It may look like The National Enquirer, but this actually is Horizons. FAPA's illustrated last-minute membership-saver is mostly written by Harry Warner, Jr., 423 Summit Avenue, Hagerstown, Maryland, 21740, U.S.A. The Coulsons do the publishing. This is volume 41, number 2, FAPA number 155, and whole number 160, dated February, 1980.

In the Beginning

The Fantasy Amateur: I find it somehow amazing that this issue's first page can be not only read but felt. I assume it's some sort of office copier that causes the print to be raised slightly from the paper. If my eyes continue to grow tireder all the time, I'll have to think about finding a way to sensitize my fingertips, in the hope that eventually all fanzines can be read by touch. Just think about the contribution this would make to the energy situation, permitting fanzines to be read in the dark. '' I see I'm slowing down in another way. The roster in this November FA betrays the fact that I still owe eight pages of activity and my membership year ends in May. It must be contagious. '' I'd rather see more attention paid to FAPA's present problems than to its history. If you subtract from the number of pages in each mailing the publications not primarily published for FAPA, you get terribly low counts. Fantasy Commentator: It's remarkable, how applicable to present-day science fiction is one sentence in the paragraph which Edward Lucas White wrote around 1879, quoted by Langley Searles in this issue: "Each appears to me to take the random, ill-founded personal preferences of the author and the more or less accidental, ephemeral and transitory usages and fads of his locality and period, project them into the future, and intensify and indurate them." Yes, yes, I know that modern custom expects us to regard this kind of story as relevant science fiction, socially significant science fiction, modern mythology, and so on. I find it as unsatisfactory as White did a century ago. '' And it's surprising and somehow humanizing to find a mighty intellect like that of Olaf Stapledon, who could write so fluently about the infinitely far future, apparently getting the year wrong in the letter to Sam Moskowitz reproduced here. Unless Sam has somehow mistaken the year, Stapledon seems to have been still writing 1948 on the next to last day of the third month of the following year. '' I've always had a knack for getting headaches, but chocolate, which I dearly love, never seems to trigger them. But I wonder if the sinuses were given proper credit as a source of head pains in White's era. I don't seem to remember hearing much about sinus trouble when I was a boy and I don't think many references to sinus trouble can be found in older fiction. My severe sinus attacks, which began in 1961 and have been dormant the past four or five years, behaved almost exactly like migraine headaches as far as symptoms were concerned. It seems certain that many sudden deaths in the old days that were ascribed to "acute indigestion" were actually the result of heart attacks. So maybe we shouldn't be prone to blame people a few generations ago for doing things that caused headaches, when some of them may have been inadvertent martyrs of their sinuses. '' Years ago, a nearby private school had a faculty member named Adrian Onderdonk. I wonder if he was related to Matthew? The name isn't often found in the United States and I seem to detect faint resemblance between this picture of the FC contributing editor and Adrian as I remember him. Adrian would have been perhaps 28 or 30 when I first knew him in 1943, but

I lost track of him long ago when he moved away and I have no idea where he may be or what he may be doing now. What the Dormouse Said: As a patriotic United States of American, I must point out that this nation is strictly impartial in the way it inflicts old television programs on mankind. I'd match the local situation against what Elizabeth Downs suffers from. From this week's TV Guide, which lists stations available to rooftop antennas in Hagerstown, I find in today's listings: Three Stooges, Gilligan's Island, Dennis the Menace, My Three Sons, I Love Lucy, Leave It to Beaver, Father Knows Best, Batman, Get Smart, Perry Mason, Dragnet, and Girl from Uncle, plus scads of ancient animated cartoons. '' I wonder if Lewis Carroll's fondness for 42 could have involved pun intentions in some instances? One or two examples which Marc cites could be taken as plays upon the word fortitude. Flo...: There's another good reason to save canceled checks. When the writer becomes famous, they can serve as nice souvenirs for his fans. Babe Ruth's widow used to send a canceled check to anyone who wrote her asking for an item relating to the ball player, following his death. '' It wouldn't take me long to total up my fannish expenses. The cost of producing Horizons and postage stamps must represent about 95% of all I spend on fandom in most years, unless I counted the nickels and dimes I squander on science fiction books and magazines at yard sales on warm Saturday mornings. '' I haven't seen mention recently of the fact that South Gate Again in 2010 is looming up closer all the time. In a few more years, it'll be closer in temporal distance than the first South Gate worldcon. Helen's Fantasia: The information about Fran Laney is interesting. It seems to put to rest the rumors that Laney didn't die. '' Authorities are strangely silent about measures which would genuinely save energy, preferring to act instead on silly ideas like the odd-even "rationing" of gasoline. An immediate ban on air conditioning in new autos would save enormous amounts of gasoline. The school year should be revamped to close classes down a month or longer in mid-winter with ashorter summer vacation, to reduce heating costs. I don't know if the half-day phenomenon that exists locally is widespread, but I'd estimate that between 15 and 20 school days each year are half-day for one reason or another: combine them into eight or ten full days and all sorts of economies could be achieved. Frostfree refrigerators are horribly wasteful consumers of electricity and hardly vital phases of contemporary civilization. I have the impression that despite all the chatter about conservation, the people in authority calculate that petroleum reserves won't become critically low until they're at retirement ago so they want the upheaval which eventually will come postponed until they've finished drawing their big salaries as active workers. Damballa: I've lived alone now for 19 yea s and I'm still not used to it. I still can't endure to eat meals by myself, so I spend a lot more on them at restaurants than cooking for myself would cost. And I still must fight off blind panic when I feel myself getting sick, knowing there's nobody else in the house to help if I become critcally ill. '' I recently watched again "The Informer". I found it more realistic, more convincing than any modern movie, and it doesn't contain any profanities or obscenities, no jets of spurting blood, no nakednesses. I think the moral is plain: intelligent acting and direction can achieve more effectively the goals that today's filmmakers seek through cheap sensationalism. '' But old conservatives in FAPA shouldn't like the present membership limit. Having 65

members was an idea that seemed as radical a heresy to FAPA when the membership limit was 50 as the recent proposal to raise the limit above 65 has been considered by some members. If there's any lesson in the matter, it seems to involve the fact that FAPA was more willing to change at one time than it is today. '' I'm NFFF teller and the most recent election put me in awful peril. There was a major writein campaign for the presidency. But some members who wrote in the name of the unlisted candidate failed to check the little box before the space provided for writein names. If the outcome had been closer, I would have been forced to announce two sets of results, one counting the unchecked writein ballots on the theory that the intent was there, another set of totals without those ballots because they failed to carry out the letter of the law, and however the officers decided to handle the situation, I would have been under fire from one side or the other for doing it that way. Then there was the difficulty caused by the fact that two ballots were sent to each member, apparently so one could be voted and one could be saved, but there weren't speicific instructions and some persons voted twice. Past, Present & Future: I wouldn't be surprised if a Dr. David H. Keller revival occurred soon. His fiction is due for rediscovery, much of it is better than its general reputation, and as soon as a paperback firm gets the notion to distribute a good-sized collection of his shorter fiction, I think a boom will begin. Then watch the collectors buzz around, because almost all the books and magazines which contain Keller fiction are already scarce and expensive. Notes from Arinam: I wouldn't mind nine-digit zipcodes, as long as they don't consist of a mixture of numerals and capital letters like those in Canada and England which are so clumsy to type. If the zipcodes are all changed, why can't they start with the same three numerals used by the telephone company as area codes for dialing? It would simplify things for the memory. '' I recently compiled statistics on a couple of hundred local newlyweds, to determine how many local young persons were emigrating after growing up around here. One thing I noticed but didn't keep an exact count on: the fact that a phenomenally large number of the local brides who have jobs are employed in either government work or in jobs that are largely financed by tax money. A much larger proportion of the bridegrooms seemed to be working in private enterprise jobs. I don't know if it was just coincidence; or a purely local situation, or an example of a national pattern. '' Public libraries must lose a frightful number of books by theft. I've often kept watch at the local library for a year or longer for something listed in the card catalog, and it never shows up. Not long ago, I got a letter from the library telling me I should return a book I'd borrowed months earlier. I knew I'd taken it back, because I'd needed it at the office, it was too bulky to fit into the desk drawers there, and I'd taken it back within 24 hours so it wouldn't get lost. I went to the library with the letter, told the girl at the circulation desk that I'd already returned the book, she said "Okay," and that was that. Fosh: A married couple will find it costs little or nothing more to buy a movie on videodiscs than to go to the movies in a theater. Count up the cost of two admission tickets, payment to a babysitter, maybe a parking fee, and a snack after the show, and the total will approach the projected cost of recorded movies. So even those who don't want to watch the same film many times might do a lot of purchasing, just to avoid all the complications involved in going to the movies nowadays. '' Considerable doubt has been cast

