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## The Divine Detective in the Guilty Vicarage<sup>\*</sup>

By Robert Zaslavsky

[58a]

From the still glassy lake that sleeps  
Beneath Arica's trees—  
Those trees in whose dim shadow  
The ghastly priest doth reign,  
The priest who slew the slayer,  
And shall himself be slain.  
—Macaulay, *Lays of Ancient Rome*,  
"The Battle of the Lake Regulus" X

Many great men—it is notorious—read detective stories, though often behind locked doors, or under false jackets. They are afraid of their high-brow friends; for detective stories still do not rank as literature . . . . But we read them, for all that . . . . These facts being notorious, let us not consider it a waste of time to discuss the detective story. It is . . . a highly specialized art form, and deserves, as such, its own [critical] literature.

—Ronald A. Knox, "Detective Stories"

If a book is a book to be lived in, it should be (like a house to be lived in) a little untidy . . . . My own taste in novel reading is one which I am prepared . . . not only to declare, but to defend. My taste is for the sensational novel, the detective story, the story about death, robbery and secret societies; a taste which I share in common with the bulk at least of the . . . population of this world. There was a time in my own melodramatic boyhood when I became quite fastidious in this respect. I would look at the first chapter of any new novel as a final test of its merits. If there was no murdered man under the sofa in the first chapter, I dismissed the story as tea-table twaddle . . . . But we all lose a little of that fine edge of austerity and idealism which sharpened our spiritual standard in our youth. I have come to compromise . . . . As long as a corpse or two turns up in the second, third, nay even the fourth or fifth chapter, I make allowance for human weakness, and I ask no more. But a novel without any death in it is still to me a novel without any life in it.

—G. K. Chesterton, "Fiction as Food II"

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<sup>\*</sup> This essay is a somewhat modified version of the first chapter of a work in progress in which I hope to explore the theological foundations of modern crime fiction through a consideration of the genre's most pointed incarnations of those foundations, namely the priest-detective (which also includes the nun-, minister-, and rabbi-detective). I have appended to this essay a checklist of all the works which I plan to examine in the larger study. To the best of my knowledge, that checklist exhaustively lists the literature of priestly detection to date. My criterion, however, is strict: the detector must be a clergyperson; a clerical setting alone is not grounds for inclusion.

We owe the serious study of mystery stories first and foremost to two theologians, Father Ronald A. Knox and G. K. Chesterton, both of whom practiced as well as defended the art of writing them. Both were classically educated and widely respected as scholars and literary critics. Both were also converts to Catholicism, Knox in 1917 and Chesterton in 1922. And since in criminal matters there are no coincidences—as Nero Wolfe is so fond of declaiming—this too is surely no coincidence. There must be some intrinsic connection, then, between theologians and whodunit writers, between theology and crime fiction.

If anyone should deny that there is a theological dimension to narratives of crime detection, that same person could not deny that there is from the very beginning a crime detection dimension to theological narratives. One need only consider the Old Testament book of Genesis, in which Jehovah's two most striking initial interventions in human actions involve crimes and their punishments. I am thinking of the original sin of Adam and Eve and the murder of [58b] Abel by Cain. In both cases, the stages of the narrative are the same: (1) the commission of a crime (disobedience of the law, in one case, and murder, in the other); (2) the confrontation and interrogation of the suspect; (3) the revelation of the guilt; (4) the punishment. In other words, these two Biblical accounts are very compressed detective stories (unaccountably missing from Dorothy L. Sayers's first [1929] *Omnibus of Crime*), the first a model of ratiocinative detection (Jehovah deducing from Adam's awareness of his nakedness his commission of the crime of having eaten the forbidden fruit and then His eliciting the confession) and the second a model [59a] of psychic/intuitive detection (Jehovah hearing the blood of Abel cry out to Him from the earth and His imposing the appropriate punishment). Divinity and detection, then, are siblings, and it is not merely fanciful to see a relationship between the all-seeing eye and the private eye, as Allan Pinkerton well knew. And to show that it is not merely fanciful, we must consider the mystery story itself.

