

## [Q&amp;A]

PW TALKS WITH JOHN PUGMIRE

## Bishop's Murder Case

Pugmire, Locked Room International's editor, is making available to American readers for the first time Stacey Bishop's classic impossible crime novel, *Death in the Dark* (LRI; pub month, Mar.; Reviews, Jan. 2).

**Why are you publishing this novel now?**

Why did Captain Ahab hunt Moby Dick? Because it has been, up until now, one of the rarest books in detective fiction, fetching £1,800 at its most recent sighting in 2006. It practically vanished without trace after Faber and Faber published it in 1930 in London, and has never been published in the U.S., despite T.S. Eliot, Faber's editor at the time, having described it as "a very good detective story." Faber only notified me this summer that they no longer held the rights. Fortunately, the rights holder, Art McTighe, when I located him, was delighted to help and provided a wealth of background information, which greatly enhances the U.S. version.

**What's special about the book apart from its several impossible murders?**

George Antheil, to use the author's real name, was an expatriate American avant-garde composer whose *Ballet Mécanique* for 16 pianos, an aircraft propeller, and an electric drill was very much admired in Europe in the 1920s. In 1927 he attempted a triumphant return home with a concert in Carnegie Hall, which turned into a debacle that ruined his career. In revenge, he retired to Italy and wrote *Death in the Dark*, in which he murdered, figuratively speaking, all the

people he held responsible for the disaster. There is a detective story within a detective story in identifying the real identities of the protagonists. Antheil was aided in his work by



two winners of the Nobel Prize in Literature, W.B. Yeats and Gerhart Hauptmann. *Death in the Dark* is probably the only literary work of any kind in history to have had three Nobel Prize winners involved in its creation, Eliot being the third.

**How does the book stack up against other golden age mysteries?**

Julian Symons, in his highly influential *Bloody Murder*, called it an "extraordinary performance," and Antheil certainly had his own particular style. I think it would be fair to call it unique, both in its style and its motivation.

**How does publishing *Death in the Dark* fit into LRI's mission?**

While it's true that, at the beginning, we started with translations of French locked room novels, notably those of contemporary French master Paul Halter, the word International doesn't exclude British or American authors. One of our most successful books has been *The Derek Smith Omnibus*, which includes a novel that's an acknowledged locked room masterpiece, *Whistle Up the Devil*.

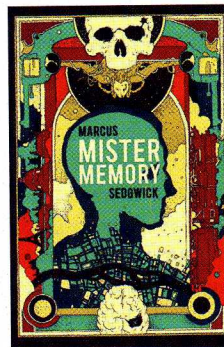
—LENNY PICKER

Duffy and his faithful right-hand man, Det. Sgt. John "Crabbie" McCrabban, wonder whether the murder is tied to a local IRA splinter group known as Direct Action Against Drug Dealers, but no one is claiming responsibility for either Deauville's murder or a separate crossbow attack on another drug dealer. Back at the station, Duffy also juggles office politics, as it appears the least qualified among the coppers is rising in the ranks, while Duffy remains behind. The IRA, a constant presence in the series, looms large and ugly, notably in a brutal blitz attack, which will leave even seasoned readers shaking. Whether Duffy will live to see another installment remains uncertain to the end. *Agent: Bob McCoy, Creative Book Services. (Mar.)*

★ **Mister Memory**

Marcus Sedgwick. Pegasus Crime (Norton, dist.), \$25.95 (336p) ISBN 978-1-68177-340-7

Fin de siècle Paris provides the backdrop for this outstanding thriller from Sedgwick (*A Love like Blood*), who creates a sense of intimacy with the reader through darkly humorous omniscient narration reminiscent of Dumas ("Paris at that time can be described as a fairy tale; assuming



it's understood that fairy tales are brutish, dark and violent"). One night, Marcel Després, a man with a photographic memory, comes home to his studio apartment to find his

wife, Ondine, in bed with a male acquaintance of theirs. The police arrest Marcel soon after he shoots Ondine dead. The motive eliminates the risk of execution, but Insp. Laurent Petit, a dedicated policeman haunted by the death of his fiancée, is shocked when he learns that the murderer has been summarily declared insane and transferred to the asylum of Salpêtrière. Petit's quest for the truth behind Ondine's murder coincides with the efforts of Dr. Lucien Morel, an alienist at Salpêtrière, to understand Marcel's phenomenal gift. Sedgwick thoughtfully explores fundamental questions about the