on the authenticity of those Shostakovich memoirs. But that composer must rank with Lovecraft in rise to esteem in learned circles. Even when his music was extremely popular during World War Two with the average music lover, he was dismissed as a charlatan by the musicologists. It's just in the past ten or twelve years that he has been treated more respectfully by the high and mighty in the musical establishment. Phantasy Press: I've run across several more examples of celebrities who published little magazines as youngsters, since writing on the topic in one of the fan history volumes. It seems to be a frequent impulse for some reason among those with the potential to do spectacular things later in life. The Rambling Fap: I feel awe when I read about people spending all that time under water but it seems as far out of my potentialities as a walk on the Moon. I got off to a bad start with life in the water. I must have been only five or six years old when I acquired my first bathing suit. My parents promptly took me to a nearby creek to go wading. I enjoyed it for a few seconds, then some water splashed on the bottom part of my garment. Instant internal chaos and external howling. I'd had it drummed into me so often that I shouldn't get new clothing wet that I couldn't make an exception for a new bathing suit. I spent the rest of that outing trying to recover my composure amid this sudden upheaval in expected behavior patterns and I never was really comfortable around the water after that. '' There's no way to know if staying on the job is worth the price I'm paying in emotional and physical tension; that depends on how many years of life lie ahead. It's a gamble which I'm taking because, as closely as I can calculate, three more years of work will provide me with about $5,000 more annual retirement income than I would have if I retired this month. The company pension rates take an abrupt leap for those who wait until the age of 60 to retire, social security benefits would be higher when I become 62, and I should be able to increase investments by a major amount if I stay on the job three more years. Five thousand extra bucks per year might turn out to be insignificant if inflation grows worse. But that added income might mm also turn out to be the difference between scrimping and having some spare spending money after retirement, it might finance a private room in a rest home eventually instead of the horror of sharing a room with another old man, and it might come in handy in other ways. Remember, even if I don't need to worry about supporting anyone else, that works both ways: there's nobody around to support me if I find I can't make ends meet after retirement. '' Meanwhile, my preparations for riding out the coming crisis seem a trifle conservative, compared with Gregg's prospective investment in a boat. I've bought a tiny electric heater which will just handle the bathroom, if there's no longer any heating oil for the furnace, I invested in an indescribable garment like a sleeping bag run wild, in case I want to watch television when there's no heat in the rest of the house, and I'm keeping a bit more cash on hand in case there should be a big run on banks which causes those institutions to close down for a while. That's it. The Speed of Dark: I dug out my fan history notes to find references to the early history of the Hugo awards, and their predecessors. Recommended reading for anyone interested in the topic who has acces to old fanzines: August, 1950, Spacewarp (prophetic item by Rick Sneary); Parsection, Sept. 15, 1961, item by Ben Jason about their design and creation; JD Argassy, #56, material by Sky Miller on the same creation topic; Tetrahedron, Kappa (I didn't note the date of the issue), Don Fran-

son summarizing early history of Hugos and IFA awards; Metrofan, March-April, 1958, account by Dick Ellington of snafus in getting early Hugos to their winners; Axe, April 29, 1961, description of Pittcon efforts to standardize Hugo award categories; Cry, April, 1962, Dirce Archer writing about the Pittcon's refusal to count 78 ballots; Axe, July 1, 1962, Larry and Noreen Shaw on terminology given awards in early years; Salamander, July-August, 1962, Dirce Archer on same topic; The National Fantasy Fan, Jan., 1963, unsigned account of Pittcon rules and Discon committee actions about Hugos; Science Fiction News Letter, April, 1950, Bob Tucker telling about Hydra Club awards; Emanation, February, 1961, Donald H. Tuck giving history of International Fantasy Award committee; Fantasy News, April 4, 1949, material about Fantasy Awards Committee project; Operation Fantast Handbooks for 1952 and 1953, facts about IFA; Yandro, January, 1963, Buck Coulson on same topic; Yandro, March, 1963, additional information on same topic by Ted Carnell; and Science Fiction News Letter, January, 1952, details on first IFA awards. I also used a publication on the IFA borrowed from Rick Sneary, not further identified in my notes, and things I learned at worldcon conversations with Dave Kyle and Bob Madle, but I didn't save my notes on the viva voce sources. Diaspar: This is encouraging. I actually recognize a few of the names of the famous pros whom Terry mentions this time. I must be more aware of the celebrities in prodom than I was a couple of years ago. The Devil's Work: Did Conan Doyle have opinions on Sherlock Holmes pastiches published during his lifetime? I think Mark Twain's A Double-Barrelled Detective Story would fall into this category. Yhos: I wish I d saved the originals to prove the existence of things local journallists wrote but someone else caught before publication. There was the society page reporter who took an item over the telephone about an Episcopalian corporate communion and described it as a "copulate communion at St. John's Episcopal Church". Another reporter did a feature story on a couple whose entrants had been particularly successful in area dog shows. "They were married in 1954 and immediately began breeding," he wrote. '' I think Prohibition would be a lesser evil than present circumstances. Yes, I have read all about the things that happened while the Volstead Act was effective, I've heard other tales from older local residents, and I can remember the last few years of Prohibition while I was a boy. But the situation wasn't nearly as bad as today's alcoholic chaos. And it would be easier today to find bootleg stills, thanks to infra-red photography techniques; it's hard to run a still without creating heat. '' In case nobody else has the energy to answer a couple of Art's questions, APA-55 is an apa which is meant for those born not earlier than 1955, and I think the letters mean But You Didn't Comment On My Zine. Goddamn Hobby: One thing I can't understand: the way the most intelligent people are so often presented with information on topics like computer systems via flipcharts, projected diagrams, and other techniques that I always associate with the first grade when we couldn't read well enough to understand the teacher without such pictorial aid. Is the television revolution so pervasive that even the intelligentsia needs diagrams and huge type and pictures to absorb information that could be provided through ordinary speech or on a page of printed words? I've sat through horribly boring presentations of this sort at school board meetings, county commissioner sessions, and so on, where the individuals for whom the presentations were meant had more than the ability to understand cat,

hat and rat. The Tiger Is Loose: I would think that the last thing Dylan would want to do is allow his listeners to understand the words to his songs. They always seemed strange to me, and just recently, when I acquired a couple of volumes of Dylan songs in printed form, I realized that they're the most hilarious nonsense since Lewis Carroll. Now I want to know if Dylan has intentionally bilked the public by following the pattern of Reginald Bunthorne, or if he is just another example of nature improving on art when he lies upon the daisies and discourses in novel phrases of his complicated state of mind whose meaning doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter. Shadow FAPA: I hope something comes of this, but I'm afraid I won't be able to participate as a publisher. It just wouldn't fit in with the massive cutback on my fanac that I've been observing in recent months. '' Some of those craters in the Jovian system as reproduced in the JPL pages look strangely like the stylized images of the sun that are found in Masonic publications and lodges. And the information on the 14th satellite of Jupiter seems incredible. Just think of the sightseeing attraction it will become when space travel is easy, whizzing so rapidly around Jupiter at only one-eighth of the distance between Earth and its moon. Pinball Lizard: This is very pleasant conreporting, for the most part. But my enjoyment is adulterated somewhat by the occasional references to drugs. Another of my friends has just been totally, irrevocably destroyed by drugs, leaving me less tolerant than ever toward them, even those that are legal. I know that many fans have demonstrated the ability to survive the use of drugs and I still get nasty forebodin s and worries when I read references to them. Orange Calendulas: On the other hand, I'm always very happy to discover evidence that fans are still possessed of the ability to enjoy older fiction, like The Good Earth as reviewed by Beverly Kanter here. Pearl Buck isn't one of my very favorite mundane authors, for no reason that occurs to me, but I'm still fond of her fiction and of this novel in particular. '' Why not send The Fantasy Amateur itself, not just ballots, to members separately? Frequently there is other material in it which demands quick attention of members, like news of activity credits needed or a proposed amendment, and complications arise when the FA arrives in the bundle only seven or eight weeks before the deadline for the next mailing, as it often did in recent years. Of course, it's not important if the promptness with which the past five mailings have gone out is maintained from now on. My November bundle arrived on Nov. 27, for instance, wonderfully fast. '' The Bruce Murray article contained information that is new to me, but I wonder if some of the apparent revelations have been disproved by the most recent photographs and other experiments of Mars probes. '' The Frank Malina memoirs are interesting, but they inadvertently provide me with an opportunity to grumble about another current fad. This is the custom of putting quotations from an article into bigger type and repeating them in the body of an article. I don't know who started doing this when but I didn't run across it until just a few years ago when those quotes started to bob up in TV Guide. I find them distracting to the eye and insulting to the intelligence. I can decide for myself what are the most important or striking sentences in what I'm reading. The space would be better utilized for a brief summary of the contents of the article published at its beginning, to help the reader decide if he's interested in the article. The rapid spread of this practice is good proof of the monkey see, monkey do nature of people in the editorial field today.