The mystery story—of whatever type—has three fundamental components: character, detection, and action. Insofar as it delineates character, it concerns itself with goodness and badness, virtue and vice, decency and corruption, morality and immorality, [59b] good and evil. Insofar as it presents detection, it concerns itself with the truth of a crime, the pursuit of knowledge, guilt and innocence, lawfulness and lawlessness, truth and falsity. Insofar as it studies action, it concerns itself with motive, means, opportunity, desire, act and potency, self-interest and selflessness. In short, the mystery story can contain all the themes which one would find in a theological treatise. That is, it can function as a dramatically rendered gloss on a theological treatise, simultaneously ethical, metaphysical, and practical/psychological. While G. K. Chesterton once asked, "Why is a work of modern theology less [i.e., why does it have to be less] to the soul, than a work of silly police fiction?"<sup>1</sup> he set out in his mystery stories to demonstrate that silly police fiction can be a work of modern theology without being any the less a work of police fiction.

The theological dimension of detective fiction is nowhere more clearly elaborated than in Chesterton's essays (scattered throughout) and W. H. Auden's seminal essay, "The Guilty Vicarage,"<sup>2</sup> the two of which together lend this essay its title. Chesterton, in "Fiction as Food,"<sup>3</sup> complains that the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have lost the sense possessed by all preceding ages (as seen, for example, in the ancient Greek drama, the medieval morality play, the writings of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Protestants, and the works of the writers of the Enlightenment)—the

sense that “a moral story almost always meant a murderous story . . . full of madness and slaying . . . the dancing of the devil and the open jaws of hell . . . parricide . . . shocking calamities.” He claimed that, as a result, we moderns look down upon the most moral works of our own fiction, works which present life as a fight rather than as a conversation, works [60a] with plot rather than plotless meanderings. Yet despite the stated preference of our times, the demand for the murder/crime story increased, even if it did so only as a sub-current, even if the literature was regarded as sub-cultural, popular, escapist (this despite the fact that its practitioners were by and large the hard-headed cultural elite). Of course, a work of high culture or art, say a Greek play, could be built on the notion that although many men have dreamed of killing their fathers and bedding their mothers but have not enacted the dream, let us see what it could mean and reveal for someone to enact it. But modern progressivism, the worship of the curative powers of technology, the industrial revolution, and urbanization banished such things into a darkness for which modern depth psychology is only a small light, and hence—to follow Chesterton—what had been center stage in earlier moral art was relegated to the wings, went underground, and has not yet fully returned to its proper central place. And this may be why readers of mysteries speak of their devotion to the form as an addiction. (I mean, one is said to love Shakespeare, but one may only be addicted to detective fiction.) And this, as Father Knox asserted,<sup>4</sup> may also be why the moral point in Chesterton’s stories, for example, is so often missed even by those who read them assiduously; they leave their high consciousness at the door of the low impulse to read silly police fiction.

Chesterton gives an important clue to that moral point in “The Divine Detective.”<sup>5</sup> He contends there that we have in modern Christendom two detective agencies. The first is the official detective, the state, “a machinery of punishment;” the second is the private detective, the church, “a machinery of pardon.” “The Church is the only thing,” he says, “that ever attempted by system to pursue and discover crimes, not in order to avenge, but in order to forgive them. [It is] the unrelenting sleuthhound who [60b] seeks to save and not slay.” This is analogous to Father Knox’s analysis of *Oedipus Tyrannos*,<sup>6</sup> in which he sees Oedipus as the official police (the Scotland Yard of Thebes), Tiresias the blind priest as the private detective, and Creon as the Dr. Watson. And, while the goal of the official detective is the physical safety of the members of society, the goal of the priest-detective is the spiritual cleansing of society. The task of cleansing society is passed on, in modern times, to the de-frocked private detective, although as society becomes more technologized and industrialized, as its foundational underworld (the mean streets) becomes wider and deeper, this becomes a more difficult task than the cleansing of the Augean stables. And the detective story, according to Chesterton, is the poetry of the mean urban streets which are the hidden essence of modern society. (Ed McBain’s “87<sup>th</sup> Precinct” novels are perhaps the finest example of this.) And it is a poetry which performs the useful social function of perpetually reminding us “that we live in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world, and that the criminals, the children of chaos, are nothing but the traitors within our gates [and that it is] the detective inn a police romance . . . the agent of social justice who is the original and poetic figure . . . that the whole [61a] noiseless and unnoticeable police management by which we are ruled and protected is *only* a successful knight-errantry.”<sup>7</sup> The “only” (which I have emphasized) is significant, because however successful the knight-errant may be, he is successful only partially, only here and there, only now and again, but not completely always and everywhere.

