michael McGarrity's **Tularosa** (1996; Norton, $25.00), couldn't be more different from Vermont, but it is used with equal effectiveness. Kevin Kerney has retired from the Santa Fe police after being severely wounded in a shoot-out. Virtually a recluse, he works as a caretaker at a ranch until he is persuaded to intervene when his godson, a soldier, vanishes from his post at the White Sands Missile Range in southern New Mexico. Forming an unusual (if predictable) team with a female Army captain at the base, Kerney and she go off into the mountains to search for him. There are excellent descriptions of this arid, forbidding land, which was Kerney's family ranch until purchased by the Army. Much of Kerney's detective work depends on his recognition of locations in paintings of the mountains, clues which are unfair to readers since this is not an illustrated book.

The initial plot involving a missing person proves to be more suspenseful than books that start with murder. Less effective is the direction the book takes with the introduction of dishonest dealers in rare objects (and drugs) along the Mexican border. Far too little effort is used in keeping the villain's identity from the reader. Far better are McGarrity's characterizations and a poignant scene at an Indian funeral. His El Paso-Juarez area is uniformly described as sleazy. This El Paso area was once almost unknown to mystery fiction, with the exception of a Brett Halliday novel and a few of his non-series short stories. Now, this is the third book I've seen in recent months set in Western Texas and Southern New Mexico. The American regional revolution rolls on.

There is not much regional description of Nashville, scene of H. Michael Frase's **Fatal Gift** (1996; Carroll & Graf, $23.00), but this is a thriller in which the author seems reluctant to stop the action to describe setting. Kasey Riteman, one of life's (or fiction's) losers, witnesses a brutal rape-killing, one described with gratuitous sex and gore. Her dilemma: how to get the police to capture the killer without endangering her own life. She devises a rather unlikely plan, but then, throughout the book, decency, not judgment, is Kasey's strong suit. She is on the run for much of the book, and 358 pages proves far too long for an author to sustain tension, even one more experienced than Frase. The great master of suspense was Cornell Woolrich, and his best work was at novelette length. When he does leave Kasey, Frase introduces some of the least sympathetic characters I have ever encountered. Fortunately, his control of the plot remains strong for a very satisfying ending.



After reading too many courtroom mysteries (a travail of trials), I instituted a self-imposed moratorium. Refreshed after about a year, I was finally ready to tackle another first legal mystery, **Breach of Trust** (1996; Pocket Books $23.00). The author, Bonnie MacDougal, is described as an attorney who worked with Bill Clinton in Little Rock, but the publisher does not indicate whether she is one of *the* MacDougals of Whitewater.

MacDougal's title seems, on the surface, as meaningless as those of most legal mysteries, but it actually applies here, literally. It appears that a Philadelphia lawyer has robbed a large trust fund and been caught. Although this is clearly a thriller and involves murder, there are two non-criminal trials presented, and they are all the more interesting because they are not murder trials. Reading them requires concentration because the financial and legal matters at issue are complicated for the layperson (especially this layperson), but the effort was worthwhile. The sus-

pense is considerable throughout, and if there is a weakness, it is in MacDougal creating too many lawyers who have second thoughts about their actions.

Others have found Bill Fitzhugh's **Pest Control** (1997; Avon $20.00) very funny. Prior to its U.S. publication, it was reportedly bought for $1 million for filming by Warner Brothers. It certainly has a funny cover illustration by Bill Mayer. Once inside the book, I had trouble suspending disbelief sufficiently, to accept the premise of an insect exterminator being mistaken for an international hit man. My problem started early with Bob Dillon (he hates it when people confuse him with Bob Dylan), an ecologically sound biology teacher turned pest exterminator. His primary motivation, the invention of a safe method for eradicating insects, never seemed believable to me. Still, suspension of disbelief is a very individual thing, and I may have been hypercritical. If Warners is right, you might have fun reading this book.

Although there is no dearth of new first mysteries, sometimes a reviewer must play "catch-up." That usually occurs when I've missed the first book in a series that has become quite successful. I'm a reader who believes that a series should be read in chronological order, so I sought out **Hot Water** (1990), the first in Sally Gunning's books about Peter Bartholomew. (In December 1996, Pocket Books published *Deep Water* (paperback original, $5.99), the seventh book in the series.)

Gunning's setting is fictional "Nashtoba," part of Cape Cod, though she calls that peninsula "Cape Hook." Bartholomew is Asey Mayo for the 1990s, with a love (and sex) life, and speaking standard English, unlike Phoebe Atwood Taylor's handyman. Even Bartholomew's occupation is similar; he runs a business called "Factotum," which provides varied services, from house repair to cataloguing books. There is much about New Englanders in Gunning's books, including their alleged antipathy to people considered "off-islanders." This includes Nashtoba's police chief, who, because he is from Boston, is called "The Big Bean" and is still not trusted. The best book in the series is *Rough Water* (1994), in which Bartholomew embarks on a whale-watching cruise. The murder weapon is a very regional one, an antique whale harpoon.

Saratoga Longshot (1976), the first book in Stephen Dobyns's Charlie Bradshaw series, is atypical, since the primary setting is New York City. In the remaining eight books in this series (*Saratoga Fleshpot,* 1995, recently reprinted by Penguin, $5.95), the setting is Saratoga Springs, site of the racetrack most often used in mystery fiction. Although horse racing is the common theme in the books (Saratoga in August is, after all, the U.S. racing capital), there is much more, including the city's colorful past when it was once one of the world's most famous resorts. This is a remarkable regional series because the author has chosen a distinctive city of manageable size and a long history, and he explores it in depth and with love. He has chosen in Bradshaw a protagonist with whom one can identify. This is a very average guy, shy and a bit of a loser in love and finance.

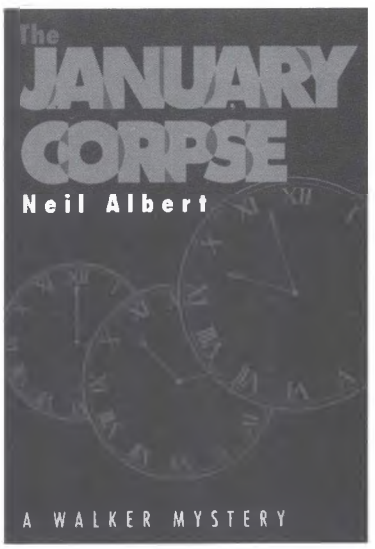
In the eighth book in the series, *Saratoga Backtalk* (1994), Dobyns shifts to a first-person narrator in the form of Victor Plotz, Bradshaw's partner in the private detective business. While I enjoy Plotz as a Runyonesqe character (he's a "high-on pragmatism, low-on-ethics kind of guy"), his viewpoint does not add to the series, and I miss the objectivity of Dobyns in the third person.

There have long been regional mysteries, but the explosion of them (since about 1980) has found first writers exploring locations that previously were virtually unknown in crime fiction. Thomas Boyle's cleverly titled **Only the Dead Know Brooklyn** (1985; taken from the title of a short story by the original Tom Wolfe) began a trilogy of Brooklyn mysteries, all reprinted by Penguin, that are the best writing I've read about the borough. Boyle covers every aspect of Brooklyn, with which he clearly has a love-hate relationship. He covers the good, including Brooklyn's glorious past, its harbor communities, and its magnificent views of New York Harbor. There are also its problems: deteriorating neighborhoods and the racial hatreds that are the *leit motifs* of his books. His first book is about a psychologically disturbed serial killer. Boyle's nominal series detective is Lt. Francis DeSales, NYPD, but he proves surprisingly uninteresting. Fortunately, throughout the books, there is also Boyle's alter ego, Professor Tim Desmond, whose view of crime and criminals is often metaphor for how to save Brooklyn.

New York's Chinatown had appeared before S.J. Rozan's **China Trade** (1994), most notably in some of Ed McBain's non-87th Precinct books, but never has it been presented as well. Rozan's Lydia Chin is a young American Born Chinese ("ABC," according to Chinatown slang) who is an interesting mix of modern and traditional, a private eye still living with her very old-fashioned mother. In a case involving the theft of porcelains from a local museum, we learn a great deal about art, Chinatown's gangs, and Lydia. The narrative flow is generally strong, though too often Rozan pulls in to shore to describe Lydia taking off her coat and putting it on as well as drink-

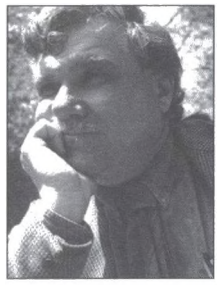
ing a seemingly infinite number of cups of tea. More interesting is Lydia's complicated relationship with her partner, Bill Smith, who does most of the detective work in Rozan's second book, *Concourse,* winner of a Shamus at 1996 Bouchercon as the best Private Eye novel, and reprinted by St. Martin's Press, which publishes Rozan in hardcover, $5.99. *Concourse* is even better than *China Trade* and is the best Bronx mystery I've read, one whose authenticity I can attest to, having lived in the Bronx much of my life.

The hardcover edition of Neil Albert's first, **The January Corpse**, has become quite collectible, though it was only published in 1991, and you may have to spend a lot to own it. If you just want to read this book, that's easier; it was reprinted by Onyx in 1993. Subsequent Albert books have, with one exception, been published in hardcover by Walker and most are reprinted in paper by Onyx's fellow Penguin Group subsidiary, Signet. (*Cruel April* was reprinted in 1996 at $5.50.) All the Albert's titles contain a month, beginning with January. A few years ago, Mary Jo Adamson had the same idea, but her last title was a "May" book, in 1989. Neil Albert's "June" title is already scheduled for 1997.



Albert's books are about private eye Dave Garrett, a former Philadelphia lawyer who was disbarred for reasons that are interesting and almost understandable. Though he lives in Philadelphia, Garrett roams throughout the eastern part of his state, especially the Pennsylvania Dutch country. (Each of the reprints has a horse-drawn Amish cart on the cover.) Albert goes beyond telling about the life style of the Amish. *January* is also good regarding a dying town in the coal region. It will also tell you the difference between two Pennsylvania towns, Pottstown and Pottsville and about Philadelphia's changing neighborhoods, including what's being gentrified and what isn't. That's good regional writing.

The case for which Garrett is hired is more interesting than many, involving proof of whether another lawyer, missing for seven years, can be presumed dead. Some of Albert's writing is predictable, such as the clichéd scene of the private eye being beaten up. You might think Garrett obtains his clues by breaking and entering, rather than deduction. However, you might do well to read carefully if you don't want to be fooled, as I was, at the ending of this very good debut. ■



Dial N for Nonsense

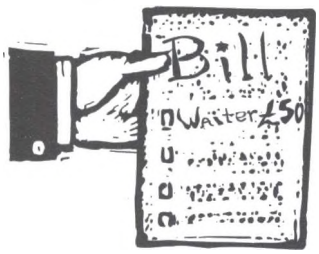
BY

LOUIS PHILLIPS

The High Cost of Waiters

The following item is recorded in Michael Scott's fun-filled book *Never! Fascinating Facts About Ireland* (The White Row Press, 1993):

The notorious 18th century Dublin hellraiser Buck English once shot a waiter dead and then had his victim added to the bill for £50.



Who Says Crime Does Not Pay?

The following news item appeared in May 1997: "A four-pound-brass lock that was picked to begin the Watergate break-in attracted a high bid of $13,000. It is difficult to beat the hype. Gail Wolpin, owner of the Phoebus Auction Gallery—where the item was brought to be sold—was quoted as saying: 'I believe this is the most significant piece of probably the most significant happening in modern American history.'"

References to Alfred Hitchcock in Crime Fiction

In Jane Dentinger's Jocelyn O'Roarke mystery, *Dead Pan* (Viking, 1992), the following exchange takes place:

"Oh, very comforting," she hissed over her shoulder. "Thanks a heap."

"Can't help it. I'm a sucker for atmosphere. Doesn't this remind you of Hitchcock's *Stage Fright* when Jane Wyman's being stalked by Richard Todd?"

Inanimate Objects Commit Murder #1

AUTO STABS MAN TO DEATH WITH BUCKLE OF HIS BELT

January 4, 1947. Bristol, England. George H. Mason, 55, was stabbed to death today by an automobile. He cranked it while it was in gear and it pushed him against a garage wall, driving the buckle of a surgical belt into his chest.

Classic Headlines

THERE'S NO CRIME LIKE THE PRESENT
The Washington Post (May 25, 1955)

The Cerebus Club

I wonder if *TAD* readers have any information about the Cerebus Club? I wonder if it is still in existence. Harlan Ellison, that wild man of science fiction and beyond, in his Hommage to Cornell Woolrich, *Tired Old Man,* describes that club of older writers:

...what had been a fairly active group of working professionals in the fifties and sixties were now a gaggle of burnt-out cases and gossips, drinking too much and lamenting the passing of Ben Hibbs at the *Saturday Evening Post.* I was thirty years past that time, a young punk by their lights, and I saw no merit whatsoever in spending an evening up to my hips in dull chatter and weariness, gagging on cigarette smoke and listening to Septuageneric penny-a-word losers comparing the merits of *Mask* to those of *Weird Tales.*

Jack the Snipper

Most readers of *TAD* are well aware of Jack the Ripper, but what about Jack the Snipper? Jack the Snipper operated in our nation's capital in 1947 as the following news item attests:

Washington D.C. January 3, 1947. Jack the Snipper shifted operations to a bus today. His ninth victim was Marie Uhden, 12, who lost a generous hunk of her chestnut locks while riding a crowded bus. The Snipper previously had confined his activities to street cars, movie theaters, and street corners. Bernice Dyer, age 16, became the Snipper's eighth victim last night. She lost a lock of brunette hair, apparently to a stranger who bowed and apologized for bumping her on a trolley loading platform.

Did Alexander Pope or one of those guys make a mock epic out of such hair-cutting activity?

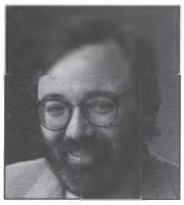
Query #897321

Why is Scotland Yard located in England and not in Scotland?

Inanimate Objects Commit Murder #2

For readers searching for unusual true stories, I heartily recommend *Fortean Times* (named in honor of Charles Fort, author of the notorious *The Book of the Damned*). The editors of *Fortean Times* have put together two collections of their materials *Strange Days: The Year in Weirdness Digest* (Andrews and McMeel Books). Here is one of my favorite items from *Digest #1*:

Chef Juan Ruiz was stabbed through the heart with uncooked spaghetti strands when 150 MPH winds hit his restaurant in Mexico City.



THE CRIME SCREEN

BY RIC MEYERS

Do you know why I hate reviewing television shows? Because, unlike movies, TV series continue to develop beyond the first few episodes, often becoming much better or much, much worse after the original few screenings. Movies, except for the rare "Special Edition," à la *Close Encounters* or *Star Wars*, stay the same—and even those special editions remain virtually the same. Not so for television programs, which resulted in my initial pan of "Hill Street Blues," and "Star Trek: The Next Generation," and my initial rave for the new version of "Murder One" and the first episode of "**Millennium**."

Well, that's the last time I ever review the first episode of anything. Rereading my orgiastic enthusiasm for the dark, dank, nasty, predictable "Millennium" makes me cringe...sometimes as much as the actual show does. It's been renewed for another season, so hopefully creator Chris Carter will make it more than a poor man's "X-Files."

Here's what I hope to see in the fall: more of a difference between our intrepid hero and our heinous villains. Lance Hendrickson is a wonderful actor, but for this kind of dreadful subject matter, we really need a Bill Murray type, a super-genius who enjoys turning the tables on the megalomaniacal serial killers who screech out of the screen every week. In other words, a good, sarcastic and sardonic lunatic who will give the viewer a sense of empowerment rather than helplessness.

Will it happen? I doubt it, but you can be darn sure I won't be telling you until the second season is almost over.

That's another reason I hate reviewing new TV shows: it's moot, more often than not. I was primed to critique such new series as "**Spy Game**" and "**Prince Street**," but both were cancelled less than a month after they were unleashed. Both, sadly, were good calls on the part of the networks. "Spy Game" was filmmaker Sam Raimi's attempt to combine "The Avengers" with "The Girl from U.N.C.L.E." for a major network with some of the wit and verve he brought to his syndicated "Hercules" and "Xena" fantasy adventures. Unfortunately, "Spy Game" made these latter shows look and sound like Shakespeare.

"Spy Game" was supposed to be a hip, funny, self-satirizing, retro series that mixed lots of good-looking guys and chicks doing martial arts when they weren't shooting or bombing each other. It had guest stars from such classic espionage series as "I Spy," "The Avengers," and "Mission: Impossible" and two very personable, capable stars. It also had the stupidest writing this side of "Charlie's Angels." All the jumping, leaping, explosions, and clever quips in the world can't save you if characters do things people simply wouldn't do.

That much was painfully clear at the outset when a major character grabbed a bomb and, instead of throwing it away, ran with it into a garage. That's just plain silly. Even if it was a feint to fake his own death, why didn't any of the supposedly brilliant investigators wonder the same thing? Instead, the writers (and, more likely, the network executives) piled on one stupid plot point after another until the viewer had no choice but to accept that this one was designed to let smug execs maintain: "See? I told you. The audience for this stuff *is* stupid."

Proven wrong again. On the other end of the spectrum, the poorly titled "Prince Street" was way too earnest for its own good. Telling the supposedly true story of undercover cops infiltrating all manner of villainous organizations, everyone involved was just so honest and sensitive and hurting that there was no one on screen to like. This one was like "thirtysomething" with guns.

Speaking of "thirtysomething," the equally poorly-titled "**EZ Streets**," created and produced by the interestingly-named Paul Haggis, is an intriguing but very tiring show which purports to examine the gray areas of cops and robbers. Therefore, the series presents those grays literally, sucking almost all bright colors out of the photography. It is very

ABOVE: THE CAST OF "THE PRACTICE," KELLI WILLIAMS, CAMRYN MANHEIM, DYLAN MCDERMOTT, STEVE HARRIS, LISA GAY HAMILTON; UPPER LEFT: LANCE HENRIKSON OF "MILLENNIUM."

self-consciously arty, with a moody score by folk singer Loreena McKennitt, and fine performances by ex-"thirtysomething" star Ken Olin, Joe Pantoliano, and Linda Farentino. Sadly, it is also consistently redundant and ultimately boring.

Then there's "**The Practice**," which is everything "Murder One" isn't. Although "Murder One" started its second season promisingly, the series foolishly decided to essentially remake its first season rather than blazing new trails. It also rapidly degenerated into the self-important nonsense of the first season with defense attorneys who were way too sensitive for anyone to actually believe in their characters.

"The Practice" is also filled with sensitive sorts, but at least these guys are believable characters and the filmmakers actually let some sunshine into the shots. At first, star Dylan McDermott was a problem. He was way too handsome and smart to be part of this failing law practice in Boston. But creator David E. Kelley surrounded him with great, mostly unusual characters. Sure, there's the cute blond assistant fresh out of school and the sexy black receptionist, but there's also the bald, black, brash, ex-private eye partner; the overweight, hard-talking female associate; and the recently-fired, nervous Jewish banker with a law degree.

Their cases are also interesting, and rarely of the big-headline-murder variety. So far (and I stress that "so far"), this is a welcome surprise from Kelley, whose previous genre shows like "Picket Fences" and "Chicago Hope" were knowingly pretentious and annoyingly self-important. Perhaps the new, hopeful approach benefits from Kelley's own experience in the legal profession (more than one critic has pointed out the physical similarity between star McDermott and creator Kelley). Of all the shows so far mentioned, the only one I'm planning to stick with is "The Practice." Hopefully, in this case, "Practice" will make perfect.

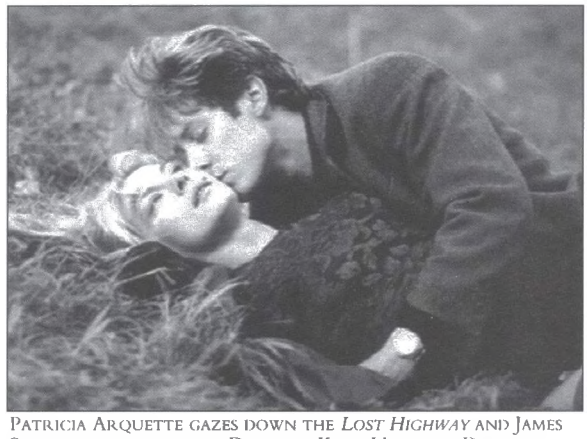
Double Vision

A few issues back, I suggested some interesting double features to check out of your local video shop. Well, it seems that Hollywood is still operating under the old adage that "Two's a Couple." Almost every week, a pair of like-minded movies are unleashed to a somewhat less-than-avid audience. So what could be more perfect than watching David Lynch's **Lost Highway** followed by David Cronenberg's **Crash**?

To tell you the truth: not watching them.

Both are idiosyncratic, knowingly arty films by two Hollywood rebels named Dave, and both involve vehicular mayhem. And both whip up a lot of frenzy to support anti-stories which add up to less than zero. Lynch's vision follows his *Wild at Heart* and *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* further into *The Twilight Zone*. Instead of Film Noir, this is "Film Null," as a tough, sardonic jazz musician meets a strange video man and winds up in jail framed for the murder of his wife—only to magically change into a car mechanic who meets a hyper-violent gangster's moll who is a dead ringer for the dead wife.

What does it all mean? Lynch isn't going to tell you, which is both the movie's failure and saving grace, depending upon what you want in a film. It's like getting into a car with a great driver, only to realize that, after two hours of interesting roads, he has no intention of taking you anywhere specific. Good or bad? It all depends on what you were expecting when you got into the car. It isn't his fault that you were hoping to actually get somewhere.

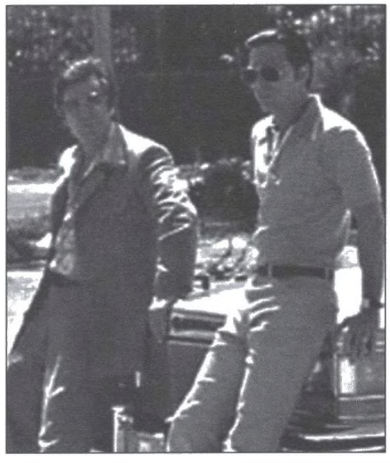


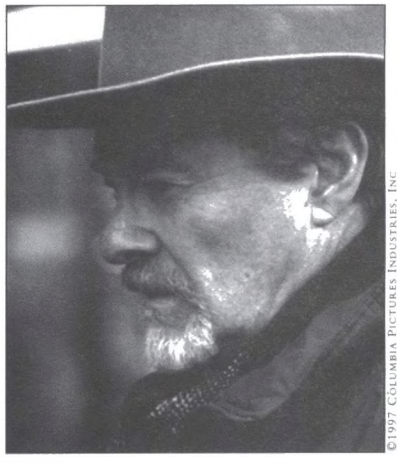
Patricia Arquette gazes down the *Lost Highway* and James Spader is turned on by Deborah Kara Unger in David Cronenberg's *Crash*.

As for David Cronenberg's *Crash*, he has accomplished the unasked-for: making a sexless sex movie. *Crash* tells the charming tale of a bunch of people who find that getting into auto accidents is a massive turn-on. Could this be a substitute for bondage or shoe fetishism... or something else that six self-destructive people actually find sensual? Cronenberg certainly doesn't seem to care; he's on a quest to adapt books deemed unfilmable by nearly everyone else to movies.

After watching Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch* and now *Crash*, I'm beginning to side with everyone else. But at least we now have an answer to that Hollywood riddle: What do you do after riding around for two hours on the Lost Highway? Why, Crash, of course.

A far better double feature would be the crime doppelgangers **Donnie Brasco** and **The Devil's Own**. Both are





Acting Giants and Young Turks: Harrison Ford and Brad Pitt in *The Devil's Own*; Al Pacino and Johnny Depp in *Donnie Brasco*. Poor Alan J. *All the President's Men* Pakula.

really good, but not quite great movies, starring an established acting giant with a young turk. The former stars Al "master of the inexplicable shout" Pacino, and Johnny "No, really, I *am* acting" Depp as a low-level mob man and the undercover FBI agent who comes to care for him. There's really not much to say about this one except that if you like gangster pics, this is okay...even pretty good if you're in the right mood.

There's far more to say about *The Devil's Own*, starring Harrison Ford and Brad Pitt. This is actually two movies, and one "quiz film" where the entire family can enjoy betting which one they're actually watching at any given moment.

There's Brad's "Tales of an IRA Terrorist" film co-starring Treat Williams, and Harrison's "Quandary of a Good Cop" film co-starring Ruben Blades—both of which the stars developed and wrote as they went along. Actually, the movie is best when it sticks to the original story, in which Harrison tries to bring Brad in before the British authorities gun him down with malice aforethought and extreme prejudice.

Unfortunately, that particular picture would have been much better directed by Andrew *The Fugitive* Davis or some other action specialist. With poor Alan J. *All the President's Men* Pakula in charge, it's striving for an importance it just doesn't possess.