Me and the Detectives

One reason why I've read so little science fiction, the past year or two, is the large quantity of detective and mystery fiction which has been taking up my time. I don't think I'm undergoing any massive transformation from a science fiction fan to a mystery fiction fan. But I'm definitely intrigued, and somewhat unhappy at my failure to get involved in mystery fiction fandom when it began producing its own fanzines a few years back. I could have used the information and guidance they would have provided.

So it occurred to me that some ramblings about my recent reading in the mystery field might interest some people, if only in the sense that my unlearned reactions to famous writers and celebrated books will provide amusement to those who know better. Over the years, I seem to have found that mystery and crime fiction is the type of fiction which science fiction fans know the most about, after the fantasy field. So maybe it's natural that late in life I should have gone off on this new reading orgy, as well as inexplicable that it has taken me so long to do it.

Until this decade, I'd read very little mystery fiction. I remember buying one or two Ellery Queen novels when paperback reprints first became available. I read Argosy during its last few years as a fiction magazine, and it occasionally ran mysteries, although not often the classic type; more often they were offbeat things like Theodore Roscoe's wonderful novelets which I want to dig out and reread someday. I have vague memories of a brief interest in Mary Roberts Rinehart, after seeing a movie based on one of her stories, but that had no lasting effect. I doubt if I averaged more than one mystery novel a year otherwise. I don't remember having any particular reason for so rarely reading mystery and crime fiction; there just happened to be other kinds of fiction that I preferred to it.

But there was one episode almost two decades ago that may have touched off my recent interest in a delayed reaction manner. Early in 1961, I was hospitalized for several months with a broken hip. A friend brought me three or four books to read. Among them was one of the many Viking Press three-deckers in which Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe novels have been reprinted. I began reading it more out of a sense of gratitutde toward the donor than because of any real interest. But pretty soon, I was fascinated, and I think I know why. I was in a terrible fuddle at the time: I didn't know if I'd be a semi-cripple from the accident, I still wasn't over the shock caused by the recent death of my father, I misinterpreted a passing remark of my surgeon as a hint that he'd discovered a serious internal problem in me unrelated to the hip, and I was terribly alienated in the sense that everything around me was strange and everyone I saw except for occasional visitors was an unknown. The old brownstone on West 35th Street and its inhabitants and their routine were exactly what I needed: even though they were fiction, they were something that didn't change, that offered a sense of the familiar to the reader even after the first few pages of one novel. Somehow I felt more confident that I would someday find myself again around familiar things and familiar faces, because I could find Archie, Wolfe, Fritz and Theodore in the same old surroundings whenever I turned to new pages in this three-novel collection. I do believe I might have had more serious adjustment problems to the hospital than the bedsore which turned out to be the worst result, if it hadn't been for that book. My friend told me to pass the books along to

someone else when I finished with them. I obeyed, and now I wish I'd cheated. I would like to own that particular copy of that omnibus Stout volume as a souvenir because I developed great affection for it. Ironically, I no longer can remember which of the Nero Wolfe novels it contained. My memory wasn't functioning very well during that period because of sedatives.

This adventure had no immediate consequences. I seem to remember reading several John Dickson Carr novels around the same time, and enjoying them quite a bit. But reading more mystery fiction was a concept that seemed to be best fitted for filing with an imposing multitude of other notions for possible action at some future time. Occasionally as the years passed I thought of Wolfe's household and personality with fondness, I started to watch a Perry Mason occasionally rerun on television late at night without feeling impelled to read the novels on which the tv series was patterned, and I remember being repeatedly interested in the fanzine material about Dorothy Sayers that two or three science fiction fans kept writing. But it wasn't until the mid-1970's that I began to do anything about this semi-interest. I don't know why it happened then. It's too late to be explained by the male climacteric and too early to be a feature of second childhood. Yard sales must have helped: they'd begun in Hagerstown around the start of the 1970s and I'd begun frequenting them several years later, resulting in endless temptations in the form of stacks and stacks of paperback mystery novels for a nickel or so apiece. Fanzines seemed to feature a bit more mystery fiction in this decade, too. The Moffatts must have helped with their JDM fanzine, since Travis McGee and some of the other books included in their fanzine references are mysteries of sorts. Then there are the fans who are Sherlock Holmes enthusiasts and kept rambling in their fanzines on that interest. I was growing increasingly jaded with science fiction, or what is published under that designation in these latter days. I started to buy mystery paperbacks occasionally, using as an excuse the old vision of a post-retirement future in which I'll need lots of reading matter, as well as some hardbound three-deckers by Stout and several other writers. If one thing got me going more than any other, it may have been the fact that the local Goodwill Industries store began to put on its book shelves vast quantities of old Detective Book Club volumes. I started to buy them up for a dime each, feeling they'd be the best way to get myself acquainted with a lot of the mystery fiction writers who were active just before and after mid-century.

Now that I'm off to a start on the task of getting acquainted with the enormous field of mystery and detective fiction, I find the Rex Stout novels to be the ones I love best in the field. I suppose that by now, I own at least a couple dozen of the Wolfe novels, and it's co forting to know how many others still remain to be enjoyed for the first time as I run across them. (I have made no attempt to collect systematically and my inability to force myself to store systematically my fanzines and correspondence extends to my mystery and detective books.) I feel just as much affection for the old brownstone now as I did when I needed something like that more acutely than at present. Here is the basis of the greatest of all Rex Stout's mysteries, I think: how was he able to make sympathetic and lovable to his readers a way of life that no normal person could endure if he somehow found himself a permanent guest in the fictional household? Goodwin is clearly a loudmouthed smartass, Wolfe has appalling manners and lack of decency toward most humans,

the other brownstone residents are too loyal and consistent to be good companions, and it's a tossup whether orchid cultivation or gourmet cooking is more alien to my interests. Additionally, there is a faint resemblance to a feudal lord holed up in his moated castle, in the obsession for locking out the world; then there's the near-paranoid attitude of Wolfe to women, which makes me wonder why NOW or some such group didn't have Stout assassinated long ago.

But somehow it all meshes into a wonderful whole. Part of the secret must lie in Stout's ability to keep a light touch in even the heaviest places. Goodwin's obsession with specifying exact times, sums, addresses and quantities is both old maidish and relevant to the plots, his love-hate relationship to Wolfe is an element that typifies how impossible it would be to translate these stories properly to movies, and there must be about a hundred little components of repetitive nature that help to make the reader feel comfortably at home. If I had a few more centuries to live instead of only a few more years, I'd love to go through all these novels and pick out how many small variations can be found on one of these components like "his lips had started to go in and out".

I don't know enough about mystery fiction to justify imposing suggestions and recommendations on other readers. But I think one exception might be justified. If you're just discovering the Wolfe novels, don't read "The Black Mountain" for a while. This is the one in which the sedentary Wolfe not only leaves the old brownstone but tramps through the Balkans. It's a combination of the impressive and the hilarious that means much more to the reader after he is thoroughly accustomed to the detective's home-loving nature.

I'm quite aware that I've gone on and on about the Stout stories in the same general manner that some fans adopt when they write about Sherlock Holmes. This probably means that Nero Wolfe means to me what Conan Doyle's hero means to many readers. Maybe I'll alter my opinion before long, but I haven't been able so far to get caught up in the Sherlock Holmes enthusiasm that so many wise and experienced mystery story readers possess. I acquired one of those heavy one-volume collections of all the Holmes stories about a year ago. Ever since I've been dipping into it from time to time and I still have a couple hundred unread pages to go. I wouldn't have read more than a thousand pages if I didn't enjoy the stories but I can't conscientiously claim to be enraptured with them. Maybe I read too many parodies and pastiches of Holmes stories before tackling the original (I seem toremember reading only one or two of these stories in the past, probably in anthologies), maybe I expected too much from the book because of its reputation, maybe it's just a case of not being the right person for the stories. I suspect one more difficulty which is more to the credit of Doyle than to his debit: the plot devices and narrative techniques which he used as a pioneer have been so often imitated by later writers that now the writer who was responsible for them seems to me like the imitator, the resorter to story-telling cliches. For example, I was able to guess while reading "The Valley of Fear" what would happen in the next few pages, time after time, and I'm sure that most readers when the novel was new found a surprise on almost every page simply because they hadn't been so inundated with the same literary legerdemain in their past reading. Nevertheless, I think I'm justified in grumbling that Doyle did repeat himself too often in certain ways, particularly in the use of an old vendetta long ago and far away as the explanation of seemingly unmotivated violence in the time in which the story is laid.