Chesterton further implies that the evil which the knight-errant battles is somehow an evil within himself, that the fundamental human problem—a concern for which is never absent from the best specimens of the *roman policier*—is the problem of evil, that the worst things in humans are uniquely human (and not bestial, demonic, or divine). In other words, the fundamental human problem is the problem of original sin,<sup>8</sup> of the fallenness of humans.

The case that this is also the fundamental problem of detective stories is made by W. H. Auden in "The Guilty Vicarage," his incisive analysis of the classic British whodunit, which he regards—in what he labels a purely personal judgment—as a work of magic rather than of art (a designation which he reserves for the American hardboiled school as exemplified by Chandler). He begins the essay fittingly with a prefatory quotation from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, ch. 7 ("I had not known sin, but by the law") and a confession of his own addiction to the form, an addiction which he later traces to his suffering from a sense of sin. Then he defines a detective story as a whodunit the central thematic concern of which is "the dialectic of innocence and guilt" and the formal structure of which follows Aristotle's description of the formal structure of tragedy, including—as a rule—the unities of time and place.<sup>9</sup>

In order to show why murder is central to the detective story, Auden divides crimes into three types: (1) crimes against one's neighbor(s); (2) crimes against society; (3) crimes simply against God. (Of course, both the first and second are also crimes against God, and all crimes are crimes against oneself.) In the first case, restitution (e.g., in robbery) or forgiveness (e.g., in assault) can in theory at least eradicate the crime, and, in the third case (e.g., suicide) the disposition is presumably strictly between the sinner and God. But the second case is murder and murder alone, and, inasmuch as the injured party is no longer existent, society must take his or her place: "[M]urder . . . is the one crime in which society has a direct interest." Murder, then, is the one crime which is a crime against society as such, and it requires the severest public scrutiny.

Auden proceeds to list and discuss what he calls the five elements of the detective story: "the milieu, the victim, the murderer, the suspects, the detective."

He divides milieu (setting) into the human (or societal) and the natural. The human setting must be a closed and closely related society, a society [61b] governed by an elaborate ritual, so as to insure that the murderer comes from within, that the society therefore is not totally innocent, and that every member is at least potentially a suspect. (He explicitly excludes the thriller.) This condition may be met by a group circumstantially brought together in time and place (e.g., a gathering of relatives or a traveling party) or by a group which is a small geographical unit (e.g., a village) or by a group which works together (e.g., a theater troupe). In addition, the group must constitute an apparently innocent society, a "society in a state of grace," a society composed of interesting and apparently good [62a] members, a society in which the law is invisible because it is unnecessary, until the murder occurs, at which point the society enters a state of crisis because one of its members has fallen from grace by using the society's own ritual to violate it. Then the law becomes oppressively visible until the guilt of the fallen individual is discovered, a discovery which allows the law to fade away again and the society to regain its lost innocence. The natural setting should reflect the human, i.e., it should be as much a Garden of Eden as possible. (I would add that this at least partially explains the frequency with which detective stories revolve around a murder in the garden, a motif which may become all-pervasive, as it does in S. S. Van Dine's *Garden Murder Case*, for example, extending there beyond the place of the murder even to the name of the central figures in the story.) This paradise is what

Auden calls "the Great Good Place," a setting in which the perversity of the murder can shine forth most clearly. He opposed this to Chandler's writings, which occur in "the Great Wrong Place" and which therefore are not the works of magical escapism which (according to Auden) the authentic detective story is but rather are works of art concerned with the serious exploration of a criminal milieu. (I think that Auden is mistaken here, but that in no way detracts from the usefulness of his analysis, generally speaking.)

The victim must be a deliberately contradictory figure, in that he or she must be good and bad at the same time. The victim must be bad enough that anyone *might* want to kill him or her but good enough that no one *would* want to kill him or her. Here Auden is again too monolithic, and he would have profited from reading Chesterton's comment (in his review of *The Skeleton Key* by Bernard Capes): "A detective story [is] in a special sense a spiritual story, since it is a story in which even the moral sympathies may be in doubt. A [62b] police romance is almost the only romance in which the hero may turn out a villain, or the villain to be the hero."<sup>10</sup> It is this fluidity of moral distinctions which is at the heart of all detective fiction, the ratiocinative as well as the hardboiled.