Even so, it's still a good movie and much better than having sex in a crashing car...or reviewing new television shows, for that matter. ■

Report from 221B Baker Street

BY

SHERRY ROSE-BOND

AND SCOTT BOND

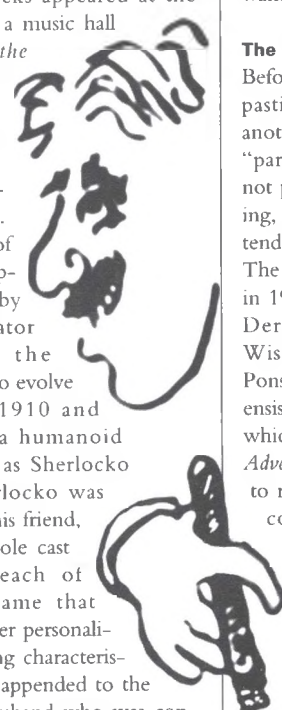
SOME TIME AGO, WE DISCUSSED SHERLOCKIAN PARODIES AND PASTICHES. DUE TO THE CONTINUING FLOOD OF SUCH MATERIALS, IT SEEMS APPROPRIATE TO LOOK AT THE SHELVES OF OUR LOCAL BOOKSELLERS AND PICK OUT OUR FAVORITES AND OUR LESS-THAN-FAVORITES. BUT, FIRST, A LITTLE HISTORY.

A pastiche is traditionally defined as a Sherlock Holmes story that looks as if it's part of the Canon but was actually written by another hand than that of the recognized authors: Dr. Watson, the Literary Agent, Holmes, or Mycroft. (Remember, we ourselves are not clear on the authorship of a couple of the adventures.) A parody, on the other hand, is written for laughs. It takes the recognizable elements of a Sherlock Holmes story and turns them on end. Parodies usually use characters whose names are, themselves, parodies of "Holmes" and "Watson." Thus, we find Hemlock Bones, Herlock Sholmes, Padlock Bones, and Picklock Holes.

In the Beginning...

Over the years, there have been hundreds of each type of story published. A review of DeWaal demonstrates the pervasiveness of this literary practice. The earliest parody was not so much written as performed. Shortly after the first of the Sherlock Holmes stories appeared in *The Strand*, they captured the public imagination so strongly that, between November 1893 and March 1894, parodies by Charles Brookfield and Seymour Hicks appeared at the Court Theatre in a music hall review, *Under the Clock*. It was the Victorian version of a "Saturday Night Live" commentary on a current cultural event.

After the turn of the century, a popular comic strip by Gus Magar (creator of Hawkshaw the Detective) began to evolve and, between 1910 and 1912, featured a humanoid monkey known as Sherlocko the Monk. Sherlocko was accompanied by his friend, Watso, and a whole cast of characters, each of whom had a name that described his or her personality or distinguishing characteristic, with an "O" appended to the name. Thus, a husband who was constantly belittled was called Mr. Henpecko, a secretary was Typewrito the Monk, and a complaining neighbor was called Groucho. The comic touched off a craze to choose a nickname that was descriptive and to add an "O" at the end. Thus, Minnie Marx's sons took to calling themselves Groucho, Chico, Harpo, Gummo, and Zeppo. It's fun to think that the Marx Brothers sported names inspired by a Sherlockian cartoon.



The original stories continued to appear in *The Strand* and in other publications in the United States. During this time, the Literary Agent himself penned a pastiche, *How Watson Learned the Trick*, for inclusion in the library of Queen Mary's Dolls' House. Several other pastiches, whose authorship is frequently disputed, collectively known as the Apocrypha, also appeared. This includes *The Lost Special*, *The Man with the Watches*, and *The Man Who Was Wanted*.

Then, in 1930, the Literary Agent died and no more original stories from the Canon would appear. Doubleday published a two-volume memorial edition of the complete works, the first time all 60 stories appeared in one publication. The public devoured it and wanted more.

The Birth of Solar Pons

Before the great parade of parodies and pastiches began, there first appeared another category of story that we call "parallel" stories. These are certainly not parodies and are not, strictly speaking, pastiches because they do not pretend to be Sherlock Holmes adventures. The most notable of these were begun in 1945 by a fan of the Canon, August Derleth, a writer in Sauk City, Wisconsin. His stories feature Solar Pons of Praed Street, with his amanuensis Dr. Parker. The stories, the first of which was *In Re: Sherlock Holmes: The Adventures of Solar Pons*, were designed to reflect the original organization and construction of the Canon. They became immensely popular and, sometime after Derleth's death, the series was continued by Basil Copper. The original stories have been reissued and are well worth the read.

The first notable series of pastiche adventures, *The Exploits of Sherlock*

Holmes, appeared in the 1940s. Each was based on an unpublished adventure mentioned in the Canon. The stories were a joint endeavor of Conan Doyle's biographer, the expatriate American mystery writer John Dickson Carr and his youngest son, Adrian Conan Doyle. These stories represent the first serious attempt at writing a real Sherlock Holmes pastiche. Unlike other projects using the Sherlock Holmes name, they did not result in legal action by the Conan Doyle estate. Yet they are rather awful, filled with anachronisms and, worse yet, Americanisms!

Another approach to pastiche-writing was taken by "John Watson" (Larry Townsend) in 1971, when The Traveller's Companion published the underground classic and cult favorite, *The Sexual Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.* The book begins just like *A Study in Scarlet.* However, it soon segues into an adventure in which Holmes and Watson (and almost every other male in the book) become lovers! It was out of print for many years but was reissued recently and can be found in most large bookstores.

"The Boom" Years

In 1974, there appeared a book that would forever change the Sherlockian landscape. Almost singlehandedly, it brought about what we Sherlockians call The Boom. This volume was Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution.* Meyer later said that he wrote the book as a fan of the Holmes stories and as a tribute to his father, a psychotherapist.

The book begins with Holmes's cocaine addiction. Watson, with the help of Mycroft, tricks Holmes into seeking treatment with Sigmund Freud in Vienna. A very successful pastiche, it was later made into a very successful motion picture starring Nicol Williamson as Holmes, Robert Duval as Watson, and Alan Arkin as Freud. It worked because all of the familiar elements were there. We recognized the characters and they behaved as we expected them to do. Freud was done with historic accuracy and, more importantly, was a critical element of the plot.

In Meyer's sequel, *The West End Horror,* he began the oft-imitated practice of having Sherlock Holmes meet every historic and literary personage possible, whether or not they have anything to do with the story. These "cameo" appearances by George Bernard Shaw, Gilbert and Sullivan, Oscar Wilde, and Ellen Terry, among others, were gratuitous and distracting. This definitely does not follow the Canon's tradition.

His relatively recent *The Canary Trainer* involves the Phantom of the Opera, but this book is not as interesting or as well written as his earlier efforts.

There now appeared the first of another popular series of books written by Eve Titus, featuring Basil of Baker Street. These fit the "parallel" category because, while Holmes and the Canonical coterie appear offstage, the protagonist is a mouse who lives at the famous Baker Street address and tries to emulate his hero, Sherlock Holmes. The books are not parodies because the characters and events are taken quite seriously (once you get past the idea of an anthropomorphic mouse). Disney produced an animated Basil movie, *The Great Mouse Detective.* The books are full of inside references to things and people Sherlockian, so the cognoscenti have double the fun reading the stories.

Other animal characters abound in the Sherlockian universe and we call particular attention to two books. The first is William Kotzwinkle's *Trouble in Bugland.* Here we find all the characters portrayed by appropriate insects. Joe Servello's illustrations also are rather wonderful. *The Detective of London,* (by Robert Kraus and Bruce Kraus, with illustrations by Robert Byrd) with a dog as hero, is another picture-book format volume that delights both adults and children.

The pun-filled *Schlock Homes* books by the late Robert Fish are remarkable for combining many Sherlockian elements within the framework of outrageous humor. The Canon provided many wonderful straight lines for Fish's punchlines. Seek them out.

If your interest runs to neither animals nor humans but to extraterrestrial, we can recommend the anthology, *Sherlock Holmes through Time and Space,* edited by the late Irregular, Isaac Asimov. It is a collection of extremely creative stories written by various science-fiction luminaries.

The anniversary of historic events or successful theatrical or literary endeavors triggers a response in the Sherlockian world. Thus, the anniversary of the publication of *Dracula* resulted in a quantity of blood-filled pastiches. One involved Bram Stoker rather than his most famous character. In one, the entire court of Queen Victoria and her subjects became vampires! These are not recommended for young people or the faint of heart. The success of

1976 SCREEN ADAPTATION OF NICHOLAS MEYER'S *THE SEVEN PERCENT SOLUTION.*

The Phantom of the Opera resulted in at least two Phantom/Holmes pastiches. The sinking of the *Titanic* was grist for the pastiche mill as was the Jack the Ripper case.

Unfortunately, many of these stories read as if they were written for the sole purpose of showing off the writer's font of esoteric knowledge; Sherlock Holmes is merely a device to get the innocent public to buy the book. The misguided author doesn't preserve the expected Sherlockian unities and completely disregards what the reader knows of the character of Holmes, Watson, *et al.*

The Best—and the Worst

The worst pastiche in an extremely crowded field is easily *Sherlock Holmes in Dallas* by Edmund Aubrey. It describes, in documentary fashion, how the nearly 120+-year-old Holmes is brought to Dallas to solve the Kennedy assassination! It is not a case of a young Holmes transported via time machine but, rather, of a centenarian in real time. It could almost have been a parody if the author had not taken himself and his idea so seriously. This volume has become somewhat of a collectible due to the perverse nature of Sherlockians. It's fun to own something this bad—just don't read it!

Our favorite pastiche is *The Prisoner of the Devil*. It was written by our late friend, the prolific Michael Hardwick, and describes Sherlock Holmes's involvement in the Dreyfus affair. The idea is interesting, and fresh and the plot is not improbable. Holmes is never out of character. Michael was an excellent writer, so it's always a pleasure to read his work. This one is a gem.

A relatively new phenomenon in pastiche-writing is the non-Sherlock Holmes Sherlockian pastiche. In these stories, the hero or heroine is a Canonical character other than Sherlock Holmes. Sometimes Sherlock Holmes appears briefly, most often not. These stories invariably become a series. The problem is that as more books are added, the quality of the later entries generally declines. It happened with Nicholas Meyer and it is happening with many of the current writers of pastiche series.

Wiggins and the other Irregulars star in *The Case of the Baker Street Irregular* by Robert Newman. (This should not be confused with Anthony Boucher's excellent pastiche, *The Case of the Baker Street Irregulars*!) This is an excellent and well-written story in which Sherlock Holmes makes a cameo appearance but, otherwise, it's all Wiggins's tale.

M.J. Trow has written a long series of books featuring the much-maligned and possibly misunderstood Inspector Lestrade. Many liberties are taken with his character, including depicting him as

a bit too sexual for our prudish taste. (The Canon doesn't tell us a great deal about him, so maybe these liberties aren't so significant.) Some of the plots are a bit improbable. However, the books are well written and entertaining.

John Gardner has the distinction of writing excellent pastiches of two famous literary personages: James Bond and Sherlock Holmes's nemesis, Professor Moriarty. His two Moriarty books turn the Sherlock Holmes world around a full 180 degrees. They force us to look at both Holmes and Moriarty in

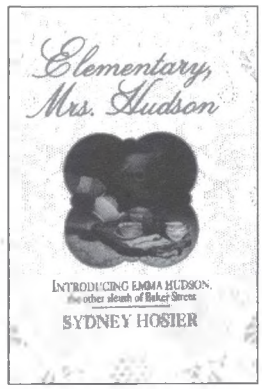
entirely different and innovative ways. We thoroughly enjoyed them and their fresh approach to the Canon.

There is a series of stories by H.F. Heard in which the featured player is "Mr. Mycroft." No, this is not Holmes's older brother but, seemingly, Sherlock Holmes himself. In *A Taste for Honey*, he's in retirement on the Sussex Downs, raising bees and getting involved in mysterious events. The books are sometimes hard to find but are well worth the effort. They have an ambiguous quality that adds to the mystery.

Not to be outdone, there is a pastiche that unambiguously features Mycroft Holmes as the detective, aided by his younger brother, Sherlock. Michael P. Hodel and Sean M. Wright's *Enter the Lion* is concerned with a plot to overthrow the U.S. government and restore the Confederacy. This was published in 1979 and so may be a bit difficult to locate.

Three separate series feature heroines, rather than heroes. The first lady of Baker Street, Mrs. Hudson, is featured in two (soon to be three) books by Sydney Hosier. She solves mysteries when Sherlock Holmes is too busy or too disinclined to take on the cases. With the assistance of her not-so-bright friend, Violet Warner, she attempts to apply Holmes's techniques to reach the solution. After some misdirection and false starts, she is generally successful. One can say the same for the books. They're an easy read with an absolute lack of profundity. No sex, no violence, no intellectual challenge.

Carole Nelson Douglas's Irene Adler books, beginning with *Goodnight, Mr. Holmes*, star Irene Adler Norton and her



companion, Penelope Huxleigh. (Godfrey Norton appears little or not at all.) Penelope is really the heroine in the stories. It is she who virtually worships Irene and who carries out the active detecting. The books have much more depth and have, obviously, involved much more research than the Mrs. Hudson books. They are reasonably well written, which is not to say that there are no clangy errors of both fact and vocabulary. Clearly an attempt has been made to include Sherlockian references but non-Sherlockian teenaged girls appear to be the (perhaps unintended) audience.

The final heroine of a Sherlockian pastiche, Mary Russell, is, herself, extra-Canonical. In Laurie R. King's *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* (by far the best of the three Russell books), Mary is an adolescent girl befriended by the retired, 60ish Holmes at his retirement home on the Sussex Downs. The story shows the development of a wonderful relationship between the reclusive and misogynistic Holmes and a lonely child with a mind as inquiring as his own. In *A Monstrous Regiment of Women*, a few years have passed and Mary is coming of age, both as a detective and as a woman. Here, she is more Holmes's equal. She is his equal partner in his adventures and, shockingly, his sexual partner as well! *A Letter of Mary* is the most disappointing of the three. Mary and Holmes are now married(!), and the story develops along certain lines of Biblical research that, ultimately, are abandoned in favor of a conventional crime. Here, Mary clearly dominates both the case and Holmes. He seems almost not to be up to the challenge. We did not like this view of Holmes at all. Poor Holmes. Imagine him to be adequate (even good) in bed but barely adequate as a detective! Shocking!

So, we are difficult to please when it comes to Sherlockian pastiches. They need to be interesting, showing some creativity, with a plausible and well-developed plot. After all, these are still supposed to be mystery stories so we want to see the puzzle and have it unfold for us, keeping one step ahead of us. It should be written by someone who knows how to write well. We do not have time to read books containing lines such as, "He smoothed away the wrinkle between her nose." We do not have time to read a book containing a gratuitous parade of irrelevant but famous people.

As Sherlockians, we do not have time to read books in which our eternal verities are ignored. We truly enjoy good pastiches (and good parodies, too, for that matter). It's very difficult to get it right; we know that. We just hope that the authors will keep trying so that the next one *will* be better. ■

SOUNDS OF SUSPENSE

BY DICK LOCHTE AND TOM NOLAN

Michael Connelly

Trunk Music

unidentified reader (Bookcassette, 15 hrs., unabridged; Nova, 3 hours, abridged. 1–800–648–2312)

Los Angeles police detective Harry Bosch, freshly returned to the homicide squad, faces a peculiarly L.A. dilemma at the twilight murder scene in the hills directly above the Hollywood Bowl. Bosch must decide quickly how to remove a dead man from the trunk of a white Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud in clear view of a crowded amphitheater without precipitating another public relations nightmare for his department and city. Publicity, scrupulously proper procedure, and recent Southern California history are much on the cops' minds in this engrossing and capably written if a bit overly complex 1997 entry by Connelly, a former police reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*.

At first glance, the corpse in the Rolls seems the target of a typical mob hit. The case gets politically trickier when the dead man is identified as a dubious Hollywood producer. And things become positively Byzantine when a shadowy division within the LAPD takes a furtive interest in this homicide. The cop jargon and the procedural detail fascinate in *Trunk Music,* which is part murder mystery, part action thriller and—thanks to a side trip to Las Vegas that reinvolves Bosch with a troubled woman from his past—part dangerous romance. The unnamed reader enunciates Connelly's text in a clear, crisp, and perfectly serviceable manner.

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Jeffery Deaver

The Bone Collector

read by David McCallum

(Penguin Audiobooks, 3 hrs., abridged)

Lincoln Rhyme, quadriplegic ex-criminalist, is a suitably bizarre hero for Deaver's flamboyantly grotesque thriller. Crippled by a crime scene accident that prematurely ended his brilliant career, the tart-tongued Rhyme is confined to a high-tech bed in an Upper West Side townhouse. He's actively seeking help to commit suicide via the "right to die" underground when former NYPD colleagues plead for his help in finding the clues-planting perpetrator of some especially grisly deaths. Aided in the field by Patrol Officer Amelia Sachs—whipsmart, psychologically scarred but (of course) fashion-model beautiful—and with his bedroom transformed into a crime lab and command center, Rhyme hastens to outwit the serial killer even as his own appointment with a furtive euthanasiast approaches. *The Bone Collector* craftily blends aspects of several recent best-selling trends in crime fiction: cutting-edge forensic methodology, turn-of-the-century Manhattan mayhem (with which this book's villain is apparently obsessed), pursuers becoming the pursued. This breakneck thrill-ride unfolds like a movie, but there's some admirable writing mixed in with the calculated excesses. Not so engaging are the book's archfiend, whose ultimate persona and actions seem more than a bit outlandish; and the book's Grand Guignol flourishes, which include flesh-carvings, rodent attacks, and death by dentition. Reader McCallum, who will probably forever be identified as a former "Man From U.N.C.L.E.," provides a crisp, objective narration that suits Rhyme's analytical character and distances the listener from the more stomach-churning aspects of the yarn.

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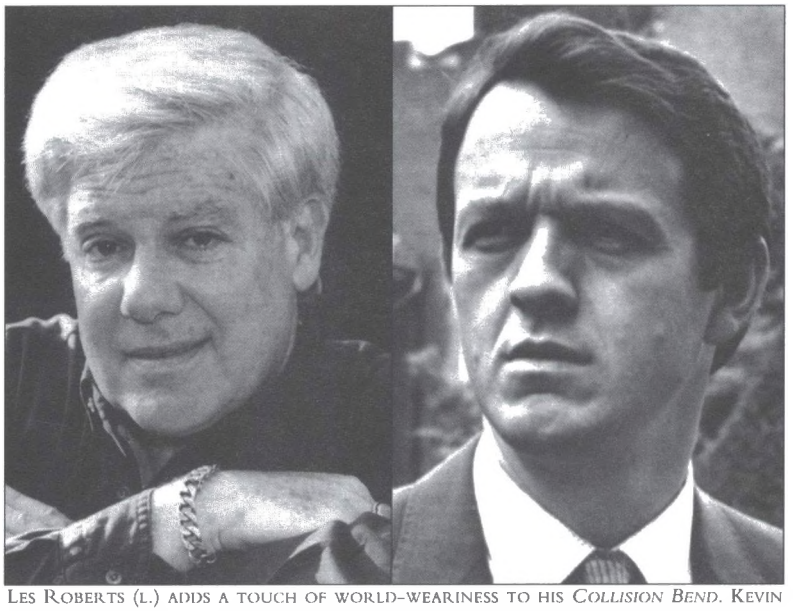

LES ROBERTS (L.) ADDS A TOUCH OF WORLD-WEARINESS TO HIS *COLLISION BEND*. KEVIN WHATELY DOES HIS IMPRESSION OF JOHN THAW'S MORSE IN COLIN DEXTER'S *DEATH IS NOW MY NEIGHBOR*.

Colin Dexter

Death Is Now My Neighbor

read by Kevin Whately

(Random House Audiobooks, three hours, abridged)

Inspector Morse's secret is revealed in this fine 1997 entry. No, not Morse's first name (only its initial: "E."). It's this: Morse drinks too much beer. The

English police detective begins to pay a physical price now for years of overindulgence—not that this prompts him to change his habits. As he himself admits, "I notice most things. It's just that some of them don't register—not immediately." The good Inspector can be forgiven his initial confusion as he thrashes through a tangled thicket of chance encounters, hidden associations, duplicities, and deceits. The events here turn on a discreet contest between two dons to head an Oxford college. But how could that pertain to the early-morning murder of a young woman in a row house kitchen far removed in style and standing from the academy? Dexter's books are brilliantly clever concoctions, the prose equivalents of the crosswords his Inspector Morse is hooked on. The author blends elements of the classic puzzle-mystery, the more bluntly realistic sort of crime fiction, the police procedural and the character saga into a type of detective novel all his own. This 12th Morse chronicle takes the well written series to a new level of skillfulness and appeal. And there's a special amusement in hearing narrator Whately, who plays the stalwart Det. Sergeant Lewis on the television series, doing his impression of John Thaw's Morse.

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Laurie R. King
A Letter of Mary
read by Megan Follows
(Durkin Hayes Audio, 3 hours, abridged)
This entertaining tale is the third in King's series about a semiretired Sherlock Holmes and Mary Russell, the American-born wife King has given the great detective and beekeeper. The couple's latest adventure begins with a visit from an elderly woman archeologist who entrusts to them a piece of papyrus that purports to hold writing by Mary Magdalene. When the archeologist is killed in a road accident, Holmes and Russell suspect foul play. One of the charms of this work is its skillful updating of the remembered Holmesian era to a slightly more modern one where telephones and automobiles are increasingly common and such real and imaginary figures as J.R.R. Tolkien and Lord Peter Wimsey are glimpsed. As for the main characters, Mary Russell is sharp and independent; and Holmes quite convincingly resembles Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's original. Even readers who resist on principle the notion of resurrecting a previous author's creation may be won over by this delightful and creative pastiche. Narrator Follows ("Anne of Green Gables," "Avonlea") may never be our favorite Holmes, but she does a nice job portraying Russell and many of the other characters in this abridgment.

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Dean Koontz
Sole Survivor
read by David Birney
(Random House Audiobooks, 12 hrs., unabridged)
Though there is a strong strain of new age mysticism in this Koontz thriller, it, like the author's last few novels, seems to be veering away from the supernatural and closer to the suspense novel, with its breathless chases and startling surprises. *Sole*'s hero is Joe Carpenter, an L.A. crime reporter who nearly loses his mind when his wife and two children are killed in a catastrophic plane crash. He has all but given up the will to live when he discovers a miraculous survivor of the crash. This apparently benign woman, Rose, is being hunted down by professionals possibly employed by the government. Spurred on by the hope that one or more of his family may also have survived, Joe casts off his depression and begins a hunt for the truth. It's a strong premise and Koontz, whose fine poetic style has been underrated for too long, makes the most of it. It's rare that an audio novel has stopped us in our tracks (or on our Trackmaster), but when the hapless Joe is trapped in the woods at night with an empathic child, and birds and beasts of prey suddenly attack, you can forget about concentrating on your steady jogging pace. David Birney's rendition of the novel is properly thoughtful and understated. But that forest sequence gets to him, too.

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Les Roberts
Collision Bend
read by the author
(Sunset Productions, 6 hrs.)
Roberts's stories about Cleveland sleuth Milan Jacovich, of which this is the seventh, are notable for at least two reasons. They adhere to the best tenets of the private detective tradition and feature the sort of personal subplots that contemporary series demand, but without the usual coyness or self-consciousness. In this instance, the woman who broke Milan's hardboiled heart asks him to help the guy who stole her from him. That would be Steve Cirini, a sleazy, promiscuous television executive, who has been arrested for the strangulation murder of his station's budding Diane Sawyer. The search for the real murderer takes Milan all around town, including encounters with a romance writer so obnoxious that genre fans may want to murder Roberts. The author spent 24 years writing and producing TV shows and his knowledge of the way things work in that industry, even at the station level, adds a special insider quality to this effective whodunit, just as his whispery, gravelly voice adds a touch of world-weariness to the presentation. ■

What About Murder?

By Jon L. Breen

Ed Gorman and Martin H. Greenberg, editors
The Fatal Frontier
New York: Carroll & Graf, 1997. xii, 419p.
Bill Pronzini's four-page introduction explores the connections between crime fiction and Western fiction, pointing out that in the dime novels, Nick Carter and Old King Brady sometimes ventured west, while real-life Westerners turned fictional sleuth in titles like "The James Boys and Pinkerton; or Frank and Jesse as Detectives"; and enumerating some of the pulp writers, notably Carroll John Daly, Erle Stanley Gardner, John D. MacDonald, Frank Gruber, and Max Brand, who wrote both kinds of fiction. The editors' story introductions are brief but acute, discussing the western contributions of the expected crossovers (Elmore Leonard, Pronzini, James M. Reasoner, Livia Washburn, Gorman, Bill Crider, Robert J. Randisi, Brian Garfield, Loren D. Estleman), some unexpected ones (Fredric Brown, Jeremiah Healy), one unjustly forgotten byline (H.A. DeRosso, dubbed "the Cornell Woolrich of the Western pulps"), and a couple of newcomers (Deborah Estleman, Michael Stotter). Longest piece in the book is a full-length novel, *The Skinning Place*, by British police procedural writer John Harvey.