And I wonder how much of the stories' reputation should be credited to the way they describe London and the supernumeraries from that city among the characters, rather than to the detective and his feats. I would love to wander through the London described by Doyle, as long as Sherlock Holmes wasn't making himself a nuisance at my side.

On the other hand, I feel the most unmitigated enthusiasm for a later crime-solver in England. Ngaio Marsh's Roderick Alleyn novels are a good place to bring up one of the matters which I think makes me enjoy so much reading a lot of mystery fiction. The Marsh novels, like much other good mystery fiction, seem so much more civilized than the novels in most other types of fiction, including science fiction. There are usually at least a few cultured characters with manners, broad interests, and the ability to express themselves fluently. Marsh sometimes puts his most telling things into direct narrative, like: "Ricky had the newly made look peculiar to little boys in bed... One would have said he was so new that his colors had not yet dried." But most of the time, the author transmutes his inspirations into quotations from the conversations of his characters, and most of them talk intelligently even when they are stupid enough to be murderers or murderees. Consider Lord Pastern and Bagott in "A Wreath for Rivera". He is wildly eccentric, and he would talk like a halfwit if he were the character of a science fiction writer. In this mystery novel, he talks as a slightly batty English uppercrust middle-aged man would talk, even when he's intent on playing the drums in a dance orchestra. Moreover, Marsh has a genius for putting incompatible things together in one story and making them seem like compatible cogs in a watch mechanism: in the case of "A Wreathe for Rivera" it's not only the dance band but also an advice to the lovelorn columnist and drug traffic. Somehow these mix nicely with the help of a group of improbable but real-seeming major characters. You feel sure that a woman named Cecile de Fouteaux Pastern and Bagott would write in a letter: "It is understood that after a certain time one should not expect the impossible of one's husband."

I'm also impressed by the way the Ngaio Marsh novels succeed while apparently breaking all the basic rules of mystery fiction. "Spinsters in Jeopardy" has a plot that might get a failing grade if conceived by a writing class student for an examination. Nobody is sure if there has been a murder until the novel is near its end, and this possible murder takes a back seat to a kidnapping which takes up a great deal of wordage and seems to create the novel's final climax with some forty per cent of the novel yet to come. In "Night at the Vulcan" the murder seems almost an afterthought, coming about two-thirds of the way through the novel. And I must admit that there is some dubious motivation or procedure somewhere in each of the Alleyn novels I've read. I doubt if real-life police would fail to launch an exhaustive investigation into the identity of the lovelorn columnist as long as the ones do in "A Wreath for Rivera" and "Spinsters in Jeopardy" revolves around a coincidence of Dickensian improbability: a momentary glimpse through a train window of what may be either a killing or a charade in a room of a large house.

I like particularly "Night at the Vulcan" for what seems to be topnotch recreation of the individuals and atmosphere of a stage production. Admittedly, I am no expert on the legitimate stage, but it seems real from what I've seen in my associations with the local little theater group and a lot of reading about the stage in non-fiction books. Marsh achieved in this novel the feat of making a

non-existent play seem like a real one. I wouldn't be surprised if Marsh actually wrote a play called "Thus to Revisit"; it would probably be easier than to try to think up dialog and plot and characters as he went along in the novel. In fact, I'd like to see this play produced. It sounds like an interesting Pirandello-type drama of the sort that might have been successful a couple of decades ago. Then there's the dialog given to the novel's playwright. Dr. John James Rutherford usually talks in a florid way that I think is partly derived from Shakespeare, partly made up in the same general pattern by the novelist, and I'm sure I'm not enough of a scholar to separate all the genuine Shakespeare quotations and paraphrases from the rest, in quotes like: "Upon my soul, the whirligig of time brings in his revenges. Even to the point where dull detection apes at artifice, inspectors echo with informed breath their pasteboard prototypes of fancy wrought. I am amazed and know not what to say." Again in this novel, Marsh does something any beginning writer would be scolded for: his heroine steps in during a last-minute emergency for a member of the cast and immediately rises from a complete unknown to a new sensation of the theater. The heroine is such a sympathetic character in this novel that the reader doesn't mind a bit the wornout nature of the event.

Agatha Christie has failed to win the unqualified admiration from me that she arouses in many other readers because I find her novels curiously uneven in merit: they all go through approximately the same motions but it seems real sometimes and a tired mimicking of formula on other occasions. Maybe part of the problem lies in the fact that so many of her books are parts of series featuring one or the other famous detective, creating a certain sameness in the need to say again in other words the things that characterize the little Frenchman and the elderly woman. Still, the Christie novels usually have that same civilized atmosphere that I admire so much, and the best of them appeal to me very much. I've been accumulating them much faster than I've had time to read them. Of those I've gone through so far, I think I prefer above all "The Hollow". M. Poirot plays a quite subordinate role in it, which I appreciate, and most of it is devoted to a family whose members are sharply differentiated, yet give the impression of relationship by the way they talk and act, even the obligatory dotty one, Lady Angkatell. Here's another mystery novel with an immensely appealing ingenue and with lines that would belong in a treasury of familiar mystery story quotations, like: "Go to Inspector Grange and say--what does one say to a moustache like that? It's such a domestic, family moustache."

Of course, I don't like all the mystery fiction I read. The Detective Book Club books came mostly without dust jacket, and in this form they contain absolutely no clue to the reader about the nature of their novels: no blurbs, no illustrations, no introductions, just title pages, copyright information, and the novels themselves. I like to approach unfamiliar fiction in this manner, because I can't be biased beforehand, but sometimes I find myself too far along in a novel to stop there before I realize it's not very well done. The DBC series seems particularly prone to include a lot of novels by the second-line female authors, all of whom have a bad habit that mystifies and annoys me. These second-rate women writers seem obsessed with their characters' hair, particularly the hair of the women characters. Mignon G. Eberhart, who must have written a mystery novel every morning before breakfast, judging by the frequency with which she bobs up in this series, is perhaps the worst in this respect.

It's something like a dripping faucet close to your bed: it annoys you and if for some reason it stops briefly you start to wonder what is wrong. Sometimes Mignon manages to write two full pages without yielding to her hair fetish, but then she makes up for it on the immediately following pages. Typical examples can be found on most pages of "The White Dress". From page 122 of the DBC edition, for instance: "...her black hair streaming over her shoulders..." "blue dressing gown held right around her, brown braid over her shoulders"; page 123, "his thin, brownish-gray hair disheveled"; page 125, "... put her hand to her hair and nodded, too". Incidentally, this novel which isn't very good made odd reading for me for a special reason. During World War Two, the Fairchild Aircraft factory in Hagerstown had a public relations excutive named Jim Wales. A major character in "the White Dress" is an aircraft executive named Tim Wales. The copyright date is 1945, which causes me to wonder if the Wales I knew was an acquaintance of the author and became the topic of a Tuckerization for that reason.

I suppose the mystery fiction fans undergo as many soul-searchings as science fiction fans over the question of whether certain stories really belong in the classification of the fiction they prefer. Sometimes the DBC editions went pretty far out. In one particular instance, I'm happy about that deviation from the straight and narrow. If Donald E. Westlake's "I Gave at the Office" hadn't been published in a 1971 release, I probably wouldn't have known about it and that would have been a terrible shame because it's incredibly funny even though it doesn't have much to do with detectives and mysteries. If you feel you're spending too much time watching investigative reporters and documentaries on your television set, try to find a copy of this novel and read it. You can spare yourself in that manner any temptation to take seriously such forms of news reporting for all time to come. The novel consists of a television man's attempt to explain the events that happened after he tried to cover a revolution meant to restore democracy in the Caribbean. I laughed hard at places which I'm sure would reduce anyone in the television industry to hysterics, like the very first paragraph's advice on how the executives should listen to the tape on which he is narrating events: "The legal department can borrow a cassette from an engineer in the news department, if necessary, and play this report through the speaker in one of the elevators at The Hub." There is a ripping climax in which an old fellow who claims to be Desert Fox Rommel announces his decision to offer his services to Israel's fighting forces, the disclosure that the heroine is an undercover agent for the Women's Lib Movement, and an encounter with a stole-runner's vehicle.