Auden believes that the murderer is some sort of Miltonic Satan, a rebel, a being of satanic pride, but that he is, but this prideful rebel is traveling—thanks to the skill of the author—incognito, as it were. "To surprise the reader when the identity of the murderer is revealed, yet at the same time to convince him that everything he has previously been told about the murderer is consistent with his being a murderer, is the test of a good detective story." This is a principle with which most readers of detective fiction would agree, even if they would not agree that the murderer is Satan incarnate. One might argue less extremely than Auden does, however, that crime (especially murder) and criminals represent the ineradicable depravity of human nature, i.e., that they are ever-present empirical demonstrations<sup>11</sup> of the truth of the doctrine of original sin (a view which is not unconsortant with the view that they are despiritualized Newtonian bodies in motion). The only fitting end for a murderer—in a detective story, although not in real life, Auden is quick to point out, implicitly thereby re-emphasizing his view that the detective story is escapist (presumably because—although he does not say so—reasonable doubt is banished in it)—the only fitting end for a murderer is execution, because since suicide means that he fails to repent, and going crazy means that he cannot repent, only execution is an act of atonement by the murderer and an act of forgiveness by society. Here again Auden would seem to be less on the side of Poirot, as he declares that he is, and more on the side of Mike Hammer, whom he would certainly claim to abhor. More to the point, he seems plain wrong. For, from the point of view of—among others—Fathers Brown and Dowling and The Reverend Doctor C. P. Randollph, suicide (which may be a genuine result of repentance, however impious the act itself might be) and craziness (which would graphically exhibit the consequences of failing to repent) are far more fitting than execution. And in some cases, whether because the murder is a unique and justifiable act by an essential non-murderer or because the crime is less than murder, no external punishment is appropriate at all. And this is the kind of decision which can only rarely be made by the official police, although it is well within the province of the priest-detective or the detective as priest.

The suspects in the society of the detective story must be all apparently innocent until the murder is committed. The act of murder causes the entire [64a] society to lose its apparent innocence in the face of the necessary intrusion of the law. For at bottom they are all guilty of something, even if it is not the something which is at issue. They may

either have contemplated murdering the victim themselves (without having carried it out), or have committed other crimes or misdeeds which they wish to conceal, or wish to take the law into their own hands, or wish to protect another person. As such, they all have something to hide, as Poirot emphasizes time and again. As Hegel says—and G. K. Chesterton agrees with him—only the beast is innocent, which means a doctrine of original sin. In his discussion of the suspects, Auden sticks too much to the mechanics of the story, but he suggests the moral problem by indirection, even against his own grain, against his own studied refusal even to use the phrase “original sin.”

The detective, Auden suggests, must be an outsider in some significant sense, whose job is “to restore the state of grace.” His outsider status guarantees his neutrality, although it hampers his investigations. He “must be either the official representative of the ethical or the exceptional individual who is himself in a state of grace.” The perfect example of the exceptional in a state of grace Auden finds in Sherlock Holmes and of the unexceptional official representative of the ethical in Inspector French. Father Brown, on the other hand, is a fusion of the two, the unexceptional individual in a state of grace, the one who can “help the murderer as an example, i.e., as a man who is also tempted to murder, but is able by faith to resist temptation.” And Auden considers these three—and this in an essay written well after the end of World War II!—the only perfectly satisfactory fictional detectives. Yet, however much one may disagree with each individual assessment, the composite picture which arises from his discussion, the picture of the detective as an exceptional individual possessed by the heroic passions of curiosity and desire for rightness and compassion for the lost members of society, of the detective as a secular redeemer attempting to preserve as many islands of purity as possible in a hopelessly fallen world—that picture is apt and suggestive.

