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Book Reviews-Monographic Musings

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (Adjunct Instructor, College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Panek, LeRoy Lad. *Before Sherlock Holmes: How Magazines and Newspapers Invented the Detective Story.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011. 978-0-7864-6787-7. 227 pages. \$40.00.

and

Jackson, Christine A. *The Tell-Tale Art: Poe in Modern Popular Culture.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012. 978-0-7864-6318-3. 208 pages. \$40.00.

Reviewed by **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston)

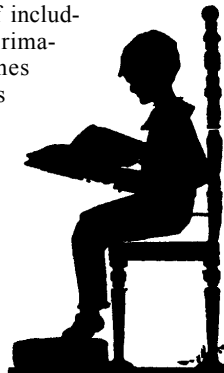
I have loved detective stories for as long as I can remember. From **Bunnicula** to **Nancy Drew**; **Sherlock Holmes** to **Alexander McCall Smith**; and the written word to the small and large screen: I love it all. In the past several years, I have also enjoyed exploring the genre through secondary sources, and I have had the pleasure of reviewing a few titles on the evolution of mystery and detective stories as well. Two relatively new titles published by **McFarland** demonstrate that mystery and detective literary studies is a subject that is alive and kicking. **LeRoy Panek's** *Before Sherlock Holmes: How Magazines and Newspapers Invented the Detective Story* and **Christine Jackson's** *The Tell-Tale Art: Poe in Modern Popular Culture* are nice investigations to the body of work dedicated to the investigation of the genre.

In considering the detective story, a number of literary critiques that I've studied look to **Edgar Allen Poe** as the godfather-of-sorts of the modern who-done-it. **Panek**, however, looks even farther back in literary history and thus widens the lens. *Before Sherlock Holmes* is a rich text that explores the historical and political landscape prior to **Poe's** fame and even preceding his birth. The first chapter of the text, entitled "Life Before Detectives," briefly chronicles the governmental and legal changes in western civilization and society's reaction, the publication of true crime stories such as *The Newgate Calendar*, and phrenol-

ogy and its influence on criminology — all of which lays the groundwork for **Poe's** work. The remainder of **Panek's** book examines different authors and literary outlets for crime and detective stories: **Poe**; "notebooks" and other serial publications featuring unnamed or lesser-known authors; **Charles Dickens**; **Wilkie Collins**; popular magazines; and daily and weekly newspapers.

Be prepared: **Panek's** writing is Dense with a capital "D." Twice he has won the **Edgar Allen Poe Award** for his bibliographic contributions to mystery and detective literary studies, and he has received numerous other accolades for his publications — so to say he has a wealth of knowledge is an incredible understatement, and this is evident in his writing. Though his text is heavy, however, it is not at all impenetrable. Furthermore, his practice of including passages from primary documents enriches his ideas and allows readers to consider the source(s) of his conclusions about the crime fiction genre.

The gold mine in *Before Sherlock Holmes* (at least in this reviewer's humble opinion) is



cate accurate, up-to-date information about Asian ethnic groups, historical and contemporary events, important policies, and notable individuals..."

And **Bloomsbury Publishing** has just released an updated edition of a standard:

- **Fairchild Books Dictionary of Textiles** (9781609015350, \$195) is in its 8th edition and "is fully revised and expanded, featuring approximately 100 new entries and over 14,000 definitions of fibers, fabrics, laws, and regulations affecting textile materials and processing, inventors of textile technology, and business and trade terms relevant to textiles..." 🌿

Panek's selected bibliography of the aforementioned primary sources. "Selected," in this case, could be considered a misnomer, as **Panek** provides over eight single-spaced pages of citations to nineteenth-century crime and detective stories as well as a list of digital magazine and newspaper archives.

Panek looks at **Poe's** work as it transported crime fiction from predominantly sentimental to logical, evidence-based, and analytical during the nineteenth century. **Jackson**, on the other hand, examines his influence on more modern creations in print, television, and film. *The Tell-Tale Heart* explores different elements and/or themes in **Poe's** body of work and focuses a chapter on each: the nameless narrator and point-of-view; codes and ciphers; setting; multiple personalities or identities; identity and physicality; gruesome horror; the "psycho-fantastic voyage" (a.k.a. reality entertainment); extreme guilt and sadomasochism; storytelling through verbal and graphic texts; and first-person narration. **Jackson** refers to her book's approach as "eclectic," and while I am certainly not a **Poe** scholar I can agree with her assessment. She identifies these ten elements in **Poe's** catalog, she uses a **Poe** story or character to illustrate her ideas regarding each element, and she offers specific examples of the elements in modern media ("media" covering the gamut from the printed word to video games). This is a far cry from the more traditional literary exposition that I would come across during my time on the reference desk.

Jackson's breadth of sources which she cites as being influenced by **Poe** is impressive. It comes as no surprise that she has researched and published in the areas of detective fiction and nineteenth-century American literature.

What intrigues and amazes me about both of these books is the high level of critical thinking revealed on every single page. On the one hand, it goes without saying that accomplished scholars like **Panek** and **Jackson** practice critical thinking like they practice breathing. On the other hand, though, I think it should be noted that these authors don't just look at influences on early detective writing and early detective writing's influences on modern works. They go beyond what is an already impressive body of literary criticism devoted to the crime/mystery/detective genre and take it outside the box. **Panek** boldly declares that **Poe** might not have been the inventor of the detective story after all, and **Jackson's** approach to considering the extent of **Poe's** visionary genius is as creative as some of the works she references. Academic libraries should consider adding these titles to their collections (if they are not already included). 🌿

From the Reference Desk from page 54

such as climate change, food and water supply, biodiversity, energy, global conflict, and landforms..."

ABC-CLIO also plans another new title:

- **Asian Americans: An Encyclopedia of Social, Cultural, Economic, and Political History** (978-1-59884-239-5, \$310; eISBN, 978-1-59884-240-1, call for pricing) "This three-volume work represents a leading reference resource for Asian American studies that gives students, researchers, librarians, teachers, and other interested readers the ability to easily lo-