Another aberration from the usual run of novels in this series appeared in 1958, judging by the copyright dates: Richard Matheson's "A Stir of Echoes". I'm not sure if this novel ever made a separate paperback edition, but I don't recall any mention of it in fanzine articles on that author. It's a story that starts with amateur hypnotics at a party that have a deeper effect on one of the participants than anyone imagined, like visits from a ghost, and precognition. It might not be complicated and fully developed enough to interest fantasy fans but it's worth watching for if you have much interest in a fine writer who doesn't receive today nearly the attention he deserves.

That same DBC volume is particularly interesting to me for a couple of other reasons. Another novel in it is Celestine Sibley's

"The Malignant Heart". There's a mystery involved in this novel that has nothing to do with the mystery in its plot. It involves a daily newspaper whose staff and plant are prominent throughout. The puzzle consists of the fact that many little things in the novel could hardly have been written by anyone except a person who had actually worked for a newspaper, and some other things in it are so ludicrously untrue to journalistic reality that they couldn't have been committed to paper by a journalist, past or present. Most of the time, the writer does a convincing job of reproducing the atmosphere of a newspaper building, the little details of how newspaper people do their job, but every so often a howler bobs up like her apparent belief that the woman who writes the recipe column has the same deadline as the front page and works frantically right up to that deadline. Newspapers aren't still "warm from the press" by the time they are distributed through the news room in my experience. I can't imagine what happened, unless Celestine arranged for someone with newspaper knowhow to write out a batch of things she could insert to provide authenticity, and then she used her own imagination to make up the unreal stuff. One merit the novel has is its recognition of the fact that the press room and other mechanical areas of a large newspaper are quite scary and strange places to be when they're deserted and not well lighted. A climax of the novel benefits from being placed in that setting. I can't remember any movie using that particular environment for a suspense scene, and someone in Hollywood has missed a good bet, although come to think of it, I imagine on location shooting there would pose really tough lighting problems, what with the high ceilings, all the stuff that would throw deep shadows, and general lack of reflective surfaces to cut down on contrast.

And the third novel in this volume is anothe fine Ngaio Marsh novel, "Singing in the Shrouds". I forgot to mention when I was writing about the Alleyn stories one special merit: the real emotion and tenderness and happiness that zooms up from the paper and hits you square in the face, whenever Alleyn and his wife are together for a few paragraphs. It's done so cunningly by Marsh that the reader can't discover what gives the impression, among the words he is looking at. William Powell and Myrna Loy used to emanate something of the sort in parts of their Thin Man movie series, but they bickered too much from time to time to be an exact parallel for the Alleyns, who aren't as brittle and flip in their conversation as the screen couple were.

Another unwritten mystery is the matter of why I didn't get hooked on Ellery Queen when I started reading a few of his books. The Queen novels have the energy that I value so much in any fiction, and I can imagine my younger self making efforts to read all the Queen titles he could find in those newfangled paperback racks or in the library. But he didn't and so I have still at this late date barely gotten off to a good start on the imposing output under the Queen name. My ignorance of the field is such that I don't even know how to distinguish the genuine Queen books from those that obviously written by someone other than the collaborators. There seem to be quite a few paperbacks published in the last few years that have Ellery Queen in big letters on the cover but no "by" beside or above the name and whose contents are too differ nt from the usual Queen style and too inferior as mystery stories to be real Queens. The Queen novels brin; to mind something else I should know more about. More than most mystery novels, they deliberately set a chal-

lenge to the reader to figure out the identity of the murderer. In some Queen novels, the fact is literally stated at some point that all the needed information has been made known for the proper deductions to be made. In other Queen novels, the arrival of this point isn't pointblankly stated but it's easy to realize it by conversation of the characters. Now, I have a rather poor record of solving mystery stories before the author does it for me, but sometimes I succeed and occasionally I not only figure out who was the murderer but also many of the subsidiary mysteries involved in the how and the why. Some novelists seem to be easier for me to play detective successfully with than others. So I wonder if anyone has conducted surveys or research into the whole matter of reader participation in mystery stories. When I succeed in identifying the murderer before the author does, what causes my success on that particular occasion when I fail on so many other novels? Am I more attentive as a reader of certain novels than others? Or is it a case of some novels providing a much greater chance to the average reader to deduce correctly? Or is it linked somehow with my own personal prejudices and experiences and observations in real life, causing me sometimes to suspect one particular character because he's similar to someone I have known in the real world, someone who has either been a criminal or has offended me in some manner or has behaved in a suspicious style? Yes, I know that the pure, unadulterated reader of mystery fiction appreciates more the manner of its telling and the ingenuity of its plotting than as a puzzle whose answer is the be-all of the novel. But it still makes me feel perceptive and superior to figure out the murderer all by myself, and stupid to have missed such obvious clues in the many novels whose denouement is a surprise to me.

There is also the basic question of whether I should read and like fiction based on killings and other crimes. As I've often emphasized in Horizons and other fannish places, I think it's wrong to entertain oneself with books whose amusement is based on real tragedy or calamity. I can comprehend the shakiness of my position if I relax with fiction based on imaginary crime. The best I can do in this embarrassing situation is to tell myself that the mystery fiction I enjoy isn't really violent. The killings often happen offstage or occupy only a few paragraphs, virtually all of the narrative deals with society's fight against unpunished evil, and it's pretty hard to find any fiction that doesn't contain some misfortune for its non-existent characters. Some consolation to my conscience consists of the fact that I don't like and don't read the tough guy and violence-filled school of detective and mystery fiction writing. Chandler and his imitators aren't civilized enough to suit me.

The biggest moment I've encountered during this mystery fiction spree was the acquisition of the DBC edition containing Bob Tucker's "The Chinese Doll". Inability to obtain this first of Tucker's novels was a black moment in my youth. As I recall, I couldn't find a copy of the paperback edition in Hagerstown and I couldn't afford to buy the hardcover, or maybe it appeared at a time when I couldn't even spare the quarter that pape backs cost at the time. All down through the years, I hoped to run across a second-hand copy somewhere, never did, and finding the novel in this form was a double surprise because I didn't know until that moment that it had been published in this series.

Someday, I hope to write an article for a general fanzine on "The Chinese Doll" which is important not only for giving Tucker a start as a novelist but also because I think it's the first major

instance of his Tuckerisms. Bob wasn't the first to use fans' names for fictional characters and I think he'd done it himself before this novel in a prozine story or two. But I don't recall anyone doing it in something as imposing as a novel, and certainly not in non-fantasy fiction. If I should write that article, I hope to verify with Bob the sources of all the names, some of which are obvious but others are doubtful. The narrator-hero of the novel is named Charles Horne. Is that supposed to be a slight variant on pioneer fan Charles Hornig? And is my suspicion correct that Harry W. Evans is a combination of me and E. Everett? Incidentally, this method of naming characters in fiction would never work for me. When I was selling some fiction to the prozines almost a quarter-century ago, I found it necessary to choose names that were totally different from those of anybody I knew. I just couldn't master the knack of imparting fictional characteristics to anyone in a story whose name reminded me of an acquaintance. If some wild circumstance decreed that I must write novels and use Tuckerisms for the characters' names, I could accomplish it only by writing the story from beginning to end with names that are neutral to me, then retyping it word for word except for the insertion of the ne , familiar names.

Reading it for the first time, after all these years, I thought "The Chinese Doll" was a superior mystery story. It's hard to judge impartially its early chapters in which fandom figures because of the obvious special interest they have for me. But the science fiction and fannish atmosphere blows away as the book goes along, and it held my interest to the end. Of course, I suppose an analyst could argue that fandom pervades the entire novel because of the basic manner in which the story is presented, a series of long letters from Horne to a friend. Would it have occurred to Tucker to reactivate that antique method of story-telling if he hadn't been active so long in a hobby where contacts were at that time mainly made through the post office?

As far as I know, the novel hasn't been in print anywhere for a long while. It might need to be retitled if a new edition appeared today, to lessen the risk of ulcerous complications for its feminist readers. I was surprised to find that the doll of the title is used as a slang term for a woman character, and there's no plaything for little girls anywhere in the novel. And I suppose there is lamentably small chance that the novel will ever form the basis for a TV movie, not because of any flaw in the way it's put together but because it would be almost impossible to contrive for the screen the equivalent of the way the denouement is worked out on the printed pages, a denouement which I understand was the thing that won the most praise from reviewers when the novel first appeared.