[64b]

Finally, Auden discusses the reader of the detective story, namely himself (but also all others for whom he could be construed as the typical representative). He claims that those readers to whom the detective story most appeals are those who are least likely to be drawn to other types of “daydream literature,” the well-educated and well-read professionals. And these are persons, he claims, who simultaneously suffer from a profound sense of sin or feeling of guilt and assume that this sense or feeling remains unchanged no matter how great is their external goodness or progressively increasing goodness. And for these readers, the detective story represents the unfulfillable dream of regaining paradise, of restoring lost innocence. In other words, for them, the detective story is the nostalgia of original sin for its pre-fallen beginnings, the nostalgia of guilt for the lost garden. In short, the detective story represents a theological utopianism of the highest order.

Thus, although Chesterton and Auden may disagree on specifics, they agree that detective stories are works of theology and that the priest-detective is somehow the essential detective. And although this may not be perfectly correct, it is correct enough as a starting-point, and it does strike a note which is heard in many, if not all, detective stories.<sup>12</sup> It would be fruitful, then, to follow the career of the priest-detective from Father Brown to the present in the [65a] faith that this will contribute to the understanding of the detective story in general. In addition, for those who—like myself—have long since ceased entering nonfictional houses of worship, it may provide a foundation for a more congenial and capacious arena of theological discussion.

## CHECKLIST

N.B.: (1) D = detective protagonist(s). (2) All dates are dates of original publication.

### **Arlington, Cyril Argentine**<sup>13</sup>

D = Archdeacons The Ven. John Craggs of Thorp and The Ven. James Castleton of Garminster

*Archdeacons Afloat* (1946)

*Archdeacons Ashore* (1947)

*Blackmail in Blankshire* (1949)

*Gold and Gaiters* (1950)

### **Boucher, Anthony** (originally under the pseud. **H. H. Holmes**)

D = Sister Ursula

*Nine Times Nine* (1940)

*Rocket to the Morgue* (1942)

"Coffin Corner" (1943, in *The Female of the Species*, ed. Ellery Queen)

"The Stripper" (1945, in *Twentieth Century Detective Stories*, ed. Ellery Queen)

"Vacancy with a Corpse" (1946, *Mystery Book Magazine*)<sup>13</sup>

### **Catalan, Henri**<sup>13</sup>

D = Soeur Angèle

*Le cas de Soeur Angèle* (1952) [tr.: *Soeur Angèle and the Embarrassed Ladies*]

*Soeur Angèle et les fantômes de Chambord* (1953) [tr.: *Soeur Angèle and the Ghosts of Chambord*]

*Soeur Angèle et ceux de la mouise* (1953) [untranslated]<sup>14</sup>

*Soeur Angèle et les roses de Noël* (1954) [untranslated]<sup>14</sup>

*Soeur Angèle et l'angelus du soir* (1954) [tr.: *Soeur Angèle and the Bell Ringer's Niece*]

*Soeur Angèle et les croix de glace* (1955) [untranslated]

*Le secret de Soeur Angèle* (1956) [with Leo Joannon] [untranslated]

*Soeur Angèle et l'étrangère* (1957) [untranslated]<sup>14</sup>

*Soeur Angèle et le redresseur de torts* (1959) [untranslated]<sup>14</sup>

### **Chesterton, G. K.**

D = Father Brown

*Innocence of Father Brown* (1911)

*Wisdom of Father Brown* (1914)

*Incredulity of Father Brown* (1926)

*Secret of Father Brown* (1927)

*Scandal of Father Brown* (1935)

"Vampire of the Village" (1947)<sup>15</sup>

### **Eco, Umberto**

D = Brother William of Baskerville<sup>16</sup>

*The Name of the Rose* (1980)

### **Fraser, Antonia**

D = Sister Agnes

*Quiet as a Nun* (1977)

**Fuller, John**<sup>13</sup>

D = [Brother] Vane

*Flying to Nowhere* (1983)

**Gilman, Dorothy**

D = Sister John and Sister Hyacinth

*Nun in the Closet/Cupboard* (1975)

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**Greeley, Andrew M.**<sup>13</sup>

D = Father Blackie Ryan

*Virgin and Martyr* (1985)

**Holland, Isabelle**<sup>13</sup>

D = The Reverend Claire Aldington

*A Death at St. Anselm's* (1984)

**Holton, Leonard**

D = Father Joseph Bredder

*Saint Maker* (1959)

*Pact with Satan* (1960)

*Secret of the Doubting Saint* (1961)

