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## Something About Books -Bibliomysteries

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## Something About Books— Bibliomysteries

by Jack Walsdorf (V.P., Library Relations, Blackwell's Book Services) <jack.walsdorf@Blackwell.com>

An email came to me, forwarded by a colleague from Blackwell's, with the message: "I have a question for a book collector, so I figure why not send it to you and see if I can spare myself hours of research in the process. One of our faculty members wants to know why publishers put the following sequences of numbers inside a book on the title page verso or whatever: 1 3 5 7 9 11 10 8 6 4 2 or 12345678910. That's just two examples. Do you know what these series of numbers mean?"

Strange as it may seem, this was the second time in the last few months that this question has come up. It has also led me to consider how the fine points of bibliographic detail, as in the case above, where the line or chain of numbers are used by publishers to indicate the printing or impression, are often used as the bases for bibliomysteries.

One of the earliest, and still one of the best bibliomysteries came from the pen of **Julian Symons**, the English poet, critic, biographer and subject of the 1996 **Oak Knoll Press** book *Julian Symons: A Biography*. His 1949 book, *Bland Beginning*, a Harper novel of suspense, contains the following postscript: "It will be obvious to those of my readers interested in bibliography that the bibliographical discoveries in my book are derived from the most ingenious piece of literary detection, *An Inquiry into the Nature of Certain Nineteenth Century Pamphlets*, by **John Carter** and **Graham Pollard**." This literary detection, of course, proved that **T. J. Wise**, once known as England's most famous book collector, has along with **Harry Buxton Forman**, conspired to produce a wide range of forged first editions by an even wider range of major Victorian authors. And it is this background that **Julian Symons** weaves into *Bland Beginning*, the story of **Tony Shelton**, a young man with little if any interest in books, but bent on buying a first edition of a rare book of poetry as an engagement present for his girl friend. The trouble is, Tony has to buy the book at an auction, and the bidding is hard, high and deadly.

Another book based even more directly on **T. J. Wise** is **William H. Hallahan's** *The Ross Forgery*, (Bobbs-Merrill, 1973). In this

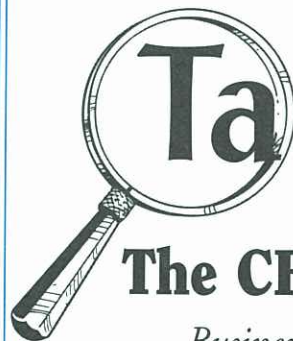
mystery, one collector of Wise forgeries conspires against another. "He commissions **Edgar Ross**, a brilliant down-at-the-heels type designer, to make him a Wise folio, to create a forgery of a forgery. He wants a Wise forgery that doesn't exist!" This book, perhaps better than any other, gets into the world and mind of the printer and goes a long way toward explaining how forgeries are made, how paper is aged, and how book collectors compete in this deadly game of bookish one-upmanship.

**Robert B. Parker**, now best known for his Spenser series (helped along by the TV series "Spenser for Hire") wrote the first of his more than thirty books in the early 1970's, when Houghton Mifflin published his first mystery, *The Godwulf Manuscript* (1973). The story line is that Spenser is hired to recover a fourteenth century manuscript stolen from a university library. While certainly not the best Parker or indeed Spenser novel, this is an enjoyable

read and one likely to be of interest to those of us involved with rare books.

Two of the best books ever published about the world of used and rare bookselling are **John Dunning's** *Booked to Die* (Scribner, 1993) and *The Bookman's Wake* (Scribner, 1995). Dunning, himself a Denver-based book dealer and once the owner of **The Old Algonquin Bookstore**, knows his stuff. In *Booked to Die*, Denver cop **Cliff Janeway** is out looking for the killer of **Bobby Westfall**, a small time booksout. Along the way we find out a great deal about the life of these scouts; where they find their books (good will stores and garage sales) and how they sell their books. We also find out about the dealers who buy the books from these scouts and the collectors who eventually add the books to their collections. The first edition of this book is now in the rarefied price range of \$800 or more, but there is a paperback edition still in print.