I don't like to watch television versions of mysteries involving famous fictional detectives, as a rule. I watched one of the episodes in the most recent effort to put Ellery Queen on the tube and it confused me so badly the next time I was reading a Queen novel, with the conflict between memory of the tv actors and my mental pictures of Queen and his father, that I couldn't enjoy Queen fiction until memory of the television episode faded. A Nero Wolfe movie is scheduled next week by one television network and I'll shun it. But Iwatched some Perry Mason episodes on television before I'd read much if anything of the Erle Stanley Gardner series. So I find myself able to cope with the same characters in two forms: the television actors saved me the trouble of conjuring up mental pictures of the continuing characters in the Gardner books. On the whole, I

believe in this one instance I prefer the television series to the books. Maybe I'd feel differently if my acquaintance with Perry Mason had begun with the novels and then turned to the screen. But as it is, Gardner's novels impress me as entirely too wordy, particularly too filled with conversation. The characters chatter on and on endlessly and most of the time it's for no real purpose. The novels that were turned into television episodes and the new plots contrived by others for the television series seem to benefit from the limits that hour-long episodes imposed on dialog. I must confess, however, that nowadays the syndicated Perry Mason episodes are too severely deprived of conversation. Those shown nowadays over channels in Baltim re and Washington seem to have at least six or seven minutes cut to make room for more advertising than was used when they were on the network in prime time. Some of this cutting has been done so clumsily that certain episodes are simply incomprehensible, because a key incident or motivating incident has been wiped out. One point in favor of the Perry Mason novels is their more consistent characterization of the lawyer as a slightly shifty sort of attorney. He is more careful to follow the lawyers' code of ethics on television but also duller. I think Gardner also put the police into a slightly better light than the television script writers did. Tragg and his associates are paragons of virtue on the tube, compared with the brutal anti-police propaganda that is usual in crime and mystery series being produced today, but they still aren't shown as individuals more interested in justice than in convictions for convictions' sake.

Occasionally I've run across a mystery novel which seems exactly right in every way to me, and when this happens, I always wonder why it isn't more famous. One of these happens to be extra-special because its setting ties in so well with my interests. It's Edmund Crispin's "Dead and Dumb" in which most of the principals are members of an opera company, for mercy's sake. Better yet, Crispin is that rarest of animals, a novelist who knows what he's doing when he writes about the world of serious music. (James Cain is one other who comes to mind immediately and I can't think offhand of a third.) I couldn't find even the smallest blunder from the musical standpoint in "Dead and Dumb" until near the end. I feel certain that no opera company would risk starting the overture for a performance of Die Meistersinger at a time when the principal tenor who is to sing Walther is not even in the building. Maybe Crispin permitted himself this improbability deliberately, for the sake of a tense climax. I can't find anything in that section of the novel concerning an understudy or certainty on the part of the company officials that the heldentenor is pedalling his bicycle toward the opera house when the conductor swings for the first time his baton. (The overture runs around eight minutes, on the average, the tenor must be on stage when the curtain rises to indulge in pantomime as the choir sings the chorale, and his first words come perhaps two minutes after the curtain's rise in quick dialog with the soprano and contralto that would be almost impossible to conduct in a tenorless manner. It would be something like a big Harlan Ellison controversy with Harlan remaining totally silent.) Of course, it might also be possible to argue that nobody would murder a baritone who is famous as a Hans Sachs, but murderers sometimes exceed even their normal excesses of violence and I suppose that could happen, too. I love the character of Mr. Levi for his chatter about opera orchestras. "You know 'ow it is with double basses. They wink and snig-

ger. It's the dames...what makes 'em wink and snigger. I tell you, I seen double basses behave in a public concert like in a way would 'ave made me old mother blench, but it's all the same nowadays, it's Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée, the dames themselves is to blame for 'alf of it." It reminds me of my modest career as a musician in the local amateur symphony orchestra long ago.

Then there are most of the novels of Cornell Woolrich which I've encountered: they are almost as dependable for excellence as those of Fredric Brown. I seem to remember Woolrich as one of the more dependable contributors to Argosy during the 1930's and I seem to trace some influences of the pulp magazine style in his books. But no harm. The pulps had the great virtue of teaching writers to make themselves clear and stick to the point. It would be a wonderful thing if they were still around as a kindergarten for today's science fiction writers, who fail so miserably on those two grounds. Woolrich's "Rendezvous in Black" must be one of his better known novels, judging by the frequency with which I see copies of it in used paperback stacks. It seems to have particular relevance today, when the question of how to cope with criminals when the courts don't is such a big one. People didn't have the impulse to go out and seek vengeance themselves in the late 1940's, when this book was copyrighted, as they do today. I suspect that the novel may have been written with the movies in mind. The closing scene, in particular, is told in a way that makes the reader almost see it happening on a giant screen at the end of the theater. Some years later, a DBC edition did something unusual: it published a collection of Woolrich novelettes instead of a novel, giving them the general title of "Violence". Maybe some of these actually appeared in pulp magazines, because two of them have copyright dates in the 1930's. They bring to mind another matter. I'm even less well versed in the shorter mystery stories than in the novels. I've read several anthologies, a few issues of the Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine, the Sherlock Holmes short stories, and a sprinkling of other mystery fiction which doesn't stretch out to novel length. As a rule, I think I prefer novel-length mysteries. Too often, I've reacted to the short stories and novelettes as I would toward a crossword puzzle: something more suited for passing away the time than for treasuring in memory and perhaps turning to again later on. Poe proved that good short mystery fiction can be written, and I'm sure there's a lot of it by other writers which I simply haven't run across yet. But it's curious that the other type of fiction I know best, science fiction, is so comfortable in the shorter lengths and how often the novel-length science fiction story turns out to be either a collection of pasted-together shorter stories or the most routine type of hackneyed activities which have been invented solely to propagandize this or that cause in a thin futuristic disguise. The Woolrich novelettes are superior, particularly the grim first one about the efforts of a murder suspect to escape and its implications of what lies ahead for him after the novelette ends.

I don't care for the sort of mystery stories which seem to be almost as standardized as gothics, the ones that are usually by female writers and always put a virtuous but slightly stupid girl into peril because she happens to be near a murder, and end with a frantic rescue by the hero as the unmasked murderer is about to do away with her. But I don't actively dislike those of this genre I've read, as I do the only novel I've read in Van Wyck Mason's Major North series. I used to think of Mason as the author of fairly good long historical

novels which I never seemed to get around to reading more of. But "The Rio Casino Intrigue" impressed me as awfully clumsy writing, with a hero possessed of loathesome perfection, and other characters who talk less convincingly than the dialog in a Victorian melodrama. It doesn't help that the novel is set in the DBC edition in extra-large type which appears almost double-spaced for the wide gap between lines. What are we to make of a mystery novel that begins with a barrage of sibilants for no apparent purpose like "Steadily the sunlit skyscrapers and soot-smeared factory chimneys of Sao Paulo commenced to sink...."? Or statements like "Aurora's voice intruded on his ruminations as a cacophony caused by competing bands swelled louder"? Or "It seemed truly a despicable thing further to torture that unhappy soul"? Then there's the amazing barrage of wornout cliches in the dialog. On one page I find in direct quotations "Which could be taken two ways", "an unexpected surprise", "It was all most unfortunate", "I think so, but I'm not sure, of course" and "once too often".

I've been unable to locate my copies of some mystery novels which I wanted to write about. So I'll be vague and inaccurate in what I say about them without firm references. For instance, I own at least one John Dickson Carr three-decker and several of his novels in paperback. It's a shame, because I admire them immensely but I think I spotted a few inconsistencies and improbabilities in their carefully contrived plots and it would be nice if I could show off a little by appearing wise on such matters. I'm not sure if it was that 1960 broken hip or another convalescence that Carr's fiction helped me to get through with some of my sanity intact. After I've finished a Carr novel, I sometimes feel as if the ingenuity of the author had gotten in the way of his story-telling function. But I don't mind this chess-game-solution flavor while I'm actually reading a Carr novel. It might be possible to list a lot of parallels between Carr as an author and Hitchcock as a director. They don't obtain their effects in similar ways but there's always the sense of an immensely capable and strong personality governing everything that happens. There's never any passage where the story seems to have briefly shaped its own destiny, just as you never see a scene where the actors appear to be indulging in a bit of improvisation. All that control is bad in the hands of less talented people, but I think it's justified when exercised by this novelist and that director.