*Deliver Us from Wolves* (1963)

Flowers by Request (1964)

Out of the Depths (1966)

A Touch of Jonah (1968)

Problem in Angels (1970)

Mirror of Hell (1972)

Devil to Play (1974)

Corner of Paradise (1977)

**Hubbard, Margaret Ann**<sup>13</sup>

D = Mother Theodore

*Murder Takes the Veil* (1950)

D = Sister Simon

*Sister Simon's Murder Case* (1959)

**Kemelman, Harry**<sup>17</sup>

D = Rabbi David Small

*Friday the Rabbi Slept Late* (1964)

*Saturday the Rabbi Went Hungry* (1966)

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*Sunday the Rabbi Stayed Home* (1969)

*Monday the Rabbi Took Off* (1972)

*Tuesday the Rabbi Saw Red* (1974)

*Wednesday the Rabbi Got Wet* (1976)

*Thursday the Rabbi Walked Out* (1978)

*Conversations with Rabbi Small* (1981)<sup>13</sup>

*Someday the Rabbi Will Leave* (1985)<sup>13</sup>

**Kienzle, William X.**<sup>13</sup>

D = Father Bob Koesler

- Rosary Murders* (1979)
- Death Wears a Red Hat* (1980)
- Mind Over Murder* (1981)
- Assault with Intent* (1982)
- Shadow of Death* (1983)
- Kill and Tell* (1984)
- Sudden Death* (1985)

**McConnell, Frank**<sup>13</sup>

D = Sister Bridget, ret.

- Murder among Friends* (1983)

**McInerny, Ralph**<sup>13</sup>

(also writes as Monica Quill: see below)

D = Father Roger Dowling

- Her Death of Cold* (1977)
- Seventh Station* (1977)
- Bishop as Pawn* (1978)
- Lying Three* (1979)
- Second Vespers* (1980)
- Thicker Than Water* (1981)
- Loss of Patients* (1982)
- Grass Widow* (1983)
- Getting a Way with Murder* (1984)

**McMahon, Thomas Patrick**<sup>13</sup>

D = Bishop Purcell

- The Issue of the Bishop's Blood* (1972)

**O'Marie, Sister Carol Anne**<sup>13</sup>

D = Sister Mary Helen

- A Novena for Murder* (1984)

**Peters, Ellis**

D = Brother Cadfael

- A Morbid Taste for Bones: A Mediaeval Whodunit* (1977)
- One Corpse Too Many* (1979)
- Monk's Hood* (1980)<sup>13</sup>
- Saint Peter's Fair* (1981)<sup>13</sup>
- The Leper of Saint Giles* (1981)<sup>13</sup>
- Virgin in Ice* (1983)<sup>13</sup>
- <sup>[67a]</sup>
- Sanctuary Sparrow* (1983)<sup>13</sup>
- Devil's Novice* (1984)<sup>13</sup>

**Post, Melville Davisson**

D = Uncle Abner<sup>18</sup>

*Uncle Abner, Master of Mysteries* (1913-1918)

**Quill, Monica<sup>13</sup>**

(pseudonym<sup>19</sup> of Ralph McInerney)

D = Sister Mary Teresa Dempsey

*Not a Blessed Thing* (1981)

*Let Us Prey* (1982)

*And Then There Was Nun* (1984)

*Nun of the Above* (1985)

**Reach, Alice Scanlan<sup>13</sup>**

D = Father Francis Xavier Crumlish

"In the Confessional" (1962, *EQMM*)

"Ordeal of Father Crumlish" (1963, *EQMM*)

"Gentle Touch" (1963, *EQMM*)

"The Heart of Father Crumlish" (1964, *EQMM*)

"Father Crumlish and the Cherub Vase" (1965, *EQMM*)

"Father Crumlish and God's Will" ["In Many Sorrows"] (1966, *EQMM*)

"Father Crumlish and the Wolf in Sheep's Clothing" (1966, *EQMM*)

"Father Crumlish and His People" (1967, *EQMM*)

"Father Crumlish Remembers His Poe" (1969, *EQMM*)

"Father Crumlish's Long Hot Summer" (1969, *EQMM*)

**Reed, Ishmael**

D = Papa LaBas<sup>20</sup>

*Mumbo Jumbo* (1972)