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Peter Haining, editor
London After Midnight
New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996. 342p.
A tour of criminous London frames a high-quality anthology that revives some relatively unfamiliar material, notably Carter Dickson's (John Dickson Carr's) 1952 Sweeney Todd play, "Flight from Fleet Street." The two-page introduction is more atmospheric than informative, but the story notes, often longer than a page, combine tourist and literary information admirably. You do sometimes have to take editor Haining's claims with a grain of salt, however. Robert Arthur's Jack the Ripper tale "The Knife" *has* been previously published in book form, in the 1967 Hitchcock anthology *Stories That Scared Even Me*, and Margery Allingham's "The Border-Line Case" was published long before 1969. In the introduction to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Worst Man in London" (which is actually "Charles Augustus Milverton" under the author's original title), Haining refers to long-deceased Sherlockian Edgar W. Smith (1894–1960) in the present tense. Among the other authors represented are Sax Rohmer, P.D. James, Graham Greene, Ruth Rendell, John Rhode, H.C. Bailey, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and R. Austin Freeman.

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Marcia Muller and Bill Pronzini, editors
A Century of Mystery 1980–1989: The Greatest Stories of the Decade
New York: MJF, 1996. 308p.
Edward D. Hoch's six-page introduction summarizes mystery fiction events of the 1980s, with emphasis on the founding of Private Eye Writers of America and Sisters in Crime, concluding with lists of Edgar winners for best novel and short story and Gold Dagger winners for best novel in the decade. The thorough story notes give biographical and literary information on a well-chosen group of widely known writers: Isaac Asimov, Peter Lovesey, Frederick Forsyth, Janwillem van de Wetering, Loren D. Estleman, Ruth Rendell, Reginald Hill, George V. Higgins, Linda Barnes, Lawrence Block, Tony Hillerman, Susan Dunlap, Brian Garfield (to whose life the listed birthday has added an extra 10 years!), Sara Paretsky, Bill Pronzini, Robert Barnard, Clark Howard, Ed Gorman, Julie Smith, and Marcia Muller. This is the first of a projected six volumes intended to cover the entire 20th-century of the mystery: one volume each for the decades of the '50s through '90s, one volume to cover the years 1900–1950.

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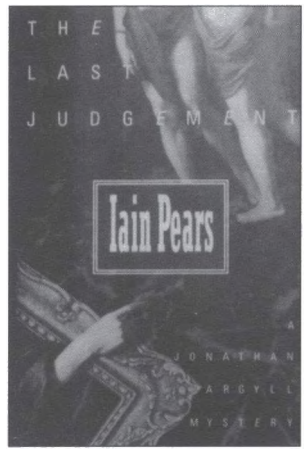
John Walsdorf and Bonnie Allen
Julian Symons: A Bibliography
with Commentaries & A Personal Memoir by Julian Symons & A Preface by H.R.F. Keating
New Castle DE: Oak Knoll; Winchester: St. Paul's Bibliographies, 1996. xliii, 296p. Illus., index.
Meticulously detailed descriptive bibliographies like this one primarily attract collectors and specialists. However, there is much more here for any admirer of Symons (1912–1994), a mainstream poet, critic, biographer, and historian apart from his wide-ranging contributions to crime fiction. Keating's preface and the compiler's introduction are followed by Symons's 19-page entry from *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, a two-page piece by wife Kathleen Symons, and a three-page chronology of his life. Best of all, Symons offers informative and often relentlessly self-critical notes on his individual books, some previously published but most original to this volume. The bibliography is divided into eight lettered sections: fiction, poetry, nonfiction, edited works, contributions to books, contributions to anthologies, selected contributions to periodicals, and contributions to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. An appendix annotates 18 secondary sources, while an epilogue lists eight sources of obituaries and tributes. The 12-page index is helpfully arranged by topic. Illustrations include a frontispiece portrait and reproductions of several title pages, covers, a corrected text page, a manuscript page, and a letter. (The volume is available for $85 from Oak Knoll Books, 414 Delaware St, New Castle DE 19720; tel: 1–800–996–2556.) ■

AJH Reviews

By Allen J. Hubin

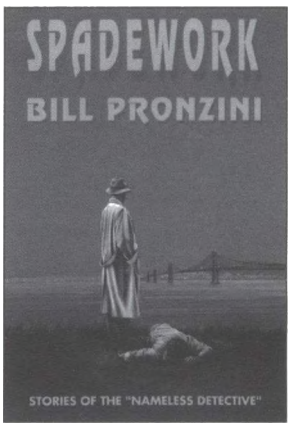
No Use Dying Over Spilled Milk (Dutton, $20.95), the third of Tamar Myers's tales about Mennonite innkeeper Magdalena Yoder, is a delightful triumph. It offers intriguing contrasts and tensions between Mennonites and their more conservative brethren, the Amish, as Magdalena travels to Ohio Amish country to attend the funeral of a second cousin twice removed. She is accompanied by her loose-living Methodist sister Susannah, plus the latter's dog/rat Snookums (who usually resides in Susannah's otherwise empty bra). It seems that Yost Yoder drowned while swimming nude in a tank of milk one cold February day. Magdalena is not universally welcomed, especially when she voices her belief that Yost was murdered along with another Amish man, who took a recent dive off a silo. These are, after all, very peculiar activities for the very straitlaced Amish. Something very peculiar is happening here, although both the Amish and the local policeman would like to pretend otherwise. Could one of the proper Amish have turned homicidally improper? Surely not...

The liberal-conservative jousting and the despairing efforts of a black D.C. homicide cop to save youngsters were more interesting to me than the murder plot in **Press Corpse** (Forge, $21.95), the second of Ron Nessen and Johanna Neuman's novels about ultraconservative radio talk show host Jerry Knight and ultraliberal *Washington Post* reporter Jane Day. Clinton has been succeeded in the White House by the rather colorless conservative Dale Hammond and his very colorful wife Grady. They are at the upscale White House Correspondents Association dinner when one of the attendees falls dead in his soup. The CIA and Secret Service play big-time CYA, deciding that the president wasn't the target, so the case falls to sleepless D.C. cop A.L. Jones, who already has at least one homicide a night on his docket. This is hay-making time for journalists, certainly for the poles-apart Knight and Day, who also like to moonlight as sleuths in occasional partnership with Jones. Very interesting glimpses of the depressing Washington scene.



The third of Iain Pears's novels about art dealer Jonathan Argyll and his bedmate Flavia di Stefano (she of Rome's Art Theft Squad) is **The Last Judgement** (Scribner, $21.00). Here Argyll does a favor for a fellow failing dealer in Paris by transporting a painting to its buyer, Arthur Muller, in Rome. The deal has a slight odor of fish about it, especially when a thief almost nabs the piece before Argyll can leave Paris. It gets fishier when the buyer reneges and commissions Jonathan to find another buyer. It becomes terminally fishy when Muller is tortured and murdered. Flavia and her boss, General Bottando, have to take an interest in this, but, alas, the policeman in incompetent charge is Flavia's nemesis (and, apparently, Argyll's predecessor in scratching Flavia where she itches). There must be something about this obviously low value artwork that's worth killing for, something in the Paris from which it came, but Bottando's French colleague, previously cooperative, turns coy. So Flavia goes to Switzerland and then to Paris, following faint trails, while Jonathan carts the painting back to its original owner, a hero of the French resistance, from whom it was apparently stolen. A smoothly told, engrossing tale of interesting people and events.

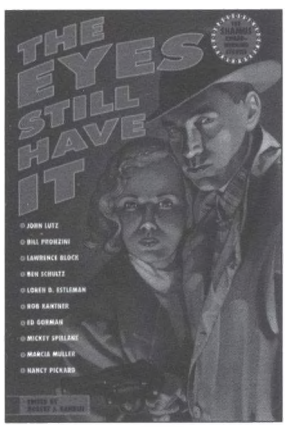
Eddie Nickles's second adventure, **The Monkey's Fist** by William D. Pease (Viking, $23.95), finds our hero retired from the D.C. police department to a life of leisure. Well, not quite. Retired yes, leisure no. His ex-wife has married big money, and Eddie needs to hold up his end with their college-bound daughter, so when offered $10,000 to track down a missing ATM card, he agrees. There are some complications he knows of: the card belonged to a recent murder victim. But it's the complications he doesn't know about that will almost surely get him dead. For Nickles is about to attract the attention of so secret a U.S. intelligence organization that it's accountable to no one—to become a problem for said organization, in fact... *Fist* is an example of the man-against-impossible-odds school of thriller, and I liked it.



Bill Pronzini's superb command of the short story is well demonstrated in his latest collection, **Spadework** (Crippen & Landru, $16.00), which numbers two previously unpublished tales among the 15 stories. The fare

here is rich and varied, even though the Nameless sleuth is central to all; as Pronzini acknowledges in an afterward, the stories range all over the place, from "hardboiled shockers, offbeat whodunnits, exercises in ratiocination, impossible crime puzzles, attempts at social commentary and light-and-wry near cozies" to "pure slapstick farce." What a grab bag of reading pleasure!

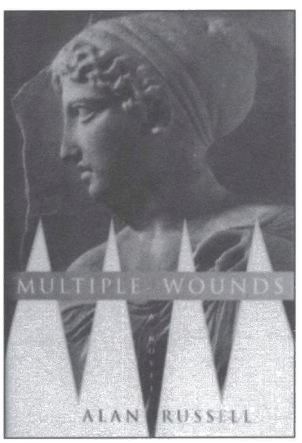
The Eyes Still Have It (Dutton, $21.95), edited by Robert J. Randisi, offers a dozen tales judged the best of private investigator short stories each year by the Private Eye Writers of America and thus given the PWA's Shamus Award. The author names are all familiar: John Lutz, Bill Pronzini, Lawrence Block and



Loren Estleman (twice each), Rob Kantner, Ed Gorman, Mickey Spillane, Marcia Muller, Nancy Pickard, and Benjamin J. Schutz. These well-written tales show that the venerable P.I. form still displays a good deal of robustness, diversity, and awareness of the evils in the world it inhabits. I would not, however, look to it for moral guidance.

We may think of Belfast as a war zone but not likely Edinburgh and Scotland. Ian Rankin's **Mortal Causes** (St. Martin's, $5.99) offers something of a corrective. The first corpse is found at Edinburgh Festival time, below street level, in a reconstruction area. He's been killed, execution style, after infliction of maximum pain, Northern Ireland style. It's Inspector John Rebus's case, but the Scottish Crimes Squad and even the Yard's Special Branch take an interest. What about the death of a young man living off the dole attracts so much official attention? Maybe the mode of death, maybe the curious tattoo on the dead man, maybe the one word message at his dancing toes. Maybe the hint of the IRA, maybe something stirring down in Pilmuir, the ghetto where gangs run and the young get old in a hurry... A vivid evocation of place and people, with Rankin's series detective, grim and battered and over-fond of whisky, a memorable creation.

Alan Russell's **Multiple Wounds** (Simon & Schuster, $22.00), nominated for Anthony and Macavity awards, is a triumph of inventiveness and suspense. It brings together several wounded people over the murdered corpse of art gallery owner Bonnie Gill. Chief among them is Holly ("Helen") Troy, whose dozen or more personalities (mostly named for Greek deities) come



out of hidden horrors of her past; did one of them observe the killing, or perhaps actually wield the knife? Another walking wounded is Orson Cheever, detective assigned to the Gill killing: he still mourns a fractured marriage and the terrible, long-ago death of his five-year-old daughter and is reduced to rubble by one of Holly's personalities, a frightened child. Wounded too is Holly's psychiatrist, Rachel Stern, who bears scars on her body and mind. What could come of such a mix when you add a killer who's quite willing to repeat himself? On no account should *Multiple Wounds* be missed.

I'm very late in catching up with Dana Stabenow's series about Kate Shugak, but the fifth, **Blood Will Tell** (Putnam, $21.95), strongly suggests I should track down the first four. Kate is a striking figure and the wryly observed Alaskan scene is beautifully captured in its many aspects—political, economic, geographic, meteorological, and cultural. Kate is of native Alaskan stock but has chosen to stay out of the machinations of native corporations that so engage the attentions and concerns of her grandmother Ekaterina. She much prefers her remote cabin, where this year (having drawn a permit for the first time in six years) she bags a moose from her doorstep. But the annual convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives is upcoming, with a critical vote on the future of tribal lands, and the pro-development folks (including some non-native slimeballs) are very much at work. Some council members Ekaterina had expected to carry the vote with her to restrict development have taken to dying at this inopportune time, and it seems Ekaterina believes it's time for Kate to take her (rightful?) leadership role in these matters—or at least investigate what might be murders. And there's the little matter of Jack, a policeman with whom Kate cohabits from time to time, and his predatory ex-wife. Fascinating place, people, and story.

I join the chorus of huzzahs for Minette Walters, whose novel **The Dark Room** (Putnam, $23.95), is an intricate, baffling tale, with diverse and emphatically fascinating characterizations—a wonderfully ingenious piece of work. When Jinx Kingsley learns that her fiancé is dumping her for her best friend and taking off for a spell in France, the second of Jinx's two suicide attempts (while stewed to the gills) lands her in the Nightingale Clinic, suffering from concussion and post-traumatic amnesia. Or so it all would appear. The clinic's Dr. Protheroe is instructed by Jinx's properties magnate father to let her get well without any psychological probing, a curious request since this seems to be exactly what Jinx needs, in view of her rejection of all accounts of her recent past. Meanwhile the police have a pair of unidentified corpses in an advanced state of decomposition. Someone seems to have dispatched them with a sledge hammer—but this is nothing to do with Jinx, of course, even though her husband was similarly beaten to death some years before. Right.... ■

Armchair Reviews

MYSTERY SOAPBOX

by Jackie Acampora

Prologue

T'was the week known as Edgars
And all over town
Mystery writers
Were scattered around.
With luncheons and breakfasts
And signings galore,
The autograph hungry
Could ask for no more.

From the writers of Cozies
To those of True Crime,
Hard Boiled Detective,
Or Thrillers sublime,
They all had their favorites,
They all came to see
Who'd take home a statue?
Which book would it be?

MWA Symposium

The workshop symposium
At old NYU
Had experts on arson,
And poisonings, too.
The bomb squad sent someone.
Detectives were there,
Both Private and Public,
Quite willing to share.

The publishing workshops had
Everyone talking.
We even got info
About cyber stalking.
And when it was over,
We had cheese and wine
And everyone said,
"What a wonderful time!"

The Banquet

"Dress to kill" was the mandate
So we all obeyed,
Strolling around while
The orchestra played.
Black tie and long gown
Or short skirt of satin,
Sequins and feathers
Were there in Manhattan.

We sat at the *TAD* table,
Lots of good talk, man.
We raised our glasses
And toasted Marv Lachman.
He won "The Raven,"
A prestigious prize
Don Sandstrom presented
With pride in his eyes.

While the Edgars were given,
We finished dinner,
Sipping our coffee,
Applauding each winner.
Sure, there were no-shows,
That happens each year.
"Best Movie," "Grand Master,"
Neither one did appear.

But Billy Bob Thornton,
He sent us a fax,
Thanked Mom and kiddies,
Politely asked
Us all to forgive him.
For missing the show.
He was out working.
(Makes movies, you know.)

Ruth Rendell, our Grand Master,
Did *not* miss the boat.
She simply decided
To stay home and vote.
We all understood that,
It's easy to see
She's not one to live
Conservative-ly.

The full names of the winners are
Elsewhere, you'll see.
They ran the gauntlet
From A down to Z;
Atkinson, Roberts,
O'Brien and Cook,
Wilson and Miller, each
Won for best book.

And we can't forget Coben,
Malone, Rapoport,
McGovern or Zuckerman
(*he* was a sport!).
The winners were humble,
Happy and proud.
They all gave good speeches,
They all pleased the crowd.

Epilogue

T'was the week known as Edgars
And now it was done.
There was some drama,
Some learning, some fun.
We will do this again,
It will be just as great
When MWA meets in
Nineteen Ninety Eight.

Featured Title

Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye

by Horace McCoy.

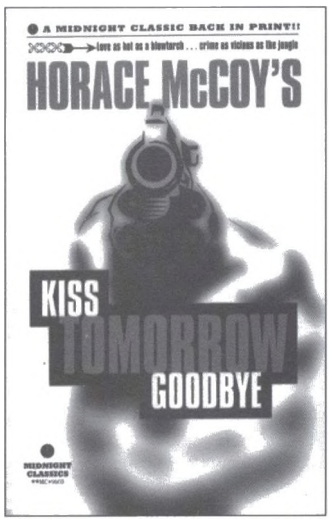
New York: Serpent's Tail, 1996. $11.95

First published in 1948 and frequently out of print since, *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* has remained one of noir master Horace McCoy's least-read books despite the fact that it is arguably his most accomplished novel. That's a shame, but entirely understandable. Featuring a blithely sociopathic first person protagonist, a supporting cast which includes not a single sympathetic character, graphic (for its time) sex utterly devoid of tenderness, and an almost overwhelmingly claustrophobic ambience, *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* makes harsh demands upon the reader. There's nothing easy about this book.

Narrator Paul Murphy (aka Ralph Cotter—the reader never learns his true name) is the product of a privileged background, a Phi Beta Kappa and the sort of facile sophisticate whose natural milieu might easily consist of gallery openings and cocktail parties. Paul, however, is also a murderous, megalomaniacal punk who has chosen crime as the medium through which his natural superiority will be revealed.

Escaping from a prison work gang, he effortlessly assumes leadership of a gang

consisting of Holiday Tokowanda, the erratic, sexually compulsive sister of one of the inmates Paul murdered during the jailbreak, and the obsequious Jinx, a sort of criminal gofer. To this nucleus he quickly adds corrupt attorney Keith Mandon and, thanks to a stroke of luck, several crooked cops, including the highly-placed Inspector Webber. His forces assembled, Paul considers that it is now just a matter of taking what he wants when he wants it. Such is, after all, the prerogative of the superior man.



Things don't work out that way, thanks to Margaret Dobson. The daughter of the most powerful man in town, Margaret is rich, well-educated and sophisticated. Everything, in other words, that Holiday is not. On one level, she is everything that Paul feels he deserves. She is not at all what he needs, however, and as the source of his attraction to her becomes clear to him, Paul recoils in horror.

To reveal more of the plot would do a disservice both to the author and to potential readers. This is frequently the case with landmark novels. *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* succeeds on so many levels that it defies easy review. As a portrait of a hopelessly depraved criminal mind it is unmatched. Read simply as a crime fiction period piece, it shows the author to be easily the equal of such better-known contemporaries as Cain and Woolrich. It can also be read as a dark and relentlessly savage social satire. It is a rare novel that can offer intellectual satisfaction on so many different levels while remaining so unapologetically unpleasant to read.

This new edition of *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye,* unfortunately, leaves a great deal to be desired in terms of production standards. The paper is cheap, the typeface inappropriate and the design impossibly amateurish. Worse, typos abound. Still, if this edition helps bring Horace McCoy to a new generation of readers, such shortcoming may be grudgingly forgiven. The novel is that strong, and more. *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* is—unequivocally—a masterpiece.

—Paul A. Bergin

GENERAL

Acid Casuals

by Nicholas Blincoe. London and New York: Serpent's Tail, 1997, $12.00

If transsexuals, drug dealers, punk rockers, and gunslingers are your thing, *Acid Casuals* is your book. Set in gritty, grimy Manchester, England, this dark tale centers on Estela, the aforementioned transsexual.

But she/he is more, a hired gun out to kill her ex-boss, Estela prowls the night spots of Manchester in search of her prey. During her quest, she encounters her past—lovers and lawmen, pimps and procurers. She also stumbles into the midst of ongoing drug dealing and devotees of all types of drugs, from cocaine to Ecstasy to amphetamines.

The tale speeds along almost as fast as the drug users that populate its pages. Blincoe, a first novelist, supposedly based his book on true stories of Manchester's underbelly. For those who like odd heroes and a tough-guy milieu, this is right on target.

—Sue Emmons

Blues for the Buffalo

by Manuel Ramos.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $21.95

For Denver attorney Luis Montez, there is no rest. Even a supposedly restorative vacation on a Mexican beach catapults him into another case.

Banged up from his last case, Luis has accepted a friend's offer to convalesce at a beachfront condo in Los Cabos. Appearing before him on the beach one afternoon like a bronzed angel in a white bikini is one Rachel Espinoza. Rachel introduces herself as a writer, and entrusts Montez with the final draft manuscript of the novel she is completing.

Upon returning home to Denver, Luis squirrels away the manuscript in a file cabinet in his office where it remains out of sight and relatively out of mind until Conrad "Rad" Valdez appears at Montez's door. Brandishing lots of machismo and a sharp tongue, Rad claims to be a P.I. investigating Rachel Espinoza's recent disappearance. Montez and the younger man alternately spar verbally and reach uneasy truces.

Rad accompanies Montez to the "Hole," a local bookstore/coffeehouse with a colorful history. It's most recently been a headquarters for the Socialist Workers Party. During coffee and conversation about a legendary sixties Chicano activist named Oscar Acosta, Rad reveals that Rachel Espinoza claimed to be Acosta's long-lost daughter and she'd been on a mission to find him. Just then, the coffeehouse goes up in flames and Chicana writer Charlotte Garcia loses her life in the blaze. Luis swears to Bonnie Collins, Charlotte's surviving lover, that he will get to the bottom of things. Local police have ruled the fire as vandalism but Bonnie's gut tells her otherwise.

Rachel Espinosa, meanwhile, continues to obsess Rad. He flies to various parts of the country to quiz writers with whom Rachel had stayed in Los Cabos. Luis simultaneously grapples with the mystery of the fire.

Despite thin plotting and the reader's sense of loose ends, this series boasts a likable protagonist in Luis Montez, and his crusty Denver neighborhood isn't a bad place to spend some time.

—Susan Zappia

Breakup

by Dana Stabenow.

New York: Putnam's, 1997. $22.95

Kate Shugak went back to her Alaskan roots to avoid all that big city (Anchorage-style) traffic and trouble, but it doesn't seem to be working. In one 24-hour period, she's chased by

grizzlies, shot at, has a jet engine land on her house, and a yard full of strangers trampling around her acreage. Or maybe it's more accurate to say sloshing around, because it's spring in Alaska, time for breakup, a time when "...all of Alaska melts into a 586,412-square-mile pile of slush." Yuck.

Kate is out of coffee, almost out of food, and definitely out of sorts. She hasn't seen the love of her life, Jack Morgan, in months. Her duty as tribal elder (a position inherited from her beloved grandmother) has her interceding in local issues; her duty as a friend has her acting as guide to a pair of stuffy Easterners. She's almost as grouchy as those freshly wakened grizzlies.

While breakup brings her two bodies (one newly thawed, the other newly clawed), along with domestic violence and tribal obligations, it brings us to a better understanding of Kate's world.

Dana Stabenow shows us an Alaska that crosses the humor of "Northern Exposure" with the adventure of *Call of the Wild*. Her characters would be misfits in any other location, but are a perfect fit for this fictional corner of a national park. They are feisty, rugged, respectful of the land and the creatures who share it.

If you're a Kate Shugak fan, this book will not disappoint you. If you've never had the fun of reading Ms. Stabenow's work, *Breakup* is a wonderful introduction. Though it may not make you want to vacation in Alaska. At least, not until spring is over.

—Jackie Acampora

Crash Course

by Kathy Hogan Trocheck.

New York: HarperCollins, 1997. $22.50

Last year the author switched from her Callahan Garrity character and introduced sixty-six-year-old Truman Kicklighter, who worked for years for the Associated Press. Shortly after retiring, the death of his wife left him at sixes and sevens. He is slowly easing into a different lifestyle by living as frugally as he can in a St. Petersburg hotel called the Fountain of Youth, joining a Great Books club, and generally being a friend to man. And woman.

The hotel's waitress, Jackalleen Canaday, is fast-talked into buying a Corvette from a used car outfit. Not only is the cost way beyond her means but the car is a real lemon. The dealer refuses to unwind the deal but later steals the car back to use it in an insurance scam. When Jackie confronts the dealer, she also spots the dead body of his salesman who had sold her the car. She reports the incident to the police but they find no body and are told the salesman abruptly left town. Truman agrees to help Jackie find the missing body and at the same time see that the slime-ball dealer is brought to justice. He sees exposing this crook mostly as a journalistic opportunity for himself.

The story concentrates more on the criminal activities of the crooks than on Truman himself although he is instrumental in righting the wrongs. As was true in her first Truman story, *Lickety Split*, this book has one of the fastest endings in memory, with one or two story lines left dangling. Still, it is a rapid read but definitely not for the squeamish.

—Don Sandstrom

Endangered Species

by Nevada Barr.