Then there are the Dorothy Sayers novels which seem to be the second-best loved by fans after the Holmes stories. I must have read six or seven of the Wimsey novels by now. I'll proclaim unmitigated adoration of them if I may be permitted one minor qualification. I think they're wonderful novels rather than mystery novels. Sometimes I get a bit annoyed when the characters stop whatever they have been saying and doing in order to turn their attention back to the murder mystery. This may be the factor that has made me think some of these novels would have been improved if the author had engaged in some judicious cutting. Sayers had such a wonderful knack of character sketching, and it seems a shame that she stopped this artistry from time to time to fill a few pages with discussions of whether a suspect could have ridden a bus and still have committed his murder, all of it backed up by extensive quotations from a timetable. Here is another instance in which I've failed to watch televised versions of mystery novels. Even if the dramatizations that PBS stations have been running are better done

than adaptations on commercial networks, I don't feel inclined to risk my mental images of yet another series of books.

I've expressed previously in Horizons my great admiration for Fredric Brown's murder novels. I suppose some of these come dangerously close to the nature of the mystery stories I don't read for their over-reliance on toughness and violence. But in Brown the rough things seem to be the inevitable outgrowth of the story which he is telling, rather than obligatory sensations which the author inserts to satisfy readers who like that sort of thing. I was lucky enough to findin mint condition a hardcover edition of "The Screaming Mimi" a while back. After I'd reassured myself to the effect that it wasn't an account of the performances of certain prima donnas in a popular Puccini opera, I found it intensely interesting and, curiously enough, its style and content impressed me as quite close to the kind of mystery stories Bob Tucker might have produced if he'd continued in that field for a few more years. The revelations at the climax are just the sort of surprise that Tucker might have used in one of the mystery novels he didn't write. One curious thing about Brown's fiction is the neutral sort of style he utilized. He used mostly short words and brief sentences but not doggedly enough to make it seem like an affectation. He didn't give many of his characters the sort of personal characteristics and behavior quirks that make them seem bigger than life or one-in-a-million, yet many of them stick in the memory. Like Max Brand, he seems to have inserted a quotable line or two just often enough to prove that he could do it if he wanted to, but not often enough to make the story seemprecious. For instance: "Death is an incurable disease that men and women are born with; it gets themsooner or later. A murderer never really kills; he but anticipates." Or: "Sleep, too, could be good, but you always woke up to confusion and complication and the thousand little unpleasantnesses that periodically mount up to one vast unpleasantness...."

The copyright notice page of this edition identifies the novel as an expansion of a story published in Mystery Book Magazine in 1949, if I remember accurately the way to translate Roman numerals. This, I presume, was a pulp. It makes me wonder how many Brown treausures may lie buried in the enormous quantities of detective and mystery pulps published during the years when Brown was selling fiction. Maybe mystery fandom has already tracked many or most of them down. If there can be such things as interminable series of reprints of Doc Savage, I don't see why some paperback line or other shouldn't start to put Brown's fiction back into print. It seems very hard to find any Brown books nowadays in any edition, except perhaps for several of his science fiction books.

One Brown novel which I don't have at hand just now, however, brings up one matter that worries me and makes me wonder if mystery writers or publishers shouldn't use more restraint. It's the story of the disappearance of a man's wife and his frantic efforts to find her. The disappearance is explained as a probable kidnapping, whose victim is kept heavily sedated by the villain. In that novel, Brown identified the chemical and the dosage which could have this effect on a captive. I wonder if that is right. It's hard to believe that the novel would be any the worse if the author had been vague in that one paragraph, omitting specifics. I don't think mystery story readers use them as background material for their criminal activities. But there must be an occasional exception. If just one of the tens of thousands of persons who read that novel seized upon

that paragraph and used its information in a real-life abduction, isn't it a case of freedom of the press being misused as license? In another novel not by Brown I read not long ago a dissertation on why so many would-be suicides live after slicing their wrists, followed by an explanation of the wrist-slashing technique that almost guarantees prompt death. Many persons try to kill themselves in a brief fit of despondency and if they fail, they never repeat the attempt. Did that book provide information which ended the lives of one or more persons who might have survived and regained their mental equilibriam, if the writer hadn't decided to convey his knowledge on the topic to everyone?

John D. MacDonald's novels often don't qulify as murder mysteries. But many of them have certain qualities in common with the breed and others are definitely in the classic tradition. In general, my reaction to JDM runs in inverse ratio to his popularity with the general public. I felt considerable disappointment with the big books that hit the best-seller list or attracted attention from the general literary establishment, I have considerable reservations in my admiration for the Travis McGee series, and I am extremely fond of a lot of the obscure JDM novels published long ago before he became so successful. Many of them strike me as better than Hemingway in a lot of ways: none of the self-conscious authorial intrusions that you can find in most Hemingway fiction, the same economy with words without overuse of certain words that obsessed Hemingay like "clean", and less of a defeatist atmosphere. Obviously, most of the early JDM novels were written rapidly. I'm sure they would be even better if he had written only one or two novels a year and worked harder on each. But there's no changing the past and I'm content with what we have.

I suppose my semi-dissatisfaction with the McGee series is inspired mainly by the fact that it is a series. After reading three or four novels about the same hero, I begin to grow a bit impatient with the attitudes and the conduct of the hero. I can understand an intelligent teen-ager engaging in the sort of life that McGee lives but I can't believe in an intelligent mature man failing to have second thoughts about an interminable series of promiscuities, the perpetual uncertainty over where next month's money will come from, and what all that alcohol is going todo to the liver and irreplaceable brain cells. Yes, I know if JDM hadn't been consistent in his employment of McGee, there would be no McGee series. And I also realize how I'm prejudiced by my dislike of water, which leaves me unable to comprehend how any human being would want to live in a houseboat. I'm no libber but I feel that there are more sensible and intelligent women in the world than there are in McGee's universe, whose average female behaves most of the time like an eighth grader at recess time and the rest of the time like a nympho. I appreciate the many excellencies in small matters in the McGee series. For instance, JDM takes the trouble to contrive a good reason why the villain doesn't kill McGee immediately, in the scene which turns up in most books of the series which finds McGee temporarily at the bad guy's mercy. Most authors simply let the villain gloat and fiddle around without motivation in such scenes. The little sermons inserted here and there in the McGee books seem intrusive at first but by now I've grown accustomed to them and actually feel the sense of impending delight when I recognize that one is starting MacDonald seems to be the best of all mystery writers with respect to his homework. No matter what the specialized field involved in his plot,

JDM seems to have boned up on the topic so thoroughly that he can write about it with easy assurance, never sounding as if he were paraphrasing from a textbook. He also seems deadly accurate in the fields that I have any knowledge of. I can remember only one eyebrow raising in this respect among the McGee novels. One deals with rare stamps, the difference between perforations becomes important at one point in the plot, and I remember suspecting that the philatelic expert who was involved in this scene should have been able to spot the wrong sized perforations with the naked eye after many years of experience with the things. And I might be overestimating the ability of the human eye in this respect, because I haven't used a perforation gauge since I was in my middle teens and stopped my own stamp collecting.

There's one special attribute which mystery stories possess for me. I'm not sure if others have the same reading reaction that I experience: mystery stories never seem to intimidate me. I can't remember running across one that seemed too imposing to read and enjoy. There are many novels, both science fiction and mundane, which I've never been able to force myself to read, because the first pages contained too many big words or the words were put together in a way that was beyond my comprehension or the characters behaved in a way that left me too stupefied to continue. I suppose there are mystery stories like that, if one hunts hard enough, but the great bulk of them are pleasingly accessible. Curiously, I got off to a bad start in this respect. I must have been about ten years old when my parents gave me a collection of Edgar Allan Poe's fiction, including several of his mysteries. My Aunt Helen came visiting on Christmas day. She was a school teacher and she pounced on this particular gift. She immediately decided that it was too advanced for anyone my age. Truth to tell, the first time I'd opened the book that December 25, I'd been baffled by the style and the slow way in which the short stories began. But my aunt's edict altered the situation. I resented her butting in and I thought she was wrong anyway. So I forced myself to plow through the long sentences and the many pages in which there was no physical action, and I believe I eventually read virtually everything in that book. She was right in the sense that some of the things I read went over my head for one reason or another. And just possibly the episode had effect on my long delay in reading very much mystery fiction. I might have retained an engram which told me that mystery fiction was hard to understand, until I actually began reading some of it and found how easy it is to get into the swing of almost any mystery story.