*Last Days of Louisiana Red* (1974)

**Sayers, Dorothy L.**

D = Montague Egg<sup>21</sup>

*Hangman's Holiday* (1933)

"The Poisoned Dow '08"

"Sleuths on the Scent"

"Murder in the Morning"

"One Too Many"

"Murder at Pentecost"

"Maher-Shalal-Hashbaz"

*In the Teeth of the Evidence* (1940)

"A Shot at Goal"

"Dirt Cheap"

"Bitter Almonds"

"False Weight"

"The Professor's Manuscript"

**Scherf, Margaret**

D = The Reverend Martin Buell

- Always Murder a Friend* (1948)
- Gilbert's Last Toothache* [= *For the Love of Murder*] (1949)
- The Curious Custard Pie* [= *Divine and Deadly*] (1950)
- The Elk and the Evidence* (1952)
- Cautious Overshoes* (1956)
- Never Turn Your Back* (1959)
- The Corpse in the Flannel Nightgown* (1965)

**Smith, Charles Merrill**<sup>13</sup>

D = The Reverend Doctor Cesare Paul "Con" Randollph

- Reverend Randollph and the Wages of Sin* (1974)
- Reverend Randollph and the Avenging Angel* (1977)
- Reverend Randollph and The Fall from Grace, Inc.* (1978)
- Reverend Randollph and the Holy Terror* (1980)
- Reverend Randollph and the Unholy Bible* (1983)

**Spike, Paul**<sup>13</sup>

D = Father Fernando O'Neal

- Last Rites* (1981)

**Webb, Jack**

D = Father Joseph Shanley

- The Big Sin* (1952)
- The Naked Angel* [= *Such Women Are Dangerous*] (1953)
- The Damned Lovely* (1954)
- The Broken Doll* (1955)
- The Bad Blonde* (1956)
- The Brass Halo* (1957)
- The Deadly Sex* (1959)
- The Delicate Darling* (1959)
- The Gilded Witch* (1963)

**Wright, June**<sup>13</sup>

D = Mother Paul

- Make-Up for Murder* (1966)<sup>22</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> G. K. Chesterton, "Reading the Riddle," in *The Common Man* (New York/London, 1950), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage," in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York, 1962), pp. 146-58. The essay has been reprinted in *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1980).

<sup>3</sup> "Fiction as Food II," reprinted in *The Spice of Life* (Beaconsfield, England, 1964); originally appeared under the title "Novel-Reading" in *T. P.'s Weekly*, April 7, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ronald A. Knox, "G. K. Chesterton," in *Literary Distractions* (New York, 1958), p. 167.

<sup>5</sup> In *A Miscellany of Men* (New York, 1912), pp. 277-83.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Knox, "Detective Stories," *Literary Distractions*, pp. 186-87.

<sup>7</sup> Chesterton, "Defence of Detective Stories," in *The Defendant* (London, 1941), pp. 118-23.

<sup>8</sup> Chesterton, "On Original Sin," in *Come To Think of It . . .* (New York, 1931), pp. 174-77.

<sup>9</sup> This had been worked out by Dorothy L. Sayers in her 1935 lecture "Aristotle on Detective Fiction," reprinted in *Unpopular Opinions* (London, 1946), pp. 178-90. Cf. my "Kant on Detective Fiction," *Journal of Value Inquiry*, Vol. 17, 1983, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Chesterton, "Bernard Capes," in *G.K.C. ad M.C.* (c.1929, repr. Freeport, N.Y., 1967), p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Chesterton, "The Maniac," in *Orthodoxy* (New York, 1909), p. 24: "Original sin is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved." Also cf. Charles Merrill Smith, *Reverend Randolph and the Avengeing Angel* (New York, 1982, ©1977), ch. 19, p. 174: "Original sin is manifested in every conceivable variety of behavior . . . . G. K. Chesterton said that original sin is the only empirically demonstrable Christian doctrine."