New York: Putnam, 1997. $22.95

Nevada Barr's "Anna Pigeon" novels, which now number five, exhibit all the action of classical hard-boiled private eye novels—she encounters fires and exploding planes, gets bashed on the head, and is shot at—without giving up the pertinent themes and realistic characters that have become a hallmark of the contemporary mystery. Barr uses many of the standard motifs and formulas in a way which transcends cliché.

Anna Pigeon has been assigned fire presuppression duty on an island off the coast of Georgia. She shares this island paradise with a curious and entertaining cast of characters. There's Marty Schiessinger, a highly-strung marine biologist who, according to park rumor, eats ticks and road-kill. Guy Marshall is the tough, tobacco-spitting fire crew boss. Dot and Mona are a pair of spry septuagenarian ex-schoolteachers who spend their summers as park volunteers. Best of all is Dijon Smith, a young firefighter with whom Anna is often teamed.

PAST CRIMES

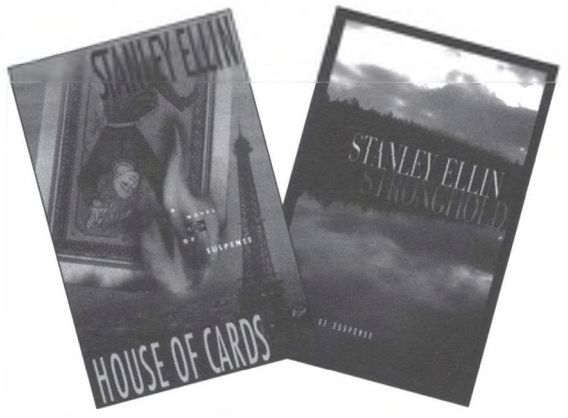
by Charles L.P. Silet

House of Cards
(First published in 1967)

Stronghold
(First published in 1974)

BY STANLEY ELLIN

New York: Foul Play Press, 1996. $11.00 each.



Stanley Ellin made his reputation writing "one-off" thrillers and superb short stories. He also did much toward erasing the distinctions between traditional genre and mainstream fiction by writing novels more concerned with character and locale than with plot. Ellin's two books recently republished by Foul Play Press, *Stronghold* and *House of Cards,* provide good examples of his talents as a writer.

Ellin was born in 1916 in Brooklyn where he grew up, attended school and college, graduated at the age of 19, and died in 1986. During the late 1930s, he eked out a living working at a number of jobs including a junior college teacher, a magazine salesman, and a steelworker. Although he began writing during these years, he failed to sell his fiction and eventually abandoned his literary efforts. In 1937 he married Jeanne Michael, an editor, and they had one child.

After a short period in the Army during World War II, Ellin returned to writing and pursued it full time, while his family lived on his service unemployment allowance and on his wife's editing salary. He first sold a story to *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* in 1948, and "The Specialty of the House" won the magazine's best fiction award that year. Also in 1948 Simon & Schuster issued his first novel, *Dreadful Summit,* beginning a career in which he eventually published another dozen novels and four collections of short fiction.

Ellin won three Edgars, two for short story collections in 1954 and 1956 and one for his novel *The Eighth Circle* (1958). The French translation of *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall* (1972) received the 1975 Le Grand Prix de Littérature Policière. He was named Grand Master by the Mystery Writers of America in 1981.

Originally published in 1967 *House of Cards* is one of Ellin's mid-career novels, and the kind of fiction we do not see as much of anymore: the European tale of political intrigue. The story begins in Paris when a former boxer and aspiring writer, Reno Davis, an expatriate American, is hired as the well-paid tutor for the nine-year-old Paul de Villemont, the only heir of a wealthy and powerful French military family. Soon Reno learns that he is being employed as much for his skills as a bodyguard as a teacher, and he finds himself protecting not only Paul but also his stunningly beautiful, and apparently unstable, mother from the nefarious dealings of the de Villemonts who are involved in the clandestine world of modern-day fascism. As the novel nears its climax, it gains speed and the action crosses international boundaries into Italy where the narrative concludes in Rome with Reno, Paul, and his mother making a harrowing dash for the safety of the American embassy with the forces of evil in hot pursuit.

Stronghold is a caper novel which revolves around a kidnapping plot in which four bumbling ex-cons, called the Company, led by the psychotic James Flood plan to hold a Quaker banker, Marcus Hayworth, and his family for ransom. The action occurs primarily in Flood's hometown in upstate New York, where he was once the town's bad boy and where he was befriended by the Quaker community in an attempt to reform him. Unlike *House of Cards* the action in *Stronghold* is greatly restricted and is largely confined to Hayworth's house and the town's small Quaker community. The narrative develops its tension inside the parameters of this claustrophobic setting as the strengths of the Quakers' passive resistance are tested against the violence imported by the kidnap gang.

In both these novels Ellin strips back the social veneer that shields the families to reveal the personal conflicts and tensions within. The de Villemonts, for example, have never quite recovered from the humiliation of the French loss of Algeria, and it drives them to throw in their lot with former FLN paramilitary forces in a worldwide plot to destroy western democracy. In *Stronghold* not only are Marcus Hayworth's Quaker principles tested, but he is also forced to confront his personal failures in his own family, especially with his oldest daughter.

Although Ellin constructed his novels along traditional lines of the thriller, the scope of the books, the care in their writing, and the strength of the characters make them also serious studies of the nature of evil and the moral responsibilities of the individual. Such universal themes retain a particular relevance for our violent and corrupt times. ■

When a plume of smoke is sighted, Anna and an associate rush to the site of a fatal plane crash. The plane had been doing routine drug interdiction when the engine malfunctioned. An investigator finds signs of sabotage, and Anna takes matters into her own hands to find the saboteur.

Meanwhile, in New York, Anna's sister, psychiatrist Molly Pigeon, has been receiving death threats. Anna asks her lover, FBI agent Frederick Stanton, to look into the threats against her sister, setting into motion a love-triangle that could jeopardize her relationships with the people she loves the most.

The story has several red (and perhaps overripe) herrings, which lead the reader to an exhausting and utterly satisfying denouement. My pulse must have doubled as I raced through the final third of the book. When Barr was last interviewed in *TAD* (28:3), she suggested that this might be the last Anna Pigeon novel. Let's hope that Pigeon is far from retirement.

—Steven E. Steinbock

Free Reign

by Rosemary Aubert. Bridgehampton, NY: Bridge Works, 1997. $21.95

Ellis Portal is a 55-year-old vagrant living for the past four years in the Don River Valley wilderness near Toronto. His past is that of a respected, wealthy judge with a wife and two children, none now part of his life. His career was ended when in a fit of uncontrolled anger, he assaulted the wife of a good friend, John Stoughton-Melville, was charged and convicted.

Digging in his hidden "pea-patch," he finds a severed black hand with a familiar ring on it. It is one of five given to five white law graduates when they became lawyers 30 years ago by John Stoughton-Melville. At the time, they pledged solemnly that once and only once, each would do a favor for each of the others. Portal has been done his favor when John effected Portal's release after his conviction, with the condition that he enter a mental hospital for six months and that he never approach the Stoughton-Melvilles again.

Portal re-buries the hand after removing the ring and decides to solve the mystery. There are a few problems with his getting back to mainstream life, from acquiring acceptable and less conspicuous clothing to renewing valuable contacts. The search brings danger-filled experiences, as well as moments of pathos and guilt.

Free Reign is Aubert's first mystery novel, although she has done much other writing, and it is a gem. Her descriptions of nature evoke beautiful pictures (almost worth becoming a hermit out there) and her "talk" of Toronto makes me want to go back for another visit. Characters are well-developed, none being saints and none being absolutely evil. The writing flows easily between the past and the current action and the building of suspense makes you feel you're climbing a mountain and you've got to reach the peak.

If there is a flaw it is that Aubert runs the gamut of social problems: the homeless, prostitution, teen-age pregnancy, homosexuality, the justice system, growing up in two cultures, and more. There are enough issues for a couple of books, but her book is still one of the best. It can be read with great satisfaction by both mystery readers and by the general reader. Her short stories would be worth finding and certainly one will look forward to her next Ellis Portal book.

—Maria Brolley

Ghirlandaio's Daughter

by John Spencer Hill.
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $22.95

This is the second mystery novel by John Spencer Hill, a Canadian author known for his critical works on Milton and Coleridge. As in his first mystery, *The Last Castrato* (1995), the story is set in present-day Italy and the detective is Carlo Arbati of the Florence police.

A brilliant detective, Arbati is also an accomplished poet. While visiting the town of Lucca where he is to receive an award for his latest volume of poems, he soon finds himself assisting a friend, Inspector Bonelli of the Lucca police, on a complex murder case. Early in the investigation, they learn that the case involves expatriates and tourists. James Dearing, an American, dies when a statue of a Greek warrior falls on him and the warrior's bronze spear penetrates his chest. The coroner's verdict is death by accidental means. Later another American dies, and this time the death is clearly a murder.

Arbati's efforts reveal that all of the suspects are British, American, or German, and that art forgery and blackmail lie at the core of the mystery.

John Spencer Hill obviously knows the locale—Northern Italy—very well, and his talent for characterization is outstanding. The many characters, coming from diverse cultures, are brought vividly to life. Hill writes in a literate style, with frequent references to literature, science, and art. (The title, *Ghirlandaio's Daughter,* refers to a painting.) The novel is a dilettante's delight, but it's also a work in the tradition of Agatha Christie. Portions of the book, especially the final chapters, will remind readers of an Hercule Poirot mystery. There are, however, two rather explicit sex scenes that would probably have caused Dame Agatha to blush.

If Hill's purpose is to entertain, and I'm sure it is, he certainly succeeds in this lively, quite remarkable novel.

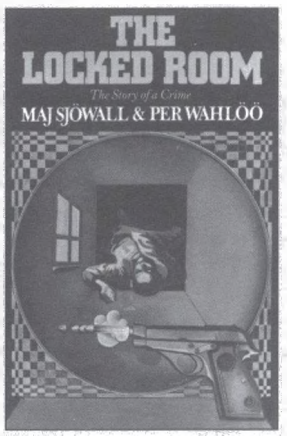
—John Apostolou

ATLAS to MYSTERY

BY GEORGE J. DEMKO

This column features Sweden and the long and distinguished historical evolution of the mystery in that northern clime. The first genuine, indigenous mystery author was Frederik Lindholm who published *Stockholmsdetekiven* (*The Stockholm Detective*) in 1893. In the early part of the 20th century, the English influence was clear in the work of S.A. Duse and J. Regis who wrote 14 novels featuring a Holmes clone. Sture Stig (aka Oscar Wagman) wrote a number of very clever parodies on Holmes. Even a Raffles-like character was created by Frank Heller (aka Martin Gunnar Serner) whose many shady exploits often took him to the continent. From the early '40s on, the mystery in Sweden became enormously popular and can be characterized by two very distinctive traits. The first is the strong sense of place exhibited by many authors and, second, the use of the mystery as an important mirror of the political, social, and economic policies and processes in a welfare-oriented state.

The first tendency is most strongly represented by Stig Trenter who wrote Stockholm based novels from 1944 to the late 1960s. His photographer protagonist was the hero who helped a less talented police inspector solve crimes in which the districts of Stockholm are the main features of the stories. These works were so strongly reflective of the city's geography that the term "Trenter Syndrome" was coined to characterize this tendency. In the late 1940s Maria Lang (aka Dagmar Lange) created a sexy female narrator who explored a number of rare themes, including lesbianism, and focused her stories in the little town of Skoga. Another writer of the period, Vic Suneson (aka Sune Lundquist), set his stories in the seedier sections and working class districts of Stockholm. By the 1950s, R.K. Ronblom wrote stories set in small towns. His hero was an historian and the writing was of a very high literary quality. A more recent example of the place-sensitive writer is Kerstin Ekman. Her novel *Blackwater* (Doubleday: NY, 1995) is a wonderfully taut story set in northern Sweden on the Norwegian border. The sometimes bleak, often awesome region is a wondrous setting for her mystery that stresses murder and racial tension between Lapps (Sami) and the local Swedes. She has received the Nordic Council Literary Prize and the Swedish Crime Academy award for best crime novel.



The social mirror trend in Swedish mysteries is clearly and superbly reflected in the work of Maj Sjowall and Per Wahloo (please excuse the lack of diacritical marks throughout this essay). This remarkable couple wrote a set of ten mystery novels that were planned to trace the societal changes in the country via the changing attitudes and perspectives of their hero, homicide policeman Martin Beck. Beginning in 1965 with *Roseanna* and ending in 1975 with *The Terrorists*, they demonstrate the evolution of Swedish society via the behavior of the police. They also document a reversal of roles for the police beginning with an orderly, right-minded organization to one in which the unrest and malaise in the society is clearly reflected and the police become corrupt and brutal. The couple had strong communist leanings and were distressed at what they perceived to be the evolution of a welfare state gone awry. All of these novels have been translated into English and published in the United States. The 1970 volume, *The Laughing Policeman*, won an Edgar in America. (The other seven titles include, *The Man Who Went Up In Smoke*, 1966: *The Man on the Balcony*, 1967: *The Fire Engine That Disappeared*, 1969: *Murder at the Savoy*, 1970: *The Abominable Man*, 1971: *The Locked Room*, 1972: *Cop Killer*, 1974).

From the 1960s on, the American influence was strongly felt in Swedish mysteries. Anders Jonason attempted with some success to emulate the Chandler/Hammett hard-boiled style in a Stockholm setting. The current president of the International Crime Writer's Association, K. Arne Blom, has contributed a number of semi-tough, politically-oriented mysteries set in the university city of Lund (*The Moment of Truth*, 1977 and *The Limits of Pain*, 1979, both translated into English). More recently Henning Mankell has brought his considerable writing skill to the public. His *Faceless Killers* (1991) traces the exploits of a set of murderers of a Swedish farm family but also uncovers a rather violent xenophobic sentiment among the usually tolerant Swedes. This effort won Sweden's Best Mystery Award.

Mysteries have been enormously popular in Sweden since the 1940s and continue to attract a national and international reading audience. For an excellent review, especially of early Swedish mysteries, consult the succinct and very useful volume by Bo Lundin, *The Swedish Crime Story* (Bodonitryck: Sundyberg, Sweden, 1981). It is also possible to acquire a great deal of information on the Internet relating to Scandinavian mysteries, including those published in English. An excellent source is <www.db.dk/dbaa/jbs/scannews.htm>.

Sweden is a truly special source of outstanding mystery writers. They know their place and their social systems and allow their readers to share the Nordic experience vicariously. ■

George J. Demko is a Professor of Geography at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. His special interest is the "locus operandi" of mysteries, especially in an international context.

Hardwired

by Sally Chapman.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $21.95

This is author Sally Chapman's fourth mystery involving computers. The heroine, Julie is a smart and spunky computer security expert who with her boyfriend Vic, also a computer expert, owns a computer security firm. The new firm is laden with bills, and little business.

Vic's old college girlfriend, Margo, enters the picture with a lucrative job offer to solve a computer security problem at NASA. Julie suspects Margo of ulterior motives in offering them this plum. She describes her as looking at Vic, "The way I look at a dessert tray after a nice dinner; something totally desirable, completely obtainable." They take the offer, Julie not as eagerly as Vic because of her suspicions about Margo.

While Julie and Vic are trying to discover how hackers are inputting unwanted code into the NASA computers, two astronauts meet their deaths under strange circumstances. Julie, her sense of curiosity aroused, starts investigating the deaths.

Julie's good friend Max, a bride of one month, married to a rich workaholic, likes to give Julie advice on her love life. Her funny quips add humor to the story. She happily leaves her new husband to be there in time for the action.

The reader gets some insight into how they train astronauts, along with computer terms and the security involved in keeping hackers out of sensitive systems. This breezy light-hearted novel does not drop many clues to the solution, but it spreads light humor along the way.

—Joyce Kopecky

Mother Nature

by Sarah Andrews.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $23.95

U.S. Senator George Harwood Pinchon is distraught when his daughter Janet is found dead in a roadside ditch with her $4,000 Merlin titanium bicycle, the victim of an apparent hit-and-run accident. After the death turns into a murder case, Pinchon becomes aggravated that the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department is not making satisfactory progress in their investigation. So he hires geologist Emily Hanson to look into the death, which only makes sense if the Senator believes that Janet's death is related to her job. Em takes the case: $500 a day, plus expenses, can convince an unemployed oilfield geologist with an anemic bank balance to do almost anything.

Em goes undercover, following in Janet's footsteps, getting a job at HRC Environmental, working with Adam Horowitz, continuing Janet's projects, and asking questions of the people that Janet encountered just before her death.

This is Em Hanson's best adventure yet. Well-drawn characters and a complex plot set *Mother Nature* above the rest of the pack. Add Sarah Andrews's name to your short reading list. You won't be sorry.

—Ronald C. Miller

Murder in Halruaa

by Richard S. Meyers.

Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1996. $18.99

Murder in Halruaa is called a Fantasy Adventure Mystery. I opened it with trepidation and began to read. Half a book later, I turned out the light, and then only because there's a job to go to in the morning. The book went with me.

Pryce Covington is a young man who only wants one thing; a cushy job for life. Pryce is a man of modest talents. A little magic, a little (as little as possible, to be truthful) sweat, some wit, a pleasant countenance, and an ego. He is a Man of Service, supplying extra hands, feet or eyes when they are needed. His partner is Gamor Turkal, who supplies a spectacular memory.

Gamor persuades Pryce to come to Halruaa, holding out the promise of that "cushy job." Unfortunately, when he arrives, it's to find Gamor murdered, lying next to a second, unidentified corpse. Pryce picks up a splendid looking cloak at the scene. The cloak changes his life. It identifies him as Darlington Blade, the prime student of a prime mage, Geerling Ambersong, who has disappeared from Halruaa. Is it Darlington's body lying next to Gamor? Or Geerling's? If not they, then who? And who killed them? There are attempts on Pryce's life, but do they come from those who think he's Darlington Blade, or those who know he's not?

This book is chock full of characters with strange sounding names, but it doesn't take long before they sound perfectly natural. For instance, there's the beautiful Dearlyn Ambersong, daughter of Geerling and something of a wizard herself. You'll meet the halfling, Gheevy Wotfirr, who knows Pryce is not who people assume he is. There are the inquisitrixes, Berridge Lymwich and Wendchrix Turzihubbard, and a sympathetic jackalwere named Cunningham.

This is a mystery and a very good

one, at that. Mr. Meyers plays fair with the clues in plain sight. There's lots of humor, a little romance, and some magic. Don't let the names scare you off. I hope Mr. Meyers will take us back to Halruaa for more mystery in the Fantasy Adventure world.

—*Jackie Acampora*

The Murder Lover

by Ellen Rawlings. New York: Fawcett Gold Medal, 1997. $5.99

Elspeth Goldman was about to be married when her body was found in her driveway, strangled with a white stocking and surrounded by broken glass. Although investigative freelance writer Rachel Crowne has a lot in common with the dead woman, her only connection to her was through her friendship with Elspeth's grandmother Jennie. It is because of her that Rachel attended the funeral, met the ex-husband and the fiancé and began to poke into corners best left searched by the police.

Ah, but her next-door neighbor is a police detective. And he is accustomed to bouncing theories off Rachel. And who better to bounce them off than a twice-married Jewish woman? And there does seem to be a decidedly Jewish angle to the crimes.

Rachel also finds herself assigned to investigate two interesting newcomers to her town. Mark Michaels's hate-group has set up shop in the Washington, D.C. exurb of Fairfield, Maryland, with his frozen-eyed assistant, Waldo Stone. They organize quasi-militia groups based on white supremacy. Their arrival at the same time a serial murderer begins strangling young Jewish women engaged to be married raises suspicion.

The Reverend Glen Beacon, newcomer to the area as well, founder and head of the Church of Unconditional Love is just a little too good to be true: too sweet, too pretty, too smooth. What scam is he running? Rachel's suspicions are raised when a Jewish lesbian who was going to be married by Beacon to her black lover becomes the killer's next victim.

As the body count—all young Jewish women engaged to be married—rises, Rachel's involvement becomes less as a reporter, and more as a possible victim. She shares a major characteristic with all of the murdered women. She is Jewish. She is not engaged, but who's to say the killer is all that discriminating. Someone starts making crank phone calls; a car seems to follow her at night. And a psychic the police bring in suggests she will be next. But Rachel is both skeptical and determined to set a trap.

Rachel's voice is distinctive and absorbing. The Jewish details are nicely balanced with the plot and her involvement in the investigation makes sense. Her outrage at the anti-semitic Michaels and how it battles with her professionalism strikes me as being completely true and honest. Characterizations are deft and clearly drawn, and Rachel's lifestyle as a freelance writer is believable. For a first novel in the female detective subgenre, this one's a winner. Make room next to your Graftons and Paretskys.

—*Mark Terry*

No Human Involved

by Barbara Seranella.
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $21.95

Munch Mancini stops by the Venice Beach biker dive to wipe her $20 bar bill clean. In a drug, and booze haze, she struggles to change her life for the better. Munch throws down a few shots of Jack Daniel's Black with the man who is sitting next to her at the bar and wonders how much he's good for—$20 or maybe $30. She doesn't know Detective Mace St. John has been sent to the biker bar to arrest her for the murder of "Flower George" Mancini, her father and her pimp.

Munch avoids arrest by giving a phony name. With a wad of cash she buys a car from an ex-employer and lands a job with Happy Jack's Auto Repair Shop.

St. John doesn't take a great deal of interest in finding "Flower George" Mancini's murderer at first, because he learns "Flower George" took advantage of his daughter over the years. However, when evidence proving the same gun that killed Mancini was used in a serial murder, he decides Munch has to be caught so he can clear up the case and put her behind bars.

Meanwhile, Munch keeps a low profile with a new name. She makes a friend

who encourages her to joins an AA and NA group. But when she slips back to her old neighborhood to get the gun she's hidden away, her troubles begin.

This mystery takes a different slant—the hunter and the hunted meeting in the beginning and told from both points of view. It almost makes you cheer for both sides. Munch Mancini's had so many bad breaks all her life that you can't help caring about her. The tense moments for both Munch and Mace keep the pages turning. Don't miss this read.

—*Catherine M. Nelson*

Not Comin' Home to You

by Lawrence Block.

New York: Carroll & Graf, 1997. $4.95

In 1958, seventeen-year-old Charlie Starkweather and his fourteen-year-old girlfriend, Carol Ann Fugate, shocked the nation by killing ten people on an eleven day murder trip through Nebraska and Wyoming.

First published in 1974 under Lawrence Block's pen name of "Paul Kavenaugh," this paperback reprint is based on the Starkweather case, and follows it fairly closely.

Jimmie John Hall, twenty-four and looking younger, thumbs a ride in a blue Tornado driven by an oilman who prides himself on his ability to judge character by appearance. "Now I look at you and what do I see? I see a boy who cares about his appearance. Hair combed, pants pressed, shoes shined, who cares what he looks like. A young fellow not afraid to look a person directly in the eye...not stoned on drugs...a decent American boy."

It does not occur to Walker Ferris that this appearance may have been designed to give just that impression. Soon Jimmie John is driving north out of Texas popping little red pills the while and hoping that it will take the police several days to find Mr. Ferris's body.

In a small Nebraska town he sees fifteen-year-old plain, lonely Betty Dienhardt and the attraction is mutual. Betty wants nothing more than to get away from her family: her whiney mother, her bitter, defeated father, her senile granny. Jimmie John sees what the underage girl doesn't: if they drive off together her family is sure to alert the police. Every cop in the state will be looking for them.

Of course, there are only three in the family. Jimmie John has lots more bullets than that...

Thus the long nightmare begins...Fleeing through the Southwest, murdering to leave no one behind who can identify them...one murder leads to another.

The novel sweeps irresistibly to its grim, almost preordained conclusion, where teenagers packed into cars wait quietly outside a prison on execution night.

Author Block was born in the East, but he has the easy going, and good-ole-boy rhythm and speech of Midwest America down pat. The novel demonstrates a Block trademark, the remarkable ability to set a mood and sustain it throughout the work. Writing with unobtrusive ease, Block provides insight into his characters and, by implication, into multiple murderer Charlie Starkweather. Start this, and you'll finish it.

—*Frank D. McSherry Jr.*

Potshot

by Gerry Boyle.

New York: Putnam, 1997. $23.95

Winding around and through Maine towns in search of stories, free-lance reporter Jack McMorrow is off on his fourth adventure, where the "legalization of pot" is the major theme, played out against the backdrop of two missing men, one presumably murdered in a drug deal gone bad.

McMorrow is approached at a Country Life fair by Bobby Mullaney, his wife, Melanie, and nameless friend, known only as Coyote. Bobby is part pot evangelist, and part small-time dealer for his home-grown marijuana.

Not taking no—or even maybe—for an answer, Bobby persuades McMorrow to write a story about the efforts to make pot-growing legal. McMorrow figures an easy three hundred dollars for the story which he pitches to the Boston Globe. Shortly after his first interview with the Mullaneys Melanie calls him to report both Bobby and Coyote missing. From rural Maine to Valley, Massachusetts, the trail of the two men takes the expected twists and turns in the drug-world, reflecting clearly how our culture can turn from peaceful to ugly and threatening no matter where one lives.