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**Judy Webster's Memorial Service**  
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edgeable. She was always helpful and supportive. She was wise and forward-looking in the opinions she expressed. And she was always pleasant and gracious-regardless of the anxiety of the issue. She was a delight and great friend to work with! She got the tasks done-and done well!

Judy was involved in many outside things.

And, again, to all these tasks she brings.

Lots of light to what was dark

Beyond her job, she left her mark

Judy was a chronic learner. She never tired of a new experience, a new challenge, a new friend and a new opportunity. An unusually quick study, she would quickly absorb the details of the challenge, make constructive and well-thought out comments, and move on to assist with implementation. Constantly she was a team player.

These traits she also applied to professional and personal activities outside the Library. She became a keystone of the Charleston Acquisitions Conferences. She was constantly involved in issues related to scholarly publishing. She constructively sought to keep the peace between librarians, vendors, and publishers.

On campus, she was often active regarding women. In 1986 she was tapped by our Chancellor to be chair of the Commission on Women. I recall gently suggesting to her that the acronymic, COW, was a bit awkward. Soon after, Judy changed the name to the Commission for Women!

This sort of action was typical for Judy-always striving to make a good thing better.

Judy was a private person. While I well-knew how she loved music and singing, in the thirty years I worked with her, I never heard her sing! Music was one of her private, personal joys. She was an active member of Westminster Presbyterian and she sang in the choir.

And now, dear Judy, take your rest.

Please know your friends, think you're the best.

And when you hear the angels sing,

Just join right in and heaven will ring!

We miss you, Judy.




**Something About Books**  
from page 59

Dunning's second (and he says last) book in the **Cliff Janeway** series is *The Bookman's Wake*. Many feel this is a better-written book, and certainly from the standpoint of allowing readers to learn details about the world of private press printing, book pricing and the book world in general, this is the most valuable book to own. And lucky for readers, this book can be had for less than one-twentieth the cost of the first Dunning book. As the blurb says: "The story starts and ends, aptly, with a book, a very special book: a 1969 edition of **Edgar Allan Poe's** *The Raven*, published by the tiny, prestigious Grayson Press, of Northbend, Washington. No bibliography mentions the 1969 edition. If it indeed exists, it could be worth a fortune to the right

collector. It's the kind of book someone might kill for."

Finally, and most recently, Dunning has come out with a short story, *Bookscout*, published as a pamphlet, limited to 3,000 signed copies, and sold at six antiquarian bookfairs held in St. Paul, Denver, Seattle, Arlington, Virginia, Chicago and Boston (500 copies sold at each bookfair).

If you would like to read more about the world of books as written about in mysteries, there is an article in the April 27, 1998 issue of *AB Bookman's Weekly* by **Steven E. Smith** called "The Antiquarian Bookseller as a Hero in Bibliomysteries" (pp. 1141-1146) and also an excellent, but scarce book written by a librarian from Los Angeles, **Betty Rosenberg**, *The Letter Killeth* (Los Angeles, Kenneth Karmiole, Bookseller, 1982). 

Why Book Section is a Signature

The term 'signature' dates back to the early days of printing when book signatures were folded by hand. The folders had to initial or pace their signatures on their own work so that errors could be traced. A book signature commonly consists of 16 or 32 pages, any multiple of four is possible.

— excerpted from Nat Bodian's  
*The Joy of Publishing*

Profiles  
Encouraged

**Ann Lowry**  
Assistant Director and  
Journals Manager  
University of Illinois Press  
in Champaign  
HYPERLINK — mailto:  
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**Professional Activities:** Ann has managed the Press's program of 14 scholarly journals since 1993. Before that, she accrued more than 20 years of experience in the Press's Books Division, primarily as an acquiring editor in literary studies, with occasional special assignments in Marketing (direct mail and advertising). She started out as a copy editor, back in the days of typewritten manuscripts and red pencils.

**Avocations:** Gardening and hiking.

**Last Book Read:** Caroline Alexander's new volume on *Sir Ernest Shackleton and the Antarctic*. 