<sup>12</sup> Cf. "Kant on Detective Fiction," pp. 63-64, n. 25: "The divine holiness of the detective finds explicit expression in much of detective fiction. There is much more in common than would appear at first glance between the Simon Templar who frequently refers to criminals as the ungodly and the Mike Hammer who takes upon himself the role of Jehovah-like judge, jury, and executioner of divine vengeance. In this category would also belong—among others—the soiled Galahad Philip Marlowe, the knight-errant beach-bum Travis McGee, and the divinest detective of all, Nero Wolfe who with his Archie-angel Goodwin purifies the world with as little departure as possible from the house on West 35<sup>th</sup> Street which contains his perfect circular and immobile godhead."

<sup>13</sup> If this superscript (<sup>13</sup>) appears after the name of an author, it signifies that the author is not included in *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers*, ed. John M. Reilly (New York, 1980), the major bibliography of crime fiction, an invaluable (even if flawed) reference work. If the superscript appears after the title of a particular work, it signifies that the work is not listed in the author's bibliography in *Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers*. In fairness to the editor—although this clearly does not account for all the exclusions indicated—it must be taken into consideration that works published after 1978 and 1979 may not have reached him in time for inclusion and that works published since 1979 could not have been included. Let me add that this excellent collection of brief critical bibliographies should make some changes in the next edition, particularly in the bizarre practice of including foreign-born writers who write virtually exclusively in English (e.g., Janwillem van de Wetering and Robert van Gulik) in the foreign-language writers section and listing only the publication date of the English translation of a foreign work rather than its original publication date. Other criticisms of this useful and valuable book could be made, but this is not the place for them.

<sup>14</sup> I have been unable to obtain copies of the French text of these novels. Here I would thank Anne Denlinger of Bryn Mawr College, who graciously consented, because here French is so much more fluent than mine, to read and summarize the French texts which I did have, leaving me free to struggle through only those passages which she indicated were most germane to my study.

<sup>15</sup> This story is currently most easily available in the Penguin edition of *The Complete Father Brown*. It seems to me unconscionable on the part of Penguin, however, which also published the five collections, not to have included this story at least as an addendum to the last collection, because this puts any purchaser of the five separate volumes one story short of owning them all.

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<sup>16</sup> Brother William of Baskerville, whose name clearly refers to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, is modeled in looks and habits on Sherlock Holmes (cf. 1983 tr., Prologue, pp. 8-9). As a theologized Holmes, he provides insight into the way in which Holmes is a secularized theologian. In addition, William's chronicler, the fictive Adso of Melk or (cf. p. xiii) Dom *Adson* de Melk is clearly a version of Dr. Watson, as one can see if one takes the name "Adson," substitutes one dental for another (i.e., "t" for "d") and adds the sound of the lost initial digamma (i.e., the "w" sound), in order to retrieve the original "Watson."

<sup>17</sup> I have included *Conversations* on this list, even though it is not a detective novel, because it continues the rabbi-detective protagonist of the novels and provides additional socio-religious background for those novels.

<sup>18</sup> I include Uncle Abner because he is presented as being in the service of God, as being a judge-investigator in the image of Daniel.

<sup>19</sup> I cannot resist pointing out that McNerny—quite deliberately, I am certain—has selected the perfect pen (= quill) name (= moniker / *var.* monica).

<sup>20</sup> I include Papa LaBas because he is a priest of a sort, namely a practitioner of voodoo invested with special powers by forces and deities whose minister he is.

<sup>21</sup> I include Montague Egg because he is a mercantile Uncle Abner. He is a traveler in spirits (pun intended), he represents the firm of Plummet and Rose (which suggests fall and ascent, death and resurrection), and he is guided by the book, i.e., by *The Salesman's Handbook*, which is treated in the stories very much as a secularized scripture. In addition, his name is very suggestive, for "Montague" means "sharp hill," i.e., Calvary, while "Egg" is a symbol of the world and the mystery of life and, in its association with Easter, of the passion of Christ.

<sup>22</sup> It is with some reluctance that I admit that I have been simply unable to find a copy of *Make-Up for Murder*. But it is mentioned and briefly discussed in Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* (New York, 1981), p. 238. It is also listed in the *British Museum Catalogue*, 1966-70 Supplement, Vol. 26, Column 711. Clearly, then, it was published in England, fell into quick obscurity—whether justifiably so or not I am in no position to judge—and was never published in the United States, for I find no reference to it in *Books in Print*, the *National Union Catalogue*, the *Book Review Digest*, the *Book Review Index*, or the OCLC computer data bank.