Jack counts on needed help from his friend, ex-Marine Clair, a neighbor whose background comes in quite handy when both face death in an apartment in Valley. Clair's character reflects again a careful approach by the writer to draw his characters realistically. He does the same with McMorrow's love interest, Roxanne, a social worker who cares too much and finds herself in danger in a sub-plot involving hard drug use and child abuse.

Jack is left balancing the demands of his story with concern for Roxanne. Tension builds as Jack must choose between work and his strong feelings for her. Doyle's twist at the end may reveal his stand on the theme, but it is not intrusive and does not lessen the impact of good writing.

What makes Boyle interesting reading is solid and insightful writing. Perfectly balancing the lure of small town living with the gradual encroachment of big-city life, a line like: "Our kids are just starting to wear their baseball caps turned around," is indicative of a writer who knows his locale well, one who writes most convincingly of the customs and mores of rural Maine. McMorrow is capable, but not larger-

than-life. He is placed in fear for his life on a couple of occasions, but extricating himself in one piece is done convincingly. The reader thinks that even he might do the same and get away with it, and the caliber of writing provides that all-important bond between book and reader. *Potshot* belongs on your reading list.

—*Cal Branche*

Rhode Island Red

by Charlotte Carter.

London: Serpent's Tail, 1997. $15.99

Nanette doesn't *need* to play jazz saxophone on the streets of New York. She grew up middle class in Queens, and has the education—degree in French from Wellesley—to make a more stable, mainstream living. But this 28-year-old buppie, tall and slim but curvy, with a shaved head like disco star Grace Jones, has chosen this potentially dangerous occupation (though she tells her cautious mama she supports herself teaching and translating).

Having broken up, for the umpteenth time, with her upwardly mobile black beau Walter Moore, Nanette is in a funk when a white street musician named Sig asks her to let him crash at her apartment for one night; his old lady's thrown him out, he insists, because he's chosen to be celibate. He sleeps on Nanette's living room floor—until someone drives a knife into his throat. When Nanette discovers his body, she learns "Sig" was an NYPD cop named Conlin. And Conlin's partner, a bullying black cop named Leman Sweet who was, like Conlin, working undercover trying to stop a wave of violence against street musicians, treats bewildered Nanette as a slumming suburbanite at best and a murder suspect at worst.

Though she'd like to move on, Nanette is drawn back into the tangle of Conlin's murder when she finds wads of money totaling $60,000 stuffed in her sax.

Childhood friend Aubrey, now a very successful (and well-paid) dancer at Caesar's Go Go Emporium, urges her to use the money to fly off to her beloved France. But Nanette's conscience (which she calls Ernestine) demands she find Conlin's "old lady," who turns out to be a blind street musician.

Nanette is an appealing young woman who's tough enough to take on the city's mean streets on their own terms, but vulnerable enough to make extraordinarily dumb mistakes about her personal life. Like other African American mystery authors who have gained visibility over the past decade, she uses Nanette's blackness—as well as her semi-reluctant buppiness and her involvement with jazz—to lend texture and depth to the novel's complex storyline.

—*Mary A. Carroll*

Saguaro Riptide

by Norman Partridge.

New York: Berkley, 1997. $5.99

Washed-up prizefighter Jack Baddalach is running an errand for the Las Vegas branch of the mob after humiliatingly losing his last fight badly on national television. His job is to locate one Vince Komoko, a former war hero missing in Mob action to the tune of two million dollars. His only clue is a motel ashtray from the Saguaro Riptide found in Komoko's bedroom.

The Saguaro Riptide is a loser of a motel going to seed in the desert town of Pipeline Beach, Arizona. The product of dreams once held by the late Dale Dayton of the '60s surfin' group Dale Dayton and the Daytonas and wife Sandy Kapalua-Dayton, the motel now offers junkyard views of once-pristine desert.

Jack sets out for the Riptide, unaware that Komoko has been offed by Pipeline Beach's sheriff and deputy, Wyetta Earp and her lesbian lover, Rorie. He is also unaware that he is relentlessly pursued by Woodrow Saad Muhammad, a black Muslim hit man with multiple personalities. Jack checks into the Saguaro Riptide shortly after a run-in with Sheriff Earp and her deputy. He meets proprietress Sandy Kapalua-Dayton, part Hawaiian, part Navajo and Irish, and the Women's National Surfing Champion from 1965 to 1967. He also meets fellow motel guest Major Kate Benteen. Kate served in Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm, has posed for Playboy in the Girls of Desert Storm issue, and also claims to have won a silver medal at the '88 Olympics in Seoul for platform diving. Kate is also searching for Komoko, but for different reasons—reasons that don't include monetary gain. This is a campy, *Pulp Fiction* sort of novel peopled by lovable kooks and wackos. Readers who don't mind a little grit will appreciate this just-for-fun entry.

—*Susan Zappia*

Sink or Swim

by Gerald Hammond.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $19.95

Wallace James is a master angler and crafter of fine fishing lures. From his flat overlooking the village square, he

observes quite a bit of the comings and goings of the town of Newton Lauder in the highlands of Scotland. Wallace didn't quite realize the significance of his vantage point until he was forced on a furlough following his heart attack.

Since he is convalescing, Keith Calder, his partner in the local sporting goods store, borrows a set of Citizen's Band walkie-talkie radios to keep him in contact with the shop. While scanning the CB channels, Wal accidentally overhears a conversation between a man and a woman which seems to indicate that they are stalking and preparing to rob someone they call "the writer" or "the rider." Meanwhile, from the vantage point of his apartment window, Wal observes a woman getting into a blue car, and begins to suspect that hers was the voice on the CB. One thing leads to another, and with the help of his wife, Calder, and a local solicitor, he spends his convalescence trying to trap the would-be thieves.

If this sounds like Cornell Woolrich's "Rear Window" or Hitchcock's film of the same name, there are indeed several similarities. The element of voyeurism is a lot of fun, and the fishing lore is interesting. The sleuths, however, had the benefit of a few too many convenient coincidences to make this fish story altogether plausible.

Nevertheless, this was a fun read for the sporting elements and the Scottish setting. Wallace James is an amateur detective who can deduce as many clues from a fish lure or a tackle box as Sherlock Holmes can from tobacco ash. We await his return.

—*Steven E. Steinbock*

Trick Question
by Tony Dunbar.
New York: Putnam, 1997. $22.95

Tubby Dubonnet is that rarest of creatures—a competent, honest and thoroughly likeable lawyer. He is pragmatic without being altogether empty of idealism, and if he is alert to economic opportunity and frankly willing to play the angles, he does so without ethical equivocation. Tubby's an upfront kind of guy.

Relaxing in Mike's Bar, an establishment he has recently purchased out of a sense that such neighborhood saloons will soon be completely gone from the New Orleans cityscape, Tubby is approached by a figure from his past, fellow attorney Mickey O'Rourke. Once highly respected and with at least one landmark decision to his credit, O'Rourke has descended into a miasma of alcoholism, depression, and self-loathing. He is also in serious professional trouble. Appointed by the court as defense council in a murder case, he has done nothing for his client in the intervening months. Trial is one week away, and he needs help. Tubby's help.

Tubby agrees, though not out of affection for O'Rourke. There is an aspect to the case that will generate enough free publicity, Tubby figures, to take some of the sting out of appearing *pro bono*. The victim was a prominent medical researcher and the accused, a janitor at the research facility, was apprehended holding the victim's frozen, detached head like a football.

Simultaneously, Tubby agrees to help Denise DiMaggio, an elementary school teacher who is being cheated by her uncle and abused by her boyfriend and who seems incongruously spiritless for a woman determined to build a reputation as a professional boxer. Denise's legal problems do not present a serious challenge, but when the two cases intersect, alarm bells sound and Tubby must reexamine the motives of all the players.

Mr. Dunbar, himself a New Orleans lawyer, is an impressive talent. He possesses a particularly deft comic touch—the discovery of the victim's body is both chilling and hilarious—and uses it judiciously. Also noteworthy is his subtle evocation of the *feel* of New Orleans. The reader is never in doubt about the setting of *Trick Question,* but that storied, raucous city remains merely setting and does not intrude upon the action. Too often, the opposite is the case with books set in the Crescent City. Skillfully written in a crisp, easy to read style and featuring a hugely engaging protagonist who stops just short of coming across as a Delta *bon vivant, Trick Question* is a winner.

—*Paul A. Bergin*

Virgin Heat
by Laurence Shames.
New York: Hyperion, 1997. $21.95

Is there a South Florida aesthetic? This is Laurence Shames's fifth novel set in Key West, and it reminded me of the brisk pace and cynical, offbeat humor in Carl Hiaasen's Florida novels.

Shames opens the book with the bitter, funny internal monologue of a Key West bartender. He makes novelty drinks with names like "Sex on the Beach" or "Virgin Heat," and he does it so well he often ends up in tourists' vacation photos or videos. This upsets him, and not just because the drink names are a sign of the forced frivolity that defines Key West. He really hates being filmed.

Your suspicions as to why that might be are confirmed in the next chapter. One of those video-happy vacationers, it turns out, is the brother of a mob kingpin who just left jail. The brother is bringing his vacation video to the kingpin's release party. The kingpin's daughter, by the way, had a teenage crush on the former henchman who turned state's evidence against her father.

It doesn't take much to imagine how all the characters will eventually crowd into little Key West as if it were the

stateroom in the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera*. To Shames's credit, he pulls the plot lines together quickly, neatly, and with a sense of humor. It works so well that, without really trying to, you may well knock off the book in one sitting.

If there's a down side to *Virgin Heat*, it's the embarrassing cover art. This isn't entirely trivial, since the book is perfect beach reading. For some reason, it features a forlorn white cat leaning through a ring of fire. Between that and the title, I just had to take the jacket off before I took *Virgin Heat* out to the pool, lest I be mistaken for a reader of soft porn or a cat lover.

—*Bill Syken*

Cozy

Biggie and the Mangled Mortician
by Nancy Bell.
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $20.95

Job's Crossing, Texas, is such a small town you think nothing would happen even though many years ago Ma Parker and her boys *had* stopped there to rest between their bank robberies. Even then, there had been no trouble—they were just passing through and in fact, by all accounts, were down-right friendly. However, the town seems to have its share of murders and suspicious deaths: recently, the new mortician in town (who seemed to know nothing about mortuary science) is found dead in his bathtub, somehow crushed to death. There are rumors of a big hairy monster (dubbed the Wooten Creek Monster) roaming the nearby woods. As expected, there's a lot of gossip about what happened to the mortician. Biggie Weatherford, who is heading a project to restore the old depot into a museum and is also putting on a production of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, decides to do some investigating. She finds evidence to indicate a connection between the new reverend and the deceased mortician and is wondering how to proceed when another body is found, that of the missing hairdresser. Meanwhile, J.R., Biggie's 12-year-old grandson, discovers a bag full of money in a junkyard near the old depot. It'll come as no surprise that Biggie succeeds in finding the connection between all these events and in solving the mystery.

There's not a whole lot to the mystery or the characters in this story but there's quite a bit of charm and good-natured humor. The little details of J.R.'s daily adventures and the depiction of the importance of food and cooking in the life of the Texas community are captivating. Take an evening and read this book (you can breeze through it). It won't leave you filled with grand thoughts or ideas, but it will amuse you and probably will make you hungry to boot. There's even a recipe to try (of Willie Mae's Hangtown Fry).

—*Lorrie K. Inagaki*

The Butter Did It
by Phyllis Richman.
New York: HarperCollins, 1997. $23.00

Washington food critic Phyllis Richman bursts onto the mystery scene with a fast-paced, very enjoyable debut that introduces restaurant critic Chas Wheatley. When one of Washington, D.C.'s finest chefs is found dead the night before a charity event, Chas's detective skills come into play. The dead man, Laurence Levain, was an ex-lover of Chas's from many years earlier in Paris, and their friendship had continued to the present. Chas doesn't think the police are looking hard enough and she's determined to discover what really happened.

As Richman weaves the specialized—and highly dramatic—world of haute cuisine into this clever mystery, readers can delight in the behind-the-scenes look at how top restaurants operate and the insulated lives of these premier chefs who are gods within their own community. Chas's familiarity with this world (her ex-husband is also a top chef in the city) enables her to ask the questions the police can't; she knows the personalities involved and the reputations at stake. Even more painfully, however, she cares deeply about these chefs and their families and she's horrified to think that one of them is a killer.

Richman strikes just the right tone and writes with a jaunty style that gives Chas the perfect blend of humor and warmth, sensitivity and bravery. Richman also succeeds in surrounding Chas with first-rate and fully-dimensional secondary characters, ranging from her reporter boyfriend to her daughter to my favorite, the police detective on the case.

Plot twists kept me guessing until the very end and I delighted in Richman's final solution, which neatly tied up all loose ends and offered great promise for future adventures of Chas Wheatley. This series is off to a terrific start and Phyllis Richman is a name mystery readers will soon be familiar with.

—*Liz Currie*

Death Brims Over
by Barbara Jay Wilson.
New York: Avon, 1997. $5.50

Just when it seems mystery authors have run out of occupations for their heroes, a new amateur-detective career emerges. Brenda Midnight (she chose the last name, and made it legal, after her divorce) is a hatmaker, the owner of Midnight Millinery in New York's Greenwich Village. Erstwhile artist Brenda enjoys her work, but business is hardly thriving: she lives (illegally) in the

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shop, sleeping under her cutting table.

Brenda's friend Carla is creating a dozen dresses for a society wedding party; the nuptials will join Ashley Millard, attorney-daughter of the owners of a posh Soho art gallery, to Gil Davison, one of the gallery's most famous (and over-rated) artists. Carla insists Brenda do the hats. Days before the nuptials, as Brenda is working with the beaded lace Carla provided for the bride's veil, a middle-aged woman in a hot pink suit strides into Midnight Millinery, pulls a gun, and demands the wedding hats. When she tries to reach Carla, Brenda learns from a male phone voice her friend is "a victim"; she tricks her way past the cops into Carla's apartment/workroom, where a bloody, lifeless Carla lies sprawled across the beaded-lace bodice of Ashley Millard's wedding dress.

Misled by the lies of a neighbor who wanted Carla's apartment, the NYPD goes astray, describing Carla as a sometime prostitute, and attributing her murder to drugs. Appalled by this slander, and convinced Carla's murder is linked to the theft of the Millard hats, Brenda resolves to find the killer, particularly when she learns Carla has left her (and a Southern sister who wants nothing to do with the big city) the small but valuable apartment.

What qualifies a milliner to solve a mystery? Creativity and boldness, plus a support network that would give the Baker Street Irregulars pause. Brenda's ex-boyfriend Johnny Verlane may not be a detective, but he plays one on TV (or at least in a TV pilot); he becomes Brenda's NYPD contact. When she decides she needs to get into Ashley Millard's law firm, Brenda fast-talks her way into a nonexistent assignment there for a temporary service, claiming to know every software system ever invented; computer-geek buddy Chuck teaches her enough keyboard skills to pursue the charade (and hacks into the law firm's computer). The woman across the hall from Carla's-now Brenda's—apartment is, in fact, a famous artist who gave up her art in protest of the Vietnam War; she takes care of other people's dogs and experiments with cookie recipes and, under Chuck's tutelage, becomes a desktop publishing whiz, ultimately sharing space at Midnight Millinery. And Brenda's friend Margo, who owns a chic boutique, knows all the gossip about New York art and fashion circles.

This motley crew improvises cleverly, unearthing hidden crimes and criminals in their search for the hat thief and Carla's murderer. But the motive for the death of Brenda's designer friend was a classic one, and the villain is revealed in a climactic final scene. Hats off to Wilson for a surprisingly effective mystery.

—Mary A. Carroll

The Feathery Touch of Death

by John Logue.

New York: Dell, 1997. $5.50

Golf and murder mix quite well, actually. The courses provide lots of places to bury bodies, the clubs act as admirable weapons, and the game itself is enough to drive one into a murderous rage. There's a long tradition of golf and mysteries, with former journalist John Logue being the latest to merge his knowledge of the sport with crime and detection.

Logue's protagonists are John Morris and Julia Sullivan, a mature couple whose relationship is realistically and playfully detailed throughout the book. We join them at the venerable St. Andrews course in Scotland for the 1978 British Open. There's plenty of famous name-dropping as Morris and Sullivan take the time to chitchat with Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus, but the good sportsmanship turns to dread when American golfer Barry Vinson is found murdered. Vinson was garrotted and an antique golf ball, a feathery, stuffed into his throat. That's just the beginning of a series of violent crimes played against the backdrop of the Open and its four rounds of hell on the Old Course.

Logue's golf lore is impeccable, and since this novel partly concerns a collection of old golf memorabilia, the feel for the sport's history and tradition is a must. A love of the sport shows through in almost every sentence, but strangely, the author is not so good at describing the golfing action. He's much better at describing the interplay between Morris and Sullivan, and their friends. Dialogue is smooth and believable, and the story whirls along as we continue to be confused by each new twist in the tale.

But, and it's a big but, the level of detection and police work in this book seems fairly lame. Inspector James Emerson makes so many errors of omission in his work that he was my chief suspect for some time.

Morris and Sullivan gallivant about the countryside, putting the wind up suspects and in general mucking around with any real investigation. They're able to find out facts that elude Scotland Yard but when they try to put two and two together, it comes up as a bogey on a par 3. If you're looking for a fun and readable golf thematic mystery, you could do worse. But if you're looking for that classic tale that explains both golf and murder, you may need to wait for Logue's next work.

—Mark Rose

Fly Fishing Can Be Fatal

by David Leitz.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $5.99

Topical mysteries have always been

popular. They are excellent for those who don't think they like mysteries. Think about it. If you have a friend who doesn't read mysteries but breeds Great Danes, and you find a mystery about Great Dane breeding, of course you're going to make him or her read the book. And usually, they get hooked and soon, they're borrowing mysteries from your bookshelves never to return them. Whether it's dogs, cars, golf, stamp collecting, or whatever, topical mysteries are usually delightful to read and have something to say about their chosen topic.

David Leitz has something to say about his chosen topic: fly fishing. His protagonist, Max Addams, is owner of a small fishing lodge in Vermont. Addams and his employees serve as guides and hosts for avid fly fishermen, who are eager to wet their line in the nearby trout stream and lake. One of their guests is Vincent d'Antella, a pleasant enough man but one who is no less than the head of a major family of organized crime. The Cosa Nostra in Vermont? Oh yes, and you know that all hell is going to break loose on the water.

The political complications of having organized crime visit your place of business are well-drawn by Leitz, as are the personal complications of strained relationships and betrayal. Leitz is good with people. And the dialogue is usually smooth, realistic, never stilted. You end up caring very much about Max Addams and the folks at Whitefork Lodge.

Leitz rips the reader through the book with a fast-paced plot and an intriguing story. Unfortunately, the ending is a bit too pat. All the loose ends are wrapped up in a Disney happyland style, and in just a page or two. But it's still fun. If you have fly fishing friends or fish yourself, you will love Leitz's natural style. His discussion of hearty early morning breakfasts and trout rising to the hatching flies makes you want to call in sick, eat like a king, then head out to the stream. And take the book with you.

—Mark Rose

God Save the Queen!

by Dorothy Cannell.

New York: Bantam, 1997. $22.95

Classy humor is the trademark of Dorothy Cannell, whose earlier mysteries include the diverting *How to Murder the Man of Your Dreams* and the amusing *How to Murder Your Mother-in-law.*

First off, in this British mystery, the butler didn't do it. In fact, Hutchins the butler is the victim, stuffed head down in a twelfth century privy at stuffy Gossinger Hall, whose inhabitants are a strange melange indeed.

Young Flora Hutchins, granddaughter of the murder victim, has been raised at Gossinger Hall since the death of her parents yet is strangely naive about the dark nature of many of its inhabitants, including her fellow servants, a prickly manservant and a gossipy cook. Sir Henry Gossinger finds himself wed to a harridan, saddled with a cousin who fears she will be ousted from the stately, if somewhat moldering, home where she came for a brief visit and has remained for what she hopes will be her lifetime. Since she's 84 and adept at cultivating the whims of Lady Gossinger, who thinks the cousin looks like the Queen Mum, it seems likely she will succeed.

Also present in the drafty mansion is Vivian, the lord's nephew, who has shocked his titled family by taking a job peddling men's cosmetics door-to-door. To add spice to the tale young Vivian is also enamored of the butler's granddaughter.

The murder of Hutchins comes on the heels of an announcement by Lord Gossinger that he plans to change his will to leave the formidable estate to his butler. That plan causes havoc among the not-so-genteel members of the family and provides a seemingly undisputed motive for murder.

While Flora mourns her grandfather's death, she also is determined to solve the eons-old mystery of the stolen silver. And she has written the Queen, enthusing about a unique silver polish which the elderly butler devised.

All of these elements collide, including an appearance of the title character, as Cannell again serves up a delicious confection of a mystery imbued with her own ribald sense of humor in this spoof of both toney upper class Britons and their downstairs brethren.

—Sue Emmons

The Groaning Board

by Annette Meyers.

New York: Doubleday, 1997. $21.95

Leslie Wetzon and her partner Xenia Smith are Wall Street headhunters, business managers, and sleuths. In their free time they manage to hang with the "New Yawk" crowd in theater, dance, restaurants, and big business.

Although it wasn't immediately obvious, the P.O.V. character of the duo was Leslie Wetzon, a forty-something ex-dancer. While Wetzon is merely bitchy, her partner, Smith, is a Class A bitch. And if you think I'm just being masculine and biased, eighty percent or so of the characters—Wetzon particularly—make this point during this book.

Smith is throwing a dinner party and she's hired the catering firm, The Groaning Board, to do the honors. The Groaning Board seems made up of a mismatched trio of women who apparently hate each other's guts. They hand their contract to Smith, who hands it to Wetzon, who later realizes that what she got instead of a contract was the prospectus (IPO, for all you out there who understand these things) to take

The Groaning Board public.

It becomes apparent that at least one member of the catering trio has no desire to do so, and there is tremendous background maneuvering on the part of the others to force her to. Perhaps even resorting to...

Is there a murder here? Oh yes.

Wetzon's boyfriend, Silvestri, is a detective. She tags along on a case whose victim turns out to be the sister-in-law of his partner. The woman was murdered by a muffin—go figure!—and, you guessed it, the firm that provided those muffins was none other than The Groaning Board.

No sooner can you say "gluten-free baking" than Smith and Wetzon are hired by the head chef of The Groaning Board to find the real murderer.

The business deals are rich and complex and occasionally grotesque. The picture of highbrow Manhattan life is both appealing and a little nauseating. As unlikable as the characters often are, they're amazingly life-like (isn't that sad?) and complex.

The mystery itself is nice and convoluted, tangled and confusing, jumping weeks and months ahead, furthered along by 67 chapters, many of them three or four pages long. Although my original guess was correct as to whodunit, I changed my mind half a dozen times during the course of the book.

—*Mark Terry*

The Hour of Our Death

by Alison Joseph.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $22.95

Sister Agnes Bourdillon, divorced, a member of a fairly open Ignatian order in London, is a most un-nunlike nun. She calls her superior, Father Julius, by his first name, has a host of friends and acquaintances in the world, and supposedly helps "run a hostel for young runaways." What she really does, of course, is solve crimes.

She reports to St. Hugh's hospital to see Kathleen McAleer, an elderly stroke victim who cannot speak. Kathleen will observe a person entering a room in which Gail Sullivan, a hospital employee, will be found dead. The hospital autopsy says the death was caused by thrombosis, but Sister Agnes, with the help of Father Julius, spirits the body away and has another autopsy done. The cause of death is now revealed as an allergic reaction to penicillin, compounded by potassium chloride. It's also discovered that Gail was pregnant.

The murder seems to be solved by page 56; but the complications are not. Sister Agnes suspects that there may be another death in the offing and tries to prevent it.

Who is at risk? Who is guilty: the two medical students, Hark and Julia, who found Gail's body—and who wind up helping Sister?; Professor of Surgery Robert Burgess, who on his own has performed Gail's postmortem and will soon retire?; Alexander Jeffes, a painter hired to paint Burgess's portrait and who is attracted to Sister Agnes—and she to him?; Professor Thomas McPherson, who has his own secret?; Professor of Anatomy Stefan Polikoff, concerned because the new hospital addition under construction is being built over a former church burial ground?; Amber Parry, an Archivist, whose illness may or may not be suspicious?

This large cast of characters interweaves in an intricate plot that keeps the reader's suspicions alighting here, there, everywhere. Sister Agnes with the unfortunately clichéd incident of breaking into an office, something this nun does with surprising ease, of course solves the mysteries. But along the way, in large part because she is sitting, clothed, for her portrait by Jeffes, she has a crisis of conscience. Is she of the church or of the world?

Joseph keeps both the Catholic beliefs and the strange hospital doings afloat and writes a page-turner, well suited for television. This, Sister Agnes's second outing, looks forward to a promising series.