Something else I've noticed is the fact that my reading speed is usually higher when I'm going through a mystery novel than its normal rate. I've always read fairly fast, compared to the average person, but I've never made any effort to indulge in speed reading; if I'm really in a hurry, I'll skim. I can think of several reasons why I should speed up when reading a mystery novel. It is more apt than many other types of fiction to have lots of conversation and conversation tends to contain a higher percentage of short words, which may cause the eye to jump faster. It's also possible that I am more anxious to get to the end when reading a mystery story, because of curiosity about the outcome. There's less reason to want to reach the end of many other types of fiction where there is no great amount of suspense involved. And mystery writers seem to have the tendency to write more lucidly than other fiction-makers. I'm

sure there are equivalents in the mystery field of Dhalgren but my luck has been good enough to spare me from finding them up to now.

Maybe the greatest mystery of all is the question of how long this reading kick will endure. So far, I've noticed no real slackening of my desire to continue reading mystery stories. I'm so far from having exhausted the works of the best writers in the field that I needn't worry for months or years about the way my interest may sag when I must turn to second-line authors because I've gone through the best ones. But I keep in mind the mysterious way in which I suddenly lost most of my interest in poetry, many years ago. That interest never came back even though I dutifully purchase the books of poetry I'd wished to own so much back in the years when I loved the stuff. Mystery fiction might curdle in my reading diet just as inexplicably and apparently permanently.

I'm so unschooled in the field that I don't even know where to look for lists of the entire output of the best mystery writers. I'm sure such lists have been compiled for many writers in the mystery fiction fanzines that I don't possess. I haven't read the biographies of mystery writers who have been so honored, but I imagine I could find Rex Stout, Agatha Cristie, and several other bibliographies there. Reference works on contemporary authors available at the local public library don't seem to list everything the individual wrote in the case of the more prolific authors. The indexes to those bulky book review compilations would probably provide the bulk of the titles by each writer I like, but I can't be sure that everything got reviewed, particularly in the case of British authors and those whose first novels weren't very successful or important.

Meanwhile, I have another problem that anyone who knows me might foresee. I don't even know exactly what I own. I've been buying mystery novels much faster than I've been reading them, thanks to the mysterious disappearance which my willpower so often attains when I'm at a big yard sale or the AAUW book bazaar and prices are exceptionally low. My memory isn't good enough to remember all the titles I've picked up. I usually can remember a title after I've read a book, and what's more, I can even remember having read it amid the spiritual intoxication of a second-hand book buying orgy. It's the unread ones that slip from memory. So I've undoubtedly picked up quite a few duplicates without realizing it. I keep telling myself that next month sure I'll tackle the task of dumping the contents out of all the boxes of books in the spare bedrooms, and also topple the quivering stacks of those which are already unboxed, then I'll undertake a massive and impressive sorting procedure to get all the science fiction separated from the mystery fiction and my books on music as well as those on the movies in their own segregations, and after that is accomplished I'll further sort out the stuff in each category by authors or in some equally ingenious manner, and start packing them away systematically so I can mark on the outside of each box what's inside. A wonderful dream, and logic tells me that if I continue to live a few more years, the law of averages should legislate that rarest of events, my carrying out a project which I've promised myself I'll do.

I even have wild notions about attending the next Bouchercon, if I'm correct in my understanding that it'll be in Washington. I don't quite know what I'll do there if I go, because I know next to nobody in that fandom and I probably wouldn't even recognize the

bulk of the pros on hand. Too much of my reading has been involved with the writers who were active earlier in this century, and I've paid no attention to some of those who have been successful in the past decade or two. But there would be one good thing about attending a mystery fiction con while I'm in this status. It would be as close as I couldcome to the peculiar reactions that most fans experience at their first science fiction convention. Nowadays, almost all fans attend a convention after only a few months of fanac, or at worst when they've had only a year or two exposure to the field. So they're relatively unsullied by the bad experiences and the semi-boredom that pile up after a person has been a fan of any type for quite a few years. As a science fiction fan, I never knew that sort of reaction to my first con. My first con came in 1960, almost a quarter-century after I'd first gotten into touch with other fans and more than two decades after I'd been first active in fanzine fandom. In a way, I felt like a neofan at that Phillycon, but in most ways I reacted to stimuli with the conditioning created by all those years of fanac.

Strangely, I can't imagine myself ever becoming a really active fan in the mystery fiction field. That is, I haven't the least desire to write learned articles about various aspects of mystery fiction, or compile reference works, or publish a mystery fiction fanzine, or even engage in a lot of correspondence with other fans. I could get ambitious later on, I suppose, if I keep reading long enough to feel I've acquired a pretty good knowledge of the basic literature in the mystery field so it'll be safe to open my mouth without making dreadful mistakes and misjudgments.

But I wonder how much future remains for the mystery fiction field. This question has undoubtedly been argued out to the point of repletion by its fans. I get the impression that the classic murder mystery is in severe difficulties as a literary form, surviving best when it's encased in some sort of glossy exterior like obscenity-laden books purporting to give an accurate picture of what it's like to be a sadistic policeman or a high-iq incest freak nowadays. Certainly the television "mystery" shows fail to inspire much confidence, since they rarely conceal the identity of the murderer from the viewer after the first five or ten minutes. It could be that attention span of people who grew up on television rather than on books is too short to justify a form of drama which must be watched all the way through to make its effect. I know there's a lot of reading still being done, but so much occurs during halfhours before the lunch hour ends or on buses or in other time segments which expire in a way that the reader can't control. So that may tend to inspire fiction which is as effective if you don't finish the story as if you went right straight through it.

But I shouldn't talk like that. I admit to a reading problem that even mystery fiction succumbs to. I have developed a nasty habit of getting unbearably sleepy, after a halfhour or so of uninterrupted rea ing. This behavior seems independent from the interest or boredom that the reading matter inspires. Am I hypnotizing myself with the printed page because I've also succumbed to the time span stunting which so many of us find our attentions suffering from? Is it the outcome of old age, a hint that soon I'll be unable to concentrate o more than a minute or so of conversation? Or could it be that I just don't get enough sleep? To the best of my knowledge, Macbeth was the only character in literature who murdered sleep, so I doubt if I'll find my personal villain unmasked in print.

The Worst of Martin

The Gentleman

One of those first luxurious warm days of spring when you may go for a walk ostensibly to inspect the weather, but rather to stretch like a tom-cat, for you can virtually feel the sap rising in you.

The park was large, deserted, an unspoiled woodland, and he swung down the shaded path thinking spring thoughts.

At a turn she was seated in a wheelchair, the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her face was like a cameo but with full sensuous lips, the proverbial enigmatic smile, and her figure, even in the wheelchair, he could see was lovely.

His sudden desire for this woman in the wheelchair made him blush furiously as she smiled back. Her tinkling laughter convinced him she knew his inner thoughts and he hurried on, confused and annoyed. And then he became interested. If she did know his passing fancy her laugh was inviting. What could he lose? Even if she said "no", flatly, his directness might amuse or flatter her.

"Delighted!" she said, when he made his unusual offer in a direct manner, befitting a gentleman with a serious but civilized problem. "I suggest you wheel me deeper into the wood. Although we are now off the main path, I think you can push me through those trees for the ground is fairly clear."

At a point beneath a low-hanging bough, she said: "Although I am unable to support myself on my yet-lovely but paralyzed legs, I have strong arms."

And she thrust herself up and hung from the limb with a practised agility. It was even possible for her, after what for some people would be the energating strain of many moments in that position, to manipulate her strong wrists and sway gently back and forth.

He was delighted with her hidden abilities and placing her back in the wheelchair, pushed her through the wood, all the while whistling in a satiated manner.

At the edge of the park, she said: "That's my apartment across the street, if you would care to push me so far."

"Love to!" he answered. "Would love to do it many a day. But tell me, who is that big man coming towards us?"

"My husband," she said. And the man was beside them.

"Darling," she continued, "this man was nice to me in the park."

He thought it ironic that the phrase "paralyzed with fear" should enter his mind and appear like a beacon of truth, a way of life.

The man swung around and shook his hand warmly.

"Thank you, sir, thank you very much."

"I don't get this," he said, relaxing but a little, "I'm--er, 'nice' to your wife in the park and you thank me?"

"Of course," the man said. "Most of the fellows just leave her hanging there...."

(reprinted from the Winter, 1962, issue of Grotesque, a FAPA publication of Ed Martin, the issue which, I believe, was the basis for his excommunication)