—*Janet Overmyer*

Murder Under the Palms

by Stefanie Matteson. New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 1997. $21.95

The legendary star of the silver screen, Charlotte Graham, decides to escape a brutal Yankee winter and vacation with friends in Palm Beach. The highlight of her visit is to be a charity ball inspired by the *Normandie*, perhaps the most famous and beautiful of the ocean liners which crossed the Atlantic in the 1930s. At the party, world-famous jewelry designer Paul Feder has asked her to model the centerpiece of his new art deco jewelry collection based on that lovely ship.

As the setting of her first love affair, the *Normandie* holds a special place in Charlotte's heart. But little does she expect to be reunited with the object of that love, the famous bandleader Eddie Norwood. Suddenly, Charlotte feels twenty again, and ten feet off the ground.

She is brought back to earth when she hears that there has been a murder at the party. Paul Feder has been found on the beach stabbed to death. To make

matters worse, the leading suspect is the daughter of Charlotte's friend.

With a huge party of suspects and memories from fifty years ago forcing their way back into her life, Charlotte hopes that she can wade through all of the clues in time to prevent another murder.

This eighth mystery centered around Charlotte Graham shows a refinement worthy of the novel's protagonist. Matteson's unhurried writing style has an effortless grace which matches the work's content perfectly. She has elegantly structured a plot which is as closely woven as the material on a *Normandie* settee, and as satisfyingly evocative.

Realizing that the bulk of her life now lies behind her, Charlotte begins to see her life in terms of a spiral drawing to a close. But she couldn't have foreseen all of the strands of her life coming together once again, in a setting so like that trip across the Atlantic fifty years ago, filled with the mingled excitement of dazzling beauty and brutal death.

—*William Eggers*

Raven's Widows

by Vince Kohler.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $21.95

A really good book in a series makes you want to go back and find the previous ones you have missed; it should also make you look forward to the next. This is one of those books.

This is the fourth in a series of mysteries featuring Eldon Larkin, reporter for a small Oregon newspaper. Eldon is a little overweight, a little sophomoric, a terrific writer with a beast of an editor. Eldon loves hunting a story, and he loves attempting (somewhat successfully) to seduce women, but those desires all pale to his love for fly fishing.

Eldon has fled rainy Oregon for even rainier southeast Alaska for a month-long fishing vacation. When he is nearly run down by a runaway (rollaway?) totem pole, he finds himself the guest of the totem artist's agent, Anita Povey, who is also the publisher and editor of a small weekly newspaper, *The Aurora: The Weekly Journal of a Free Alaska!*. She makes him an offer he can't refuse: if he writes for her, he can have free room and board at her place, which is on a river great for fishing. Because the costs of Alaska have hit him in his wallet, and because he has hopes he'll end up in her bed, Eldon agrees.

Then Jason Baer, the totem artist, is murdered, shot in the chest and crushed beneath one of his totem poles. Urged on by Anita and her daughter, Cassandra (a nine-year-old assistant-editor-from-hell!), Eldon investigates. Along the course of his digging, he runs into all sorts of fun and vivid characters: twin brothers, one a cop, the other a priest who writes for *True-Detective*; a pair of flakey sourdoughs; an Indian Chief and his massive dog, Woody; an anal-retentive shopkeeper; and an entire island of drunken, argumentative Alaskans with too much time and booze on their hands.

This novel is a lot of fun. Eldon is great company, a believable character, a little bit batty with a real likeable, readable voice. Although the mystery is only good, not great, the novel as a whole is a terrific read, rich with totem pole lore and Indian mysticism turned on its head. Much of the plot circles around the interpretation of totem poles and the obligations and competition created by the traditional potlatch. I, for one, plan to keep his name on my list of author's books to look for next time I'm at the bookstore.

—*Mark Terry*

Revenge of the Cootie Girls

by Sparkle Hayter.

New York: Viking, 1997. $20.95

Fans of Sparkle Hayter's funny, breezy series featuring Robin Hudson will get a kick out of this third book, which takes place entirely during one very unusual "girls night out." Robin's recent promotion to head of the Special Reports unit of the All News Network means she now has a young—and very naive—intern, Kathy, following her around to learn about broadcast journalism. Robin invites Kathy to come along on a Halloween night on the town, but when Kathy doesn't show up as planned and instead leaves a bizarre telephone message saying she's hiding in a man's closet because his wife has just come in the room, Robin gets worried.

And when Robin gets worried, she does something about it. Her girlfriends soon find themselves dragged along on a hunt for clues that are being tantalizingly dropped for Robin, clues that tie this Halloween night to Robin's long-ago girlfriend, Julie, who shared the childhood trauma of being nicknamed a "cootie girl" by the popular girls in their small hometown. Years later, Julie and Robin had traveled to New York for their first visit to the big city; now, nearly 20 years later Robin and her friends are retracing the same stops Robin and Julie made one night during that trip, a night that turns out to have been far more fateful to Julie than Robin ever knew.

Robin is a great character—resourceful, funny, opinionated and tough as nails—and this book lets us see some of what led to her adult personality. Although Robin can now laugh about her childhood pain, by the end of this night she'll have a new perspective on those days that will change her forever.

Revenge of the Cootie Girls isn't a traditional whodunit. The only murder in it occurs late in the story and is practically incidental. Instead, this book resembles one of those crossroads we all come to

in our lives; a particular event (or evening) where pieces of our life puzzle come together to form a new picture. And Hayter's hysterically funny writing style gives this book a laugh-a-page charm that will bring tears to the eyes of anyone who ever dreamed of revenge on childhood tormenters! I definitely recommend reading the first two books in this series before this one, however, so you can enjoy Robin and her friends even more.

—*Liz Currie*

School of Hard Knocks
by Donna Huston Murray.
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $5.99

Things are not going well in a posh neighborhood on Philadelphia's Main Line. A boy's bicycle is stolen from his garage, a television set from a parked car. A neighbor's run-down house and yard make the nearby property difficult to sell. Mail boxes are smashed.

Ginger Barnes is having her own problems. Her son was bumped from the track team by his best friend. Her daughter has mysteriously come by a large, for her, sum of money. Her husband, head of the private school Bryn Derwyn Academy prefers spending evenings in front of his computer rather than with her. And Ginger finds herself being drawn against her will to her sexually appealing neighbor whose wife is leaving him.

Then the neighborhood problems escalate. A woman is beaten to death. Ginger's elderly neighbor, Letty, whose house and yard make "mess" an understatement, is assaulted and must be hospitalized. The neighbors call a meeting to discuss forming a "town-watch." They will take turns patrolling at night but will call the police if they see anything. But is one of them behind the crimes?

Ginger finds herself drawn into Letty's problems. And, with the police not exactly on her side (a welcome contrast to those civilians who in mysteries work hand-in-glove with them), Ginger almost against her will begins to investigate.

Murray writes a compelling tale—I read it in one sitting—with the family's problems as interesting as those of the neighborhood. This third Ginger Barnes tale shows a smooth style, quiet humor, and a feeling for the texture of everyday life. Very highly recommended.

—*Janet Overmyer*

Six Feet Under
by D.B. Borton. New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 1997. $5.99

When retired policeman Moses Fogg gets an alarming message on his answering machine from Rocky Zacharias saying she is in trouble and needs his help, both Moses and Cat Caliban are concerned. But Rocky didn't bother to mention where she was staying.

Moses remembers the Rocky Zacharias case as difficult. Cat Caliban, who wants to be a snooper in the worst way, learns that that is the way it's going to be—the worst way—and Moses Fogg doesn't want to do it. Cat talks him into it. It seems nobody wants to tell them where Rocky is. Then they discover most of her acquaintances don't seem to want to deal with an aging ex-cop or a P.I. in training. It makes the couple suspicious.

The trail leads them to the woman who is caring for Rocky's three kids. Even she is suspicious of the pair and refuses to help them. When the three kids show up on Moses's doorstep just before Christmas, the confusion reaches a peak and drives the amateur detective team crazy. Someone is following them and breaks into Caliban's apartment.

It's not until they finally meet Rocky that things really take a turn for the worse and all you-know-what breaks loose.

This is a comically written whodunit à la Erma Bombeck with grandkids and crazy neighbors who want to join in the hunt. A terrific read with great characters I know you'll love. Some books say they are a hoot and then you read them and there's nothing there—*Six Feet Under* is really a hoot and holler!

—*Catherine M. Nelson*

Taken to the Cleaners
by Dolores Johnson.
New York: Dell, 1997. $5.50

Just divorced would-be artist, Mandy Dyer owns a dry cleaning/laundry business in Boulder, Colorado, which she inherited from her Uncle Chet. She turns sleuth, however, when Betty the Bag Lady brings her a laundry bag with a blood stained pinstriped suit in it. One of the partners in the nearby high-powered law firm of O'Brien and Van Dyke has been murdered, and it appears that the killer was wearing the suit when the foul deed was done. She suspects that Betty is being pursued by the killer, who thinks she might have witnessed the suit being thrown away. With some help from cleaner-spotter Mac Rivers and her trusty friend, ace reporter Nat Wilcox, she assists the police in smoking the killer into the open.

In stories like this, the mystery seems to be an excuse to introduce some engaging characters, foremost being Mandy herself. She copes with a rollercoaster of a life, assisted by her sense of humor (although often very corny and punning) and her friends, Mac and Nat. There's even a cat named Spot (as in "out damned spot"), who seems to hate everyone except those who have an aversion to cats. There are a lot of references to famous lines from movies, which are part of a game that Mandy and Mac play, as well as a lot of puns that are dry-cleaning related. The book is definitely a lot of fun.

—*Lorrie K. Inagaki*

HISTORICAL

Dirge for a Doge
by Elizabeth Eyre
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $22.95

This sixth Renaissance mystery romp with period P.I. Sigismondo is so densely filled with Venetian lore, gore, and more that the central plot seems at times to sink and disappear, as the city itself has been threatening to do for centuries.

Hired assassins, power-plots (both official and in-family), and machinations of a bewildering variety pack the pages, and there's hardly an element of Venetian society that isn't represented—church, state, military, aristocracy, and those (such as Jews) who must be especially watchful for their own welfare.

While the shaven-pated Sigismondo is a fantasy figure—possessing more lives than the aggregate of a tribe of cats—it is his lowly servant Benno whose observations ground and give texture to the story. For the reader, Benno provides a knot-hole view of Venetian life—that of kitchen slaveys, small shop keepers, and servants. Obviously, this well serves the story, too, because Benno (aided by his half-wit manner) provides raw scraps of overheard conversations, street-gossip, and servant-talk that can fill in and piece out Sigismondo's complex sleuthing tapestry.

The initial mystery to test the shiny-pated one's fabled powers is the murder by stabbing of Niccolo Ermolin, a Venetian aristocrat with power, pelf, and a beautiful new wife who's barely post-adolescent. Before the book ends, this crime has seriously impacted the Venetian power-structure, bringing down the Doge and powerful families, plus destroying lives both innocent and guilty.

The case takes its toll on sleuth and servant also, leading Benno to offer his non-regretful prediction: "That place'll sink one day and good riddance."

—*Norma J. Shattuck*

Eater of Souls
by Lynda S. Robinson.
New York: Walker, 1997. $21.95

This fourth mystery features Lord Meren, Eyes and Ears of Pharoah. Meren serves the boy king Tutankhamen, considered a living god, who is struggling to restore Maat—harmony and balance—to Egypt after the conflicts that tore the kingdom apart during the reign of the heretic Akhnaten, who was finally killed. Akhnaten had ordered Meren's father killed, and imprisoned and branded Meren with his heretical sun-disk, so Meren wrestles with guilt feelings about the heretic's death.

The plot takes a two-pronged thrust. First, Lord Meren has discovered that Nefertiti, the Great Royal Wife of the dead heretic pharaoh Akhnaten, died of poisoning. The troubling knowledge, which implicates courtiers, is the kind that may cost even Meren his life. Second, a mythological crocodile-headed goddess, Ammut the Devourer, Eater of Souls, has apparently been literally ripping the hearts from her victims and leaving a white feather in its place. A pompous watchman conceals the grisly murders—the victims are only little people, after all—until threats of war loom when a powerful Hittite envoy is found slain in the same manner.

The feel, smell, and sound of an ancient, alien world (circa 1300s B.C.), which in its day believed itself to be the pinnacle of refinement and civilization, permeate the pages. Reading the story one develops an understanding of the ancient Egyptian way of life, ideas of justice, and sense of the *ka*, or soul. As the widower Meren deals with two rebellious teen-age daughters, his adopted son Kysen is fast becoming a seasoned detective in his own right. The richly portrayed criminal underworld is full of fascinating "barbarians": the prostitute Ese, the deadly Greek pirate Othrys with his sun-bleached hair and sky-blue eyes; and fops of the court. Sinister, bone-chilling characters are here in abundance, as the ravenous crocodile monster hunts down more victims.

This excellent historical puzzle uses dozens of appropriate ancient Egyptian metaphors and pungent curses and in the end, the solution of the mystery leaves one hungry for more adventures of Lord Meren.

—*S.M. Tyson*

Face Down in the Marrow-Bone Pie
by Kathy Lynn Emerson.
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $20.95

Lady Susanna Appleton is a strong woman, one who speaks her mind and holds her own in any educated conversation. Not so strange nowadays, but for Elizabethan times, when men were not only men but absolute rulers of their household, it is an unusual situation. Her husband, Sir Robert Appleton, is a diplomat for Queen Elizabeth, and his frequent absences have allowed Lady Susanna ample opportunity to expand her knowledge and to be comfortable running the Appleton estates. Sir Robert is not sure he is comfortable with Lady Susanna usurping his traditional role.

At this point, however, Sir Robert doesn't have much choice. As he is planning to depart for France on a dangerous political mission, a disturbing message arrives. The steward at Sir Robert's old childhood home has passed away under mysterious circumstances, and it is desired that he return to Appleton Manor. Sir Robert is not much interested in old Appleton Manor. When he leaves on his mission, Lady Susanna decides to take it upon herself to set her husband's birthplace back on its way to being a successful land holding.

When she arrives at the manor, she finds it in utter disarray, and bizarre legends floating around about the steward,

Bexwith, found face down in a marrow-bone pie. There are a ghost, lying neighbors, shady solicitors, and surly townsfolk to deal with. There's the legend of Sir Robert's lecherous father, and unless Lady Susanna is very much mistaken, there is also a poisoning to be investigated. The author takes us through all this with great wit and a flair for the dramatic tale.

This is a marvelous first mystery novel from Emerson. And it introduces a character who has great potential for a series. The Appletons and their servants are all well-drawn, each with real motivations, charms and failures. The author does an excellent job of preserving Elizabethan social mores while still appealing to our modern sensibilities. Even though her characters are often found breaking the rules, her descriptions of everyday life are simple, elegant and instructive.

Emerson's writing style is brisk. Emerson also has a real talent for dialogue, which, while not strictly Elizabethan in a realistic sense, is certainly readable. On the other hand, her plotting is a little thin, and the ending is wrapped up all too quickly, and a bit too easily for each of the main characters. Still, it's not often that one wishes there were a hundred more pages to a book just because you think it would be fun to read.

—*Mark Rose*

The Fair Maid of Bohemia

by Edward Marston.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $21.95

With the plague behind, deadly intrigue ahead, and a murderer hounding his every step, Nicholas Bracewell would be justified in fleeing, but his personal code of honor leads him to reject that course of action. Rather, he decides to "take arms against a sea of troubles and, by opposing, end them." But Nicholas is armed only with his wits, and his opponent holds every advantage.

Nicholas Bracewell's life as the bookholder of Westfield's Men, an Elizabethan acting troupe, is often an unstable lot with devastating crashes and exhilarating victories. When he receives word that the Princess of Bohemia, after enjoying a performance of Westfield's Men, has invited the troupe to play in Prague before her uncle, the Emperor, Nicholas sees this as a triumph of inestimable magnitude.

However, Nicholas begins to suspect that the invitation is not merely a testament to the actors' skill when, on the eve of the troupe's departure, he is given two messages to deliver surreptitiously to a mysterious Doctor Royden upon arrival in Prague.

Nicholas's suspicions seem to be confirmed when one of Westfield's Men is murdered during the curtain calls of their first performance. The messages loom in Nicholas's mind as he considers the weeks of travel before he can discharge his duties. They are no longer merely obligations to Nicholas, but the key to bringing a friend's killer to justice.

Rather than providing the opportunity to resolve the situation, the actors' arrival in Prague draws them into a game of intrigue and politics of which they do not know the rules, the players, or the roles they must play. And just as Nicholas seems to be closing in on the killer, the killer counters by abducting Nicholas's love, Anne Hendrik.

Caught in a foreign city, hounded by an implacable foe, and worried about his beloved, even the normally self-assured Nicholas Bracewell begins to wonder if he has finally met his match.

The Fair Maid of Bohemia, the ninth mystery by Edward Marston featuring Nicholas Bracewell, retains a freshness and vitality that will satisfy his loyal readers and attract new ones. Like his creation Lawrence Firethorn, who can ignite an audience with a burst of passion or a flash of comic wit, the author Edward Marston entertains with a multifaceted charm that is irresistible.

—*William Eggers*

Fatal Elixir

by William L. DeAndrea.

New York: Walker, 1997. $21.95

Fatal Elixir is the second of William L. DeAndrea's Lobo Blacke/Quinn Booker mysteries set in the rugged Wyoming Territory of the previous century.

Blacke is a former lawman now crippled by a gunman's bullet. He's settled in a town called Le Four and is publishing a newspaper, the *Black Hills Witness.* His chief assistant is Booker, a one-time dime novelist who finally came West to see what it really was like.

The case at hand is one of mass murder. Patrons of Dr. Theophrastus Herkimer's "Mirakola," a potion he claims cures gout, cancer, excessive wind and other maladies, die of poison. Someone has tampered with several bottles of the potion, lacing them with a fatal chemical. One of those stricken is the town's sheriff, who in a last healthy moment deputizes Booker.

Further complicating the situation is the recent release from prison of killer Paul Muller, the last man sent up by Blacke before his injury. He's on his way back to town, madder than ever because his son was one of the victims of the poisoning.

The novel is an interesting hybrid of Western and mystery. It has just enough of the steers-and-sagebrush setting to make it interesting to the Western fan. But importantly for mystery readers, it has two heroes who go about solving the crime in a fashion favored by more modern crime solvers.

—*Bernard A. Drew*

Hunting a Detroit Tiger

by Troy Soos.

New York: Kensington, 1997. $18.95

Mickey Rawlings is an amateur sleuth and a professional baseball player who is trying to make the regular lineup of the Detroit Tigers to which he has just been traded. It is April 1920 and Mickey is in Detroit, returned early from spring training because of an injury to his wrist.

Mickey's journalist pal Karl Landfors suggests that Mickey attend a meeting of the International Workers of the World at Fraternity Hall to hear Emmett Siever

make a speech. Siever is a former baseball player who is trying to start a player's union. After the speech, when Mickey follows Siever to an office in the back of the hall a few minutes later, he finds him shot dead on the floor. Detective Aikens arrives almost immediately and after very brief questioning allows Mickey to leave the scene.

Mickey is not too concerned about the situation until he reads in the newspaper that he killed Siever in self defense and the case is therefore considered closed by the police. Mickey goes to the police station to insist on his innocence and with only mild encouragement from Detective McGuire, he sets out to find the real killer.

At this point Mickey is feeling the heat from every direction. The IWW members want to kill him as revenge for Siever's death. Mickey's Detroit teammates hate him because they think he is trying to sabotage the fledgling player's union. Hub Donner, a union buster, wants Mickey to spy for him and also come out publicly against the player's union.

Mickey learns that Aikens is not really a detective but rather an agent working for a new division of the Justice Department headed by an ambitious bureaucrat named J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover's boss is now running for President as an enemy of all reds and radicals and is especially angry with the IWW, who may have caused him to lose the Michigan Primary.

The only help Mickey can count on comes from his girl friend Margie and his pal Karl. It is a clear case of three minnows in a tank full of sharks. Fortunately for the cause of justice, Mickey does not quit easily.

Hunting a Detroit Tiger is the fourth book in the author's Mickey Rawlings series. The background is thoroughly researched and the story contains some entertaining tidbits about professional baseball in the era of Tris Speaker, Ty Cobb, and Walter Johnson.

—*Peter Kenney*

Jane and the Man of the Cloth
by Stephanie Barron.
New York: Bantam, 1997. $21.95

Every time she goes on a visit, fearless, feisty Jane Austen lands in the midst of an adventure. This sequel to the thoroughly delightful *Jane and the Unpleasantness at Scargrave Manor,* begins on a stormy night in 1804 as she, her parents and her beloved sister Cassandra travel to Lyme, the seaside resort. A reckless coachman overturns their coach, Cassandra is injured, and Jane goes for help. The nearest farm is High Down Grange, a dead ringer for Wuthering Heights, whose dark, handsome, and brooding master, Geoffrey Sidmouth, soon engages Jane's interest in all sorts of ways. A doctor is found for Cassandra, who becomes an invalid.

The body of a man is found hanging from a gallows clandestinely erected at the end of Lyme pier. At a shop that serves as juicy gossip central, Jane learns a lily was found at the dead man's feet and a nasty placard around his neck leaves no doubt murder has been done. The murder leaves the town buzzing with speculation.

Lyme's coast is a hot-bed of smuggling. The hanging is blamed on The Reverend, the legendary leader of the local smugglers, known as Free Traders or The Gentlemen of the Night, who slip tea, brandy, silk, and sealing wax under the noses of the crown's revenue men. As Jane socializes, the gallant naval hero Captain Fielding fills her ear with dark tales of Geoffrey Sidmouth, his mysterious French cousin Seraphine, and mysterious goings on. Jane exhibits that penchant of Elizabeth Bennett—to believe ill of people if someone charming whispers nastiness about them in her ear. Suddenly Captain Fielding is found shot to death; Sidmouth is accused of murder and swiftly seized and jailed, facing trial for his life. Jane's loyalty and her heart are equally torn. Not knowing what to think, the determined Miss Austen must investigate and find out what kind of man Sidmouth truly is.

Barron's thorough knowledge of Austen and her world doubles the charm of this book. The smuggler's trade and intrigue during the Napoleonic wars thicken the plot as Jane delves into lives both high and low to find clues and answers. Many scenes will recall for readers the girlhood pleasures of reading Daphne du Maurier. Minor characters, especially the smugglers, delight in the best Dickensian fashion. Even the footnotes make good reading. I recommend this book and the first adventure. Happily, Barron is working on a third mystery for Jane.

—*S.M. Tyson*

Murder, Mrs. Hudson
by Sydney Hosier.
New York: Avon, 1997. $5.50

London, England. 1898. Horse drawn hansom cabs move noisily through the cobblestoned gaslit streets. A young Winston Churchill, recently defeated in his first run for public office, has come to 221B Baker Street to hire detective Sherlock Holmes. But Holmes is too busy to take on the job, especially since Churchill has not told him the full importance of the case, and sends Churchill to his housekeeper, Mrs. Emma Hudson (who previously solved a mystery in *Elementary, Mrs. Hudson*).

Churchill wants Mrs. Hudson to find and follow a man named Marcos, an international terrorist whom he has heard was seen around the London Docks. Mrs. Hudson and her friend Mrs. Warner (note the initials, H and W) move around the London Docks, visiting various pubs in search of Marcos. In one they meet Paddy O'Ryan who had worked for Mrs. Warner's husband. O'Ryan knows

where Marcos is staying. This unlikely trio of detectives camp out in an empty house across the way from Marcos's lodgings (shades of a Holmes adventure) and follow Marcos around London. He seems to be sightseeing, until O'Ryan overhears him in a pub with an unknown Englishman saying, "House on Thames go boom." Now they know that Marcos is involved in something serious, but what house on the Thames does he mean? And is it involved with the Boer War currently going on?

The book moves along nicely, with Mrs. Hudson needing proof to bring to Scotland Yard (that is, Inspector Lestrade) to get them involved. When the reader questions why Mrs. Hudson doesn't speak to Holmes, Mrs. Hudson points out that it's *her* case and she wants her team to solve it themselves.

There is one caveat. At one point Mrs. Warner uses "astral projection" to send her spirit across London to find out if Marcos is where they think he is. This "supernatural" element throws the book off. It would be much better if Mrs. Hudson, as her mentor Sherlock Holmes, stayed in this world. (Arthur Conan Doyle, however, did believe in the spirit world, so perhaps this is a tribute to Sir Arthur.)

While not the greatest mystery, *Murder, Mrs. Hudson* is a quite enjoyable book, especially as an alternative view of Sherlock Holmes. (While Mrs. Hudson has learned her methods from Holmes, she is not awe-struck by him.) In addition, Hosier paints a nice portrait of late Victorian England.

—*Martin Friedenthal*

NON-FICTION

Crimes of the Scene
by Nina King, with Robin Winks.
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $23.95

The concept here is that while you travel abroad, you might well enjoy reading a mystery set in the country you intend to visit. So for whatever country you might expect to visit—except the British Isles, which would have made the book a volume longer—the authors have listed mysteries available in English, rating them on the quality of the mystery and the use of setting and local color.

The flaw in the concept is that it's hard enough to find a good mystery or a novel that uses its setting well without expecting both in one book. So virtually every book listed falls short, according to the authors, in one way or another. Only six books were voted "worth the trip"; all the others come with warnings like "brisk and pointless," "entirely predictable," or "unconvincing."

The book is divided by country. Each country is covered with a few quotes and then the list of reviewed books. This is followed with a shorter list of books noted but not extensively reviewed and, usually, by a short essay dealing with some specific topic: books by native writers translated into English (and the quality of the translation), mysteries to be read if you're fluent in the native tongue, methods of death that show local color, the use of generic Caribbean islands in literature, and so on. Nina King is responsible for the majority of the material, with a considerable amount of the rest being Robin Winks's work. Other contributors include Anthony Olcott (on mysteries set in Russia), Jim Lehrer (on Maigret), Mark I. Pinsky (on Judge Dee), and nine more.

The reviews are short and snappy, perhaps a little too short or too snappy at times. They are bound to start discussions, as should any book on mysteries in which Robert James Waller comes out looking better than Robert B. Parker and John D. MacDonald (who is described as hard to take in his own day and even worse now). The authors do point out a number of books which sound as if they would be worth a look, which is their intent, after all. But it would be better to look at this book as a reference than to sit and read it straight through.

—*Dan Crawford*

Digging Up Butch and Sundance
by Anne Meadows. Lincoln, NE:
University of Nebraska, 1996. $19.95

Their real names are Robert LeRoy Parker and Harry Longabaugh, a pair of outlaws who, with others, were known variously as the Wild Bunch and the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang. During the last twelve years of the nineteenth century, the gang planned and executed robberies in the western states that netted them $200,000, the equivalent of $2.5 million today. Then they disappeared.

During the 1960s, William Goldman, a talented Hollywood screenwriter, resurrected Parker and Longabaugh from the dusty pages of history, cleaned them up a bit, added some witty dialogue, and wrote about their exploits using their now-famous aliases. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* debuted in 1969, starring Paul Newman as Butch and Robert Redford as Sundance. When I close my eyes, I can still see scenes from that wonderful motion picture: Butch blowing up the railway express car and money floating in the air; the mounted posse bolting out of the boxcar, tracking Butch and Sundance through the night; Sundance hesitating before jumping with Butch off a cliff into the roiling river far below; Butch riding a bicycle...

But questions about Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid persist. How much of the movie was based on fact; how much on fiction? Some of each, as it turns out. And what about the rumors that Butch and Sundance were not killed in Bolivia? Did they eventually return to the U.S. and peacefully live out their lives as some say? Anne Meadows, a lawyer-turned-writer, and her husband, western history expert Dan Buck, decided to follow the outlaw trail from the western U.S. to Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia, hunting for an elusive paper trail in musty archives that would confirm or deny Butch's and Sundance's meanderings in South America. And with the expert assistance of world-famous forensic pathologist Clyde Snow, they even exhumed skeletons in their quest for the truth about Butch and Sundance.

Meadows and Buck found many answers on their nightmare trek through some of the most inhospitable terrain in the world. The journey and tale of discovery of this intrepid pair of historical detectives is as fascinating as Goldman's story of Butch and Sundance.

Digging Up Butch and Sundance is magnificent in scope and execution, spellbinding in its revelations, and deserving of a place on the bookshelf of students

of true crime and Wild West history.

—Ronald C. Miller

The Vintage Book of Classic Crime
edited by Michael Dibdin. New York: Vintage, 1997. $14.00

Here is a collection of Crime Writing as Great Literature. This means anything except crime writing in the tradition of the British mystery between the world wars. Golden Age mystery writing was, we are told, emasculating, elitist, and pernicious, casting a pall over crime-writing in the English-speaking world.

This seems as useful as knocking the Model T Ford because it didn't come in teal. One can argue about the merits of teal, but it's rather too late to carry on about it now. If Dibdin had spent a little less space attacking one genre of crime writing, it would have made room for more excerpts—he's made a thoughtful selection—or for his commentary on them, which is frequently worth reading. Instead, he wastes space returning to his complaints about the genre he did not include, as if this would finally resolve all lingering doubts about the glowing qualities of realism in literature.

If you can get past his daring chivalric stand against the dangers of the cozy, you find a fascinating variety of authors, from Poe and Zola to Elmore Leonard and Walter Mosley, in the form of short stories, excerpts from novels, essays, and poems. The selections have been grouped into chapters labeled "Serious Business," "The Police in Different Voices," "Sentence First, Verdict Afterwards" (this is a collage of excerpts from critical essays), "Uncommon Murderers," and "The Dangerous Edge of Things." He has avoided the over-anthologized, with the possible exception of the excerpts from Raymond Chandler and Edmund Wilson on the British detective novel, probably inevitable in this collection.

He comes up with an impressive array, and he very likely could have made his case if he had let the selections speak for themselves. But he has to emphasize the point in his own way. The clink of his two cents dropping all through this book eventually becomes an annoying distraction.

—Dan Crawford

Police Procedural

Black Heart
by Stephen Smoke.
New York: Harper, 1997. $5.99

Pasadena detectives E.L. Nash and Ron Bailey catch a new homicide: the battered body of Evelyn Brown has been found partially buried on the grounds of millionaire Harvey Kensington's estate. The victim's sister is Sarah Harmon, a prosecutor in the D.A.'s office, and evidence at the crime scene may tie the Brown murder to other homicides, perhaps even to a vicious serial killer. In short order, Nash and Bailey are searching not only for a brutal killer but also for a missing baby.

The detectives' personal lives are crumbling, too, with Nash's marriage on the rocks, and Bailey's in no better shape.

Black Heart is a gritty police procedural that draws both detectives and the reader inexorably into a perverse world of evil that spans generations and assaults and offends the mind. Stephen Smoke's dark tale delivers endless evils from the opening scene to the ominous final line. Not recommended for sensitive readers.

—Ronald C. Miller

The Bone Collector
by Jeffery Deaver.
New York: Viking, 1997. $22.95

New York City. August. A heat wave. A U.N. peace conference about to begin. A man and woman coming home from a business trip enter a cab at Kennedy airport and promptly realize that they are being kidnapped. The next morning the man's body is found buried next to the Amtrak lines at 37th Street and 11th Avenue. One hand is sticking out of the grave, with the flesh cut off one finger and the woman's diamond ring hooked on the exposed bone. He had been buried alive.

The police need the help of criminalist Lincoln Rhyme, the world's best crime scene investigator. But Rhyme is no longer with the NYPD. Three years earlier he had been crushed by a falling beam while investigating a crime scene. Now he is a quadriplegic only able to move his head, shoulders, and left ring finger. He has no interest when his old partners ask his help to find the missing woman. All Rhyme wants to do is die, and towards that end he is waiting for a doctor from the Lethe society who will give him his wish. But while talking to the doctor, his mind keeps going back to the pictures of the crime scene he was shown. He has seen clues from the killer as to the whereabouts of the missing woman. He promises his partners twenty-four hours of his help.

Rhyme's old teammates flock to his house bringing equipment to minutely examine all scraps of evidence (some mere particles of dust) found at the crime scene. Included in the team is Amelia Sachs, the patrolwoman who was the first on the crime scene. Sachs wants nothing to do with this operation. She is about to transfer to Public Relations. Her feelings toward Rhyme are extremely antagonistic, especially after he orders her to dismember a corpse in order to keep a piece of evidence pure.

Rhyme succeeds in figuring out where the kidnapped woman is being held, but the killer strikes repeatedly thereafter, planting clues at each scene as

to where his next victim will be found. The identity of the kidnapper/killer (the Bone Collector of the title) is revealed in a twist at the end, followed by an even bigger and better twist in the book's very last pages.

The Bone Collector is a fast moving, constantly involving, suspense thriller. The police procedural sections are terrific. I may not have understood all the technical terms, but I was intrigued by all the information modern science and police techniques can obtain from a crime scene. In addition, Deaver builds tension on several other levels besides that of the kidnappings: the relationship between Rhyme and Sachs, and Rhyme's death wish. Will he want to live until the end of the case? And what about after?

There is, however, one drawback to the book. Much of the descriptions of what happens to the victims are quite graphic and brutal. I feel that some of these, especially a scene involving rats, could have less minutely explicit. This aside, *The Bone Collector* makes a good, fast-moving read.

—*Martin Friedenthal*

Cop Out

by Susan Dunlap.

New York: Delacorte, 1997. $20.95

Dunlap's police characters represent the vein of conventionality that belies Berkeley, California's, widely held reputation as Rads 'n' Fads-ville. In fact, these cops would not seem out of place if the author transplanted them to Turlock or even Toledo. They are non-rad, non-Red, non-fey, non-touchy/feely to the point of seeming a tad dull.

That includes Officer Jill Smith, star of Dunlap's series. She's no dazzler in personality or pursuit skills, but when she feels obliged, she's dogged and dedicated to the point of risking her job and her peers' respect. But she's understandably afraid of alienating her lover, Seth Howard, whose edgy, rather immature reactions are attributable to a chaotic childhood with a mother who eventually deserted him.

Against her back-drop of average-Joe cops, Dunlap does array colorful characters fitting the city's raffish reputation. They include a Telegraph Avenue street artist; a hot-eyed preacher; a quirky chef who designs bespoke meals, delivered from a miniscule apartment; and the demonic-seeming proprietor of a seedy tattoo parlor. Against stereotype, this tattooist hankers for conventional success—a toney shop at San Francisco's Union Square. However, his secret formula for creating high-sheen tattoos is grisly to the max!

All these types have ties to a murdered mediator, and they also may have clues to the ominous disappearance of Herman Ott, an eccentric advocate for the city's marginal business people and its down-and-outers. Smith's preoccupation with finding Ott puts her more and more at odds with her peers, who are firmly mired in the them vs. us mind-set.

Though I don't fault her for delivering merely a well executed (but not riveting) read, she should be cited for mislocating the fabled Claremont Hotel, which plays a part in the plot. That huge, white wood structure—over-the-top Victorian in style and ornamentation—is in Oakland, not Berkeley.

—*Norma J Shattuck*

Murder! Murder! Burning Bright

by Jonathan Ross.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $20.95

The most dangerous animals prowling a British wildlife park are human, Detective Superintendent George Rogers discovers. It's an un-nerving case, its timing coinciding with his efforts to get two of his troubling addictions under control—nicotine, and Angharad, the wealthy, stylish barrister/sportswoman with whom he has a long-term, if wobbly, relationship.

However, Rogers enjoys no let-up in personal tension and fatigue from his first call to Castle Caldbeck Wildlife Park following discovery of two dead employees—one shot, one bludgeoned. Complications are added when his superiors order caution in pursuing the case because one of the murdered employees had been an undercover cop trying to flush-out a drug ring suspected to be operating from the park.

Then, just as the challenging case is unwinding, Rogers becomes the victim of an animal-tranquilizing dart fired into his arm. And that's definitely not the best way to bag a little rest! He barely survives.

The lush landscape of the site seems a particularly unlikely setting for all this violence. However, as something of a counter-balance, the locale also fosters a romance—between Chief Inspector David Lingard, second-in-command to Rogers, and Castle Caldbeck's fetching female security officer.

Lingard is not your stereotype of a Brit-cop. He's an elegant, expensively tailored aesthete with a weakness for snorting snuff and uttering quaint old exclamations like "Egad." Thus, he provides an amusing contrast to the more standard-issue Rogers, who's pragmatic, short-fused, low-rent, and definitely deficient in *joie de vivre* compared to his junior officer.

The prolific author, whose real name is John Rossiter, was himself a Chief Superintendent of Police. That some of his prose reads as slightly formal and stilted could be explainable as throwback to those years of report-writing. However, his characters here are skillfully sketched and his plot fast-paced and involving.

—*Norma J. Shattuck*

Private Eye

The Bum's Rush

by G.M. Ford.

New York: Walker, 1997. $21.95

Ford's droll take on the hard-boiled genre and one of its signatures—tersely sardonic language ("My body felt like a knuckle that needed to be cracked.")—is a big plus in this latest of the Leo Waterman mysteries set in Seattle. He also gets maximum mileage out of the down-and-outers who serve as his aides-de-street. These woeful, Schnapps-fueled irregulars add pungency (in more ways than one) to the proceedings and often are the subject of Waterman's funny asides:

"He remained focused on George, Harold, and Norman, whose synchronized swaying movements gave the impression that they were ice-skating while standing still."

While utilizing the services of these substance-soaked Sancho Panzas in the post-embezzlement disappearance of a city librarian and the questionable dis-

position of a dead rock star's assets, Waterman simultaneously aids them in freeing Ralph, one of their own, being held in a sinister flop-house whose owners are warehousing him and others while collecting monthly pension checks.

The rock star sub-plot also evolves from Waterman's relationship with the no-safety-netters. When he learns that Selena, new to the group, is the mother of Lukkas Perry, the dead rocker, he launches a pro-bono quest to see that she gets a fair cut of the boy's estate. This means roiling the home waters of the music business sharks who, in the supposed absence of relatives, are looking forward to sharing Perry's considerable current and future assets.

Rebecca, the forensic pathologist who is Waterman's long-term significant other, is likeable and nearly unflappable under stress except when it comes to riding in his body-damaged car which "crabbed down the road at a horribly oblique angle," making passengers motion sick.

Though not without sustaining a scary measure of body damage himself—"I'm standing here bleeding like Teddy Kennedy's liver"—Waterman successfully wraps up his cases. Yet he can't quite manage a satisfied smile:

"If my lip had been smaller than a pizza, I would have grinned."

—*Norma J. Shattuck*

Kat Scratch Fever

by Karen Kijewski.

New York: Putnam, 1997. $22.95

I have always enjoyed Kat Colorado's narrative style and think it improves with each book. This is the author's eighth in the series featuring one of today's top five female P.I.s immersed in a serious investigation during the Christmas season in Sacramento.

Kat was hired by a lawyer to check out his partner, James Randolph, to ascertain if he was in some kind of difficulty. Before Kat can find out much, Randolph is found shot to death. The police are certain it is a suicide and close the case. Kat, however, concentrates on what possibly could have caused him to take his life or to be murdered. Before long she finds evidence of a truly strange blackmailer at work.

Kat is assisted by her regular cast, many of whom have significant roles to play in her case: Kat's best friend, advice columnist Charity Collins gets really involved; Kat's grandmother, Alma, is hilarious pretending she is a wealthy widow; Kat's ward, Lindy, reveals her past to her classmates; Detective Henley gives Kat some help reluctantly; and her lover Hank pays a few visits from Las Vegas. But it is mostly Kat's show and she does her thing splendidly. The case she is working on is in constant focus, which makes for a fast-moving, attention-keeping story, Kat is a down-to-earth person with a subtle sense of humor and a keen awareness of what is going on. A cover blurb says this "series just keeps getting better." I agree totally.

—*Don Sandstrom*

Past Tense

by Stephen Greenleaf.

New York: Scribner, 1997. $22.00

For his twelfth sortie into the sleazy side of San Francisco, veteran mystery novelist Greenleaf plunges his popular private eye John Marshall Tanner headlong into the psychological murk of repressed memory. Tanner's best friend, undercover cop Charley Sleet, stands up in open court one day and coldbloodedly shoots to kill, shattering the skull of Leonard Wints, on trial for allegedly sexually abusing his daughter Jillian some twenty years earlier. After Charley spurns the help that Tanner marshals from their circle of poker buddies, violently breaks out of police custody, and disappears into the San Francisco underworld, a string of serial killings forces Tanner to conclude reluctantly that his old friend has turned rogue—and he, Tanner, has to stop him.

Obsessed with his deadly game of Where's Charley?, Tanner begins at the grisly beginning, probing the background of Charley's courtroom victim and the fragile psyche of the daughter whose retrieved memories may or may not be valid. Along the way, he uncovers sordid evidence of corruption everywhere he looks, a grim portrait of urban life that indicts members of police departments, judicial systems, and social agencies as exploitative despoilers of the innocent.

As an antidote to his grungy backdrop, Greenleaf camouflages the bittersweet vulnerability of Marsh Tanner, a fortyish 1990s White Knight tainted around the edges by the sewage of the world and its wicked wicked ways, with a case-hardened aplomb equally capable of stooping to petty crime and rising to clinical sex with Jillian's dishy shrink. The various spear-carriers who flesh out Greenleaf's chorus all ring just as true as their colorful hot-wired dialogue, and his deft hand with plot twists ensures a satisfyingly rapid pace of page-turning. As hunted villain-or-victim, however, the elusive Charley Sleet seems to lack substance, making for a denouement that tends to whimper more than it bangs. Taken all in all, Tanner fans will likely greet *Past Tense* with present applause, while newcomers may find themselves longing for the flaming old fictional days of Mickey Spillane and company, where good guys were good, bad broads were bad, and the inconvenient urgency of Tanner's moral dilemmas never reared its snaky head.

—*Mitzi Brunsdale*

Shaky Ground
by Steve Brewer.
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $21.95

Bubba Malory is a good old boy in the tradition of Andy Griffith's Sheriff Taylor, but unlike the beloved TV law enforcement official, Bubba is as low rent a private detective as any there is. Bubba moved from his Mississippi roots to New Mexico and until recently, lived in the sleaziest part of town, comfortable with the lowlifes and criminals in his neighborhood. That changed when he became engaged to newspaper reporter Felicia Quattlebaum who lives on the other side of town.

With the wedding almost upon the happy couple, Mrs. Amber Fields hires Bubba to locate her college professor husband, who never returned from an exploring expedition. A helicopter reconnaissance over the area of exploration locates his jeep, and soon the professor is found dead, three bullets in his body. Bubba is now hired to identify who committed the dirty deed, something he wants to do in order to get his mind off his upcoming nuptials.

In the meantime, Felicia is investigating a story centering on Tierra Verde, a mysterious company that plans to build a series of communities in the underdeveloped Rio Puerico. Its owner Tommy Greene, never seen or photographed, is noted for hiring thugs as employees. It is obvious there is a lot of money tied up in this project. Bubba finds it to be a very strange coincidence that David Fields was murdered in the middle of land belonging to Tierra Verde. As he digs deeper, he finds himself being warned off by the Feds, making enemies of a bounty hunter, and going head to head with organized crime. Risking his life more than once leaves little time for introspection about his upcoming nuptials, a situation that pleases him no end.

Bubba Malory is a protagonist that is hard to resist, a man who knows what he is and remains in harmony with himself. His wry, deprecating wit keeps the reader from taking *Shaky Grounds* too seriously. The novel is meant to entertain, which it successfully does. It will be hard to wait for the next installment to see the impact marriage has on ole Bubba.

—Harriet Klausner

The Valentine's Day Murder
by Lee Harris.
New York: Ballantine, 1997. $5.99

Three close friends, Matty, Clark, and Val, decide to cross a partially frozen Lake Erie one Valentine's night to cap off Val's birthday celebration. Unfortunately, the ice gives way and the three never return. With the advent of spring, a search of the lake results in the discovery of two bodies, that of Clark and Matty, but not Val's. Even more surprising is the discovery that Matty had been killed by a bullet. Police suspect that there was a scuffle between the three, with Val being the shooter and fleeing the scene.

Val's wife, however, is positive not only that Val would never shoot anyone but that Val never would have consented to such a dangerous act as crossing the ice and that he's alive somewhere. She hires Christine Bennett, ex-nun, now private investigator, to find her husband. Although Christine believes that Val is most likely dead at the bottom of the lake, she reluctantly agrees to try her best to find out what happened that night. As Christine questions the wives of the three men and Val's business partner and goes through Val's business and personal effects, she uncovers some puzzling facts about Val as well as about Matty and Clark, including the fact that Val seems to have died 30 years ago!

The unravelling of the events that led to that fateful night on the lake provides an intriguing mystery. This is a true mystery in that the mystery is everything. The story is also refreshing in that as more and more facts become known, there are no sordid revelations about the villainous nature of the victims. What emerges are portrayals of three decent people. The characters, especially Christine, tend to be on the sketchy and dull side, and their primary value seems to be to move the mystery along. Although some of the connections in the mystery don't quite hold together, overall the story is intriguing enough to hold the attention of most readers.

—Lorrie K. Inagaki

THRILLER/ SUSPENSE

Blood of Your Sisters
by Colin D. Peel.
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $20.95

In a mere 189 pages, Colin Peel, a New Zealander, treats the reader to a wickedly fast ride with screaming turns that is more like The Wild Mouse than the proverbial roller coaster.

The hero, Mark Raynor, is a professional trouble shooter in the post-cold war era. One could say he is the consummate trouble shooter, except that title more properly belongs to his friend Janson, who is frequently saving Raynor's bacon, but that's not to say that Raynor does not occasionally return the favor.

Together they lead us through the tinderbox that is today's world, alternately chasing or being chased by gun-runners, diamond smugglers, ivory poachers, giant cartels, and corrupt governments, plus the requisite amount of beautiful women, both good and evil, with enough shootings, massacres, explosions, torture, and intrigue to make even the latest Arnold Schwarzenegger action film seem "G" rated.

What makes *Blood of Your Sisters* rise above a hell of a good action yarn, is Peel's lucid and convincing view of the newly emerging power bases, as iniquitous as the world's old devils, but far more complicatedly layered. Janson explains to Raynor about the Kinshasa Copper Co. and its brutal, avaricious leader Kabinda, "It's the first African-based crime syndicate...And it isn't like anything else you've come across. These guys have Africanized what they've learned from the west, mixed it with a few ideas from the Far East Triads and formed the equivalent of an African Mafia." How's that for a view of the "global village"?

While doing a job for a South African diamond cartel, Raynor witnesses a confrontation between Kabinda's forces and an American based environmental group in Angola. Kabinda savagely massacres them all including the rape and murder of a young, beautiful American girl. Raynor is traumatized, not just by what he's seen, but by his

total inability to even attempt to stop the carnage.

On returning to the U.S. he is contacted by the environmental group and meets the dead girl's twin sister. Raynor decides that only vengeance will purge his soul, and so he goes back to Africa with a mission to destroy Kabinda. Despite his own wide experience, he is woefully unprepared to face Kabinda's tremendous power. It is only Janson, who has his own agenda, and a far more cynical, but pragmatic view of what the world has become, who can possibly help Raynor achieve success.

Peel guides us through with a sure hand, making certain we're never lost in the maze, at least not for long. The world of *Blood of Your Sisters* is terrifying and may leave one longing for the old Reaganesque "Evil Empire."

—Laurence Coven

Bomb Grade

by Brian Freemantle.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $25.95

Charlie Muffin and Brian Freemantle are back, so everything is right with the world! Although the cold war is over, Freemantle still finds espionage between Russia and England to write about.

The book's title refers to the Russian plutonium which is the center of attention here. 250 kilograms, enough to make 50 Hiroshima-sized bombs of weapon-grade material, is stolen from Russian warehouses by the Russian Mafia for later sale to Middle East buyers. The price is high, $75 million for the lot. While the main concern is Charlie's involvement in the pursuit of the gangsters, it doesn't neglect his love affair with Natalia and his adventures with his assistant, curvaceous American FBI nuclear scientist, Hillary Jamieson.

Typical of the series, Charlie has continual trouble with his own headquarters as well as at home and in the Moscow embassies. However, by playing the lone wolf and always keeping affairs close to his own vest, Charlie prevails against the bad guys. Perhaps surprisingly, certain characters change and develop, at least somewhat.

Charlie's followers will find all of the old sequences and sayings as well as certain of the old girlfriends present. He is optimistic and resourceful as ever and gets away with all that he possibly can, often going far beyond the rules. As usual the novel is a disjointed, liquor filled limo-riding escapade, with death near on every page. Charlie is the thinking man's operative, a survivor. His feet are still clad in hush puppies and always hurt. In the end he prevails, more or less.

Yes, there are problems. Freemantle's writing moves slowly and is sometimes confusing. There are too many Russian names to keep track of and a few unlikely coincidences. Some readers will be bothered by the detailed descriptions of Mafia torture.

However, this is a major addition to the Charlie Muffin library, introducing certain areas which are new to his saga—nuclear theft, Russian Mafia activities, and Charlie's daughter, Sasha. We should drink a toast to Charlie and Natalia—and to *Bomb Grade*!

—John F. Harvey

Brutal Fantasies

by John Hands.

New York: Harper, 1997. $5.99

With the demise of the Cold War and the ensuing rationalization and understanding of the true nature of "the Russian threat," thriller writers have been turning to other areas for their material. John Hands has focused his attention in his latest book on the "Irish problem," a surprisingly uncommon subject for British authors. His protagonist, John Darcy, is a CIA officer in the twilight of his career as a Soviet specialist. To fill out his time before retirement, Darcy has become a "terrorism expert," posted to Britain's MI5 as a liaison. His position takes on meaning after a terrorist bombing in a pub outside Cheltenham. The dead are American, many of whom worked at GCHQ, British intelligence's electronic eavesdropping center.

With MI5 and the Cheltenham police clearly unable or unwilling to pursue an investigation to identify the perpetrators, Darcy is ordered to discover their identities. It is a "deniable" mission in a country which is America's closest ally—and Darcy knows that if anything goes wrong, without written authorization, he's expendable.

MI5's Edward Maitland insists the IRA, who want to disrupt ongoing peace talks, is responsible for the bombing. But Darcy, who crossed Maitland's path in their Cold War days, disagrees, knowing that the Irish are aware of how deaths of Americans will affect their support across the Atlantic. Darcy's investigation is, however, disrupted by the kidnapping of Maitland's daughter, Emma. It appears that she is actually Darcy's unknown daughter, the result of an anguished affair with Maitland's wife. To rescue her, Darcy adopts the identity of his younger brother Joe, a New York priest with ties to the IRA.

In telling his strong, coherent story, author Hands illustrates the high personal cost of intelligence. His character Darcy recounts both his and the CIA's part in the student protests over the Vietnam War, the vicious search for a Soviet agent within the CIA's counter-intelligence division, the CIA's own illegal, brutal terrorist activities in Latin America, the lack of understanding of Catholic liberation theology, the attempts to destabilize the Labour government of British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, and finally, the

cooked-up causes of the Grenada invasion. Whether the end justified the means and the costs is unclear. In sum, Hands's venture into the world of clandestine operations is more than just a well researched and written thriller.

—*Nancy-Stephanie Stone*

The Jigsaw Man

by Deanie Francis Mills.

New York: Jove, 1997. $6.50

More works of fiction and nonfiction have been written about the Kennedy assassination and its aftermath than about any other domestic event in twentieth century American history. Consequently, it is challenging to handle these old chestnuts in a new way, which is exactly what Deanie Francis Mills does in her latest book. Parker Jefferson, the Special Agent in Charge of the Dallas field office, the twelfth largest field office in the Bureau, is about to be nominated as head of the FBI by President Clinton. Not only is this a personal coup for career agent Jefferson, but it also erases doubts of the competency of the Dallas field office that had been lingering since Kennedy's assassination over thirty years ago.

Unfortunately for Jefferson, he had been involved as a rookie agent in the pre-assassination security investigation of the President's killer, Lee Harvey Oswald. Jefferson appeared to emerge from the ensuing Bureau witchhunt unscathed. But as he knows too well, appearances can be deceiving. Gipsy Halden, the wife of an intelligence officer for the Dallas Police Department, unknowingly holds a piece of a puzzle that can destroy him. Fearful that his future may be destroyed by the past, Jefferson must eliminate any problems that could be created by Halden.

The Jigsaw Man is a tightly constructed, well written thriller. Readers familiar with *Losers Weepers* and *Love Me Not* will be surprised and pleased by Mills's venture into new and different material. It's a great read.

—*Nancy-Stephanie Stone*

Killing Floor

by Lee Child.

New York: Putnam, 1997. $23.95

Guilty pleasure. It is a hackneyed phrase that has been used for so long by vacillating reviewers that it very nearly lacks meaning at all. Sometimes it does, though. *Killing Floor* is a guilty pleasure, a novel one can thoroughly enjoy, while viewing the author with aloof intellectual contempt for having bothered to write it. I liked it a hell of a lot, and I hated myself for liking it.

Narrator/protagonist Jack Reacher is every editor's nightmare, a character so thin that to call him a cardboard cutout would be a compliment. He's big. He's tougher than case hardened nails. He's Mike Hammer on steroids.

Jack, a drifter recently separated from the downsizing U.S. Army, is arrested in a diner in Margrave, Georgia, for murder. Evil Southern cops (never heard that one before, right?) haul him down to a PD headquarters peopled by similarly unfamiliar characters—incompetents, oafs, and one female officer who is both perceptive and...beautiful! After that, discovering that her boss is an overeducated, underrated New England black man comes as less of a shock. That he wears a moleskin vest with a tweed suit is, well, disturbing.

The dead man turns out to be Jack's brother, which annoys him a lot. He gets busy. By book's end, he has killed at least nine people—some with the help of Moleskin Vest and Beautiful Southern Female Cop, but most on his own initiative. Jack's tough, but I think I mentioned that already. By the time he unearths a conspiracy so large it would give Robert Ludlum wet dreams, the reader pretty much knows where this thing is going.

Killing Floor is one of the worst books I have ever read. *Killing Floor* also kept me up far beyond my usual bedtime. Guilty pleasure, I guess.

Author Lee Child's first offering is, by any thoughtful critical standard, jejune, but it is undeniably, unrelentingly compelling. It galls to like a book this bad. It's even worse to wonder what Jack's going to be up to next. And I do wonder.

—*Paul A. Bergin*

Naked Justice

by William Bernhardt.

New York: Ballantine, 1997. $22.00

Ben Kincaid is a lawyer who seems to have inherited the traditional down-at-the-heels characteristics of the hard-boiled detective. Bills aren't being paid, and his loyal staff, all two of them, are being as patient as they can. Add a 13-month-old nephew who was dropped off, literally, by Ben's missing sister months ago to Ben's responsibilities and you have the recipe for personal disaster: a poor law practice with few resources and a lawyer whose personal life is full of turmoil.

Which is why he is surprised when Wallace Barrett, Mayor of Tulsa, Oklahoma, selects to defend against a charge of murdering his wife and both children. Barrett is black, and the quick similarities to the Trial of the Century threaten to turn off readers who take this as a cheap imitation novel. But those who stay the course find that this eighth novel by Bernhardt goes beyond the similarities to enhance a real puzzle.

Kincaid's staff digs in to find as many answers as they can, but they are overwhelmed by the superior resources of District Attorney Jack Bullock. Bullock and Kincaid had worked together once. But Ben had broken with Bullock over a case that involved his own father and the past is ever-present as both men square off in court. More is at stake than Wallace Barrett's life. That connection with the past becomes part of the plot in a life-threatening series of incidents that plague Kincaid in his quest for justice.

Bernhardt's writing is quite good, and one is hard-pressed to find grievous errors. The surprise twist at the end should only be hinted at here, and it does make the novel stand out from the crowd.

—*Cal Branche*

No Time for an Everyday Woman

by Wenda Wardell Morrone.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $22.95

There are no everyday women in this book. The men aren't your run-of-the-mill sort, either. Come to think of it, the dogs are special, too. Maybe it's something in the Montana air, because Wenda Wardell Morrone's debut novel introduces us to a cast of characters, any one of whom could carry a plot:

Senator Fred Colman, legislator, philanthropist, womanizer, and truly concerned about the people he represents.

Lorelei Muldoon, the latest in a long line of Colman conquests. She's smart, funny, and in deadly danger. Her survival of the plane crash that kills Colman changes lives from Merciful Valley, Montana, to Washington, D.C.

Barney McFaul, the outdoorsman who rescues Lorelei from the downed plane. He did it so well the first time, he figures it could become a habit.

Claud Willetts, Colman's best friend and a man of influence in the valley. He and Colman had set up a sting operation to capture the operators of some particularly potent marijuana fields. Now he's left to finish the job.

The Reverend Abigail Butterfield. She dispenses wisdom, strength, and zucchini. Her network of informants could be the envy of a big city police department.

Sheriff Orry Neiderhoffer, a man frustrated by being out of the Colman-Willetts information loop.

Betty Colman, the long-suffering wife of the Senator. Aided by her assistant, interior decorator Olga Finaldo, she has a life and career apart from the political one and plans to be even more of her own person. But Olga is the mastermind behind those marijuana fields and will sacrifice anyone to further her own dreams.

Ricky Fenton, Olga's nephew, a young man who has pretensions of running the family business. He works with Paca and Mech, true nasties.

There are nephews and cousins and assorted good ole boys and gals, too many to mention in this review. Even Merciful Valley itself—with its inhabitants known as "toolies" and surrounded by pine forests and mountains—takes on a personality. The title comes from a song written by one of the lesser characters, Banjo Man. I liked the lesser characters. They were no less interesting. And I liked this book even though I never did figure out the antagonism between Claud and the sheriff, or why he *was* left out of that loop. Neither do we know how Claud or Barney make their living, though there are hints that may be followed up in future books, if this is indeed a series.

But those are minor details. You'll root for the good guys and hate the bad, all of whom are right up front. The plot is a simple one, but the characters are not. Do yourself a favor and get to know some of the strongest characters in any novel, let alone a first one. Keep 'em coming, Wenda!

—Jackie Acampora

Out of the Sun
by Robert Goddard.
New York: Henry Holt, 1997. $25.00

Londoner Harry Barnett, part-time worker at a service station, gets a phone message stating his son is in the National Neurological Hospital. What a shocker since Harry's not aware of having a son, but on calling the hospital, he finds the patient's name is David Venning. He recalls well his short hot encounter 34 years ago with Mrs. Claude Venning, whom he has not seen nor heard from all these years. Nevertheless, Harry goes to see comatose David and realizes this indeed is his son. David, a diabetic, had been found in a hotel room in an irreversible coma due to an overdose of insulin. No one except David's mother and now Harry holds out hope for a recovery.

As everyone tells Harry, his son was a genius mathematician and the more Harry hears the more he is suspicious. He learns David and some colleague friends had worked for Globescope, a corporation forecasting and selling economic future factors worldwide. Their project was called Sybil (named for the seeress in old mythology) and when the researchers would not skew their findings for Globescope, they were fired. One by one they begin to die. Is it suicide, accidental death, or murder?

Harry feels he owes it to his son to pursue his hunch that there has been dirty work done and his chase (and being chased) takes him to Denmark, the U.S.A., and back to England. And to the academic world of higher mathematics, physics, and quantum mechanics. The nail-biting situations are many and as one character says, "...luck is like gasoline. When you run out, you're always a long way from a filling station." But Harry manages to pull through and even manages to have a bit of romance on the side.

This is certainly one for the aficionado who likes a mix of science fiction, mystery, thriller, and arcane science. Don't let the last put you off, it is still good reading. It also poses the moral question: does scientific genius consider the long term consequences of her/his work?

—Maria Brolley

Remote Control
by Stephen White.
New York: Dutton, 1997. $22.95

District Attorney Lauren Crowder, Dr. Alan Gregory's wife, has taken an intern, Emma Spire, the daughter of the Surgeon General of the United States, under her wing, but she isn't aware what that involves until Emma invites her and her husband to a party. Part of the party is a demonstration by Ethan Han of his latest computer development involving sensual taping. Without knowing it, Ethan has taped Emma and him making love and when Emma finds out she is furious. She asks Ethan to destroy the tape, but he can't find it. Someone has entered the lab and taken the tape. Emma sees how her privacy is totally destroyed. Dr. Gregory believes Emma is on the verge of committing suicide and tries to prevent it.

Although she is suffering from a sight-threatening disorder, Lauren stands guard in front of Emma Spire's house during a raging snow storm because she believes someone is out to kill Emma. As she keeps watch, a blurry threatening figure approaches her car and she fires her gun. When the police arrive, Lauren confesses she has shot the poor man lying in the middle of the street and they drag her off to jail.

Even though she is District Attorney, Lauren gets no special treatment and the poor woman can barely see what is happening to her or who is helping her or not. She ends up with two lawyers who try their best to keep her safe, but it seems no one can help her and she is all alone and unable even to help herself

An exciting read and interesting characters with mother nature doing its best to confuse the issue. Stephen White knows how to turn a phrase and create situations that keep you on the edge of your seat. If you've ever been caught in a snow storm, you'll really relate to this wonderful novel.

—*Catherine M. Nelson*

Room 13

by Henry Garfield.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $22.95

Marilou McCormick, an attractive red-head, is an English teacher by day. At night she throws caution to the wind, latching onto wild guys who drive motorcycles or pickups—no BMW owners—for sex on the beach and short term relationships. But when a werewolf kills her current boyfriend, Marilou decides it's time for a move. Making the move from San Luis Obispo to the town of Julian, a quiet, conservative one-time gold-mining town northeast of San Diego, she gets a job teaching high school English at Bailey Memorial High School.

Her new domain is Room 13, an annex to the old school building, and the room where, less than a decade ago, a teacher took his own life. Today the room seems haunted, with an animated heater, window shades that refuse to open, and with faded posters of American literary figures—Hemingway, Poe, Hawthorne, London—that have minds of their own, inflicting severe paper-cuts on anyone who dares try to take them down.

Room 13 is not, strictly speaking, a mystery novel. It is a crime-thriller with supernatural (read "horror") elements. I had hoped to find a mystery hidden in the story. There were subtleties that I took to be clues, and several characters whom I labeled as "possible suspects." But the final pages offered no surprises.

Nevertheless, this was a thoroughly enjoyable novel, blended with equal parts of Hiaasen, du Maurier, and "X-Files." Garfield, a Southern California transplant from New England, has peopled his book with a zesty array of characters. There's Robert Rickard, the shy, sad semi-literate school custodian who suddenly becomes an avid reader. There's Richie, the developmentally challenged giant of a student with an unnatural love for mice. There's Jim, the school's only African American student, who talks like he just stepped off the plantation.

Best of all, there's Marilou's love-interest and the title character of Garfield's previous novel, Cyrus "Moondog" Nygerski. Moondog is not your typical bus driver. "Unpublished novelist, sporadic newspaper columnist, former Hollywood stuntman, baseball player, dope smuggler, and rock musician," for the last three years, Moondog has "harbored a terrible secret." He is lycanthropically challenged. (In other words, watch out on a full moon). *Room 13* is terrific fun. It will have you howling for more.

—*Steven E. Steinbock*

True Crime

Death of a Model

by Clifford L. Linedecker.

New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $5.99

Some 16,000 murders occur in the United States each year and most receive, at best, a few paragraphs in the newspapers. But when a young, beautiful model, someone with her life ahead of her, simply disappears, a real nerve is touched. On November 16, 1995, Linda Sobek, a vibrant, 27-year-old blonde who worked as a Los Angeles Raiders cheerleader and modeled for swimsuit calendars and car magazines, left her Hermosa Beach apartment on a bright, sunny day for a photo shoot with a photographer named Chuck. She was never seen again. Shortly after Thanksgiving, the model's body was found in a shallow grave scratched out along a highway in the San Gabriel Mountains in Los Angeles County.

Detectives talked to the prime suspect, a temperamental automotive photographer named Charles Edgar Rathbun, six foot three and two hundred and ten pounds, badgering him until he finally took them to find the model's body. Rathbun claimed the death had been a tragic accident. At the remote site of the photo shoot, he had hopped in a fancy Lexus truck, trying to show Ms. Sobek how to do doughnuts, a high-speed driving and spinning maneuver. He'd hit the petite, size 3 model with the vehicle, accidentally killing her, then panicked and finally buried her in a shallow grave, he told them.

Autopsy reports contradicted Rathbun's story, for the coroner found Linda had been manually strangled and asphyxiated, bound, and sodomized with a foreign object, possibly a gun.

Detectives tried and failed to tie Rathbun to other cases of murdered women found in and near the places he had lived. But the one-time shutterbug was sentenced to life without possibility of parole for the sexual assault and murder of Linda Sobek.

Linedecker gives a good, insider's view of the dark side of the modeling world, in which models prefer never to go to a site without access to a phone, in which agents check photographers out and quickly spread the word about photographers with bad habits. Perhaps Linda passed over those safety rules when she met Rathbun, perhaps her trusting nature cost Linda her life.

Veteran true crime writer Linedecker makes the sad and sordid story read like a novel. The bittersweet focus is a cautionary tale for aspiring models, for in a business that can be glamorous and rewarding, there are rotten apples and models must be cautious.

Linedecker's dedication speaks volumes: "To all the models and aspiring models out there: Good luck, have fun, be careful."

—*S.M. Tyson*

A Father's Rage
by Don Davis.
New York: St. Martin's, 1997. $5.99

Former deputy sherif Ken Arrasmith shot burly ex-convict Ron Bingham to red ribbons in Lewiston, Idaho, in May, 1995, firing twenty-six shots into him at point-blank range. Arrasmith then killed Bingham's wife Louella, firing six shots into the woman's back. Both victims were unarmed.

Arrasmith surrendered to police across the border in Clarkston, Washington, where he had friends. Bingham, he told them, had raped his 15-year-old daughter, Cynthia, aided by his bisexual wife. This husband and wife rapist team had been doing this for 25 years, carefully picking young girls who were runaways, drug addicts or otherwise unlikely to go to the police. They had been tried and convicted only once.

When police did nothing in response to his complaints, Arrasmith said, he had taken the law into his own hands. If it had been your daughter, Arrasmith asked, what would you have done?

National TV talk shows picked it up—"Oprah," "Montel Williams," "20/20," "Leeza," "Donahue." More than twenty victims of the Binghams now came forward. Arrasmith told reporters "I'm no hero, I'm just a dad." It was to be the keynote of his defense at his trial.

The second half reports the trial, quoting key testimony and its effect on the legal strategy of both sides as well as on the jury and spectators. Davis notes how, during an intense, emotional summing up by one side, the jury sits stony-faced, without a tear or hanky in sight.

What keeps the reader rapidly turning the pages of this gripping paperback original is the wish to know if the jury can be so swayed by emotional pre-trial publicity that it will ignore the facts. Not to mention the disturbing flaw in Arrasmith's vigilante defense, pointed out by Lewiston's *Morning Tribune*: if it's all right for Arrasmith to kill rapists without a trial, shouldn't it be all right to kill Arrasmith without a trial for the more serious crimes of multiple murder?

Suspenseful, intelligent, and thoroughly researched, *A Father's Rage* is worth the time of true crime and trial buffs.

—Frank D. McSherry Jr.

ANTHOLOGY/ COLLECTION

My Mother, The Detective
by James Yaffe. Norfolk, VA:
Crippen and Landru, 1997. $24.95

Oy gevalt! They don't make 'em like Mom anymore. No, I'm not bragging about my own mater familia. I am referring to the collection of, until now, nearly impossible-to-find stories from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.*

Has anyone considered that Jim Yaffe is the reincarnation of Israel Zangwill? A century ago, Zangwill wrote short stories and sociological studies about Jewish life in England. Yaffe, on the other hand, has written a gaggle of tales about Jewish life in New York and a non-fiction work, *The American Jews.* Zangwill wrote the world's first locked-room detective novel, *The Big Bow Mystery* (1892). Yaffe writes about the world's warmest armchair detective, Mom. Both men's books always seem to wind up at the end of the bottom right-hand shelf at the bookstore.

Yaffe has written four novels featuring Dave (we never learn his last name) and his mom. The action in these books has shifted from New York to Colorado where Dave, now widowed, works as a detective, and where Mom is a permanent visitor. The eight "Mom" stories included in *My Mother, The Detective* were written between 1952 and 1968, twenty years before the first "Mom" novel appeared. In the short stories, Dave is an NYPD detective, and his wife, Shirley, is still living.

The recipe in this eight-course Sabbath meal goes something like this: Dave and Shirley spend each Friday evening at Mom's apartment in the Bronx. Much of the evening Dave acts as peacemaker between the two dominant women in his life. Sometime between the chopped liver and the pot roast, Mom invariably asks, "So Davie, how are things at work?" Dave, a New York homicide detective, then describes a recently cracked case—one which he assures Mom was *clearly* open and shut. By the time dessert is served, Mom has turned the case on its side, showing that New York's finest got it all wrong, thereupon pointing the finger at the true culprit.

Mom's methodology is as good—and as rich—as her cooking. She begins with a casual, deprecating aside that begins to erode her son's confidence. Then she asks three or four "simple questions" about the crime. Next she launches into a lengthy and apparently unrelated story about some relative, friend, or neighbor ("This reminds me of my cousin Sadie," or "my Uncle Julius," or "my brother Max"). Finally she ties it all together, explaining whodunit and why.

These stories are tightly-plotted comedies of Jewish manners. Sherlockians will appreciate the puzzle-elements used in "Mom in the Spring," a story of love, death, and deception. But even the cleverest of readers won't catch all the curves Mom tosses.

In "Mom and the Haunted Mink"—a high point for me—Mom solves the case of a mink coat that apparently has a mind of it's own, refusing to be taken out of a closet, jumping around in public, and ultimately killing a woman.

"Mom Remembers" is the magnum opus of the collection. In it, Mom recalls the Delancey Street of the 1920s when, on the eve of her wedding, her fiancé was charged for a murder and Mom's own mother proved his innocence.

Owners of the cloth-bound limited-edition of *My Mother, the Detective* are in for an additional treat, a separate pamphlet containing "The Problem of the Emperor's Mushrooms." This is a gem of a story, written when Yaffe was eighteen, featuring Paul Dawn, Chief of the Department of Impossible Crimes (is this reminiscent of Carr's Colonel March?). In this tale, Dawn solves an ancient mystery: how Emperor Claudius could have been poisoned despite safeguards. In explaining this case, Dawn uncovers another, more recent one.

Crippen and Landru—publishers unique in producing mystery short stories exclusively—have once again produced a delightful and collectible volume. This is a high quality book and Mom is a woman of valor worth getting to know.

—Steven E. Steinbock

A Die-Hard Mystery Fan Wouldn't Be Caught Dead Without a Collection of The Armchair Detective

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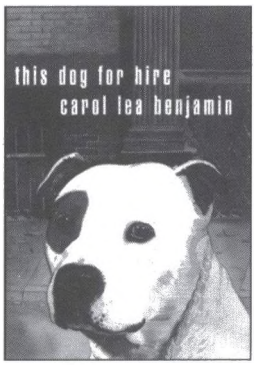

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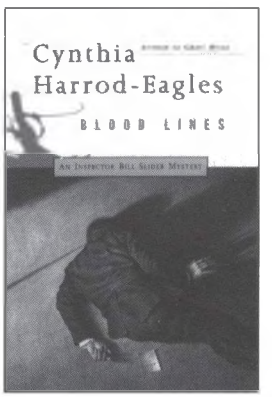

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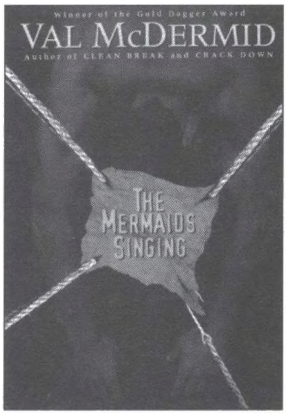

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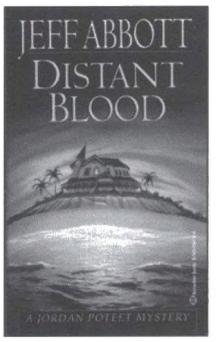

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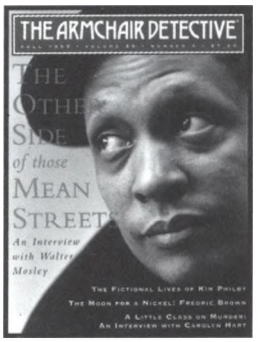

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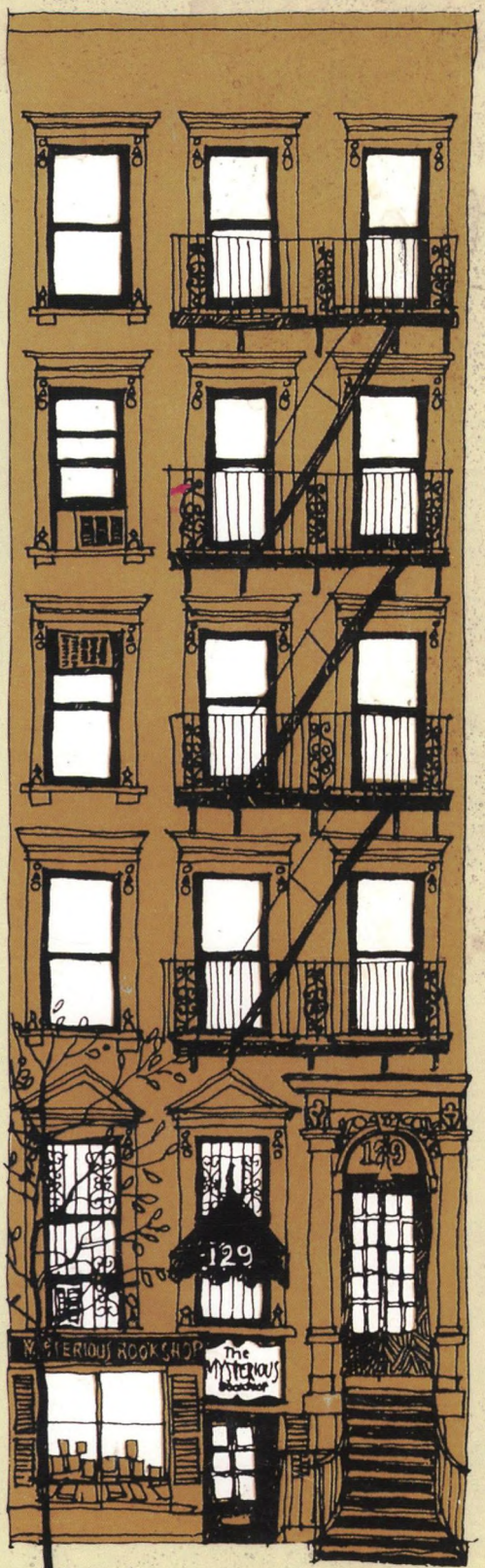

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