

[Q&A]

PW TALKS WITH SZU-YEN LIN

Rain of Terror

In *Death in the House of Rain* (Locked Room International, Nov.), Taiwanese author Lin crafts a taut impossible-crime novel.

**What was the inspiration for the book?**

The trick of the impossible murders first came to me when I was using the men's room in a restaurant. Such a space becomes a locked room when people are in it, and I started thinking about how I could get out of that space with it locked from the inside. The answer dawned on me before I left.

**The book has an unusual setting: a house in Taiwan designed to resemble the Chinese character for rain. Where did that come from?**

I chose the unusual setting because the term "snowbound" in the context of mystery fiction is usually translated as "rainbound" in Chinese. Therefore, a setting that makes "rain" physical would be representative of this subgenre of mystery, at least for Chinese-speaking readers.

**How different would the book have been had you set it in Japan, where more impossible-crime fiction is being written these days?**

There might not be a big difference. And I think this shows that Taiwanese culture is indeed influenced by Japanese culture to some degree, and this partly explains why Taiwanese readers enjoy Japanese fiction so much. But the attitude towards life revealed at the end of the final chapter

of the story, which goes into debates about free will, is very typical of the Chinese-speaking world.

**How have your mystery criticism writings shaped your fiction?**

Comments from the hardest critic tend to be the most constructive; at least this is what I have learned from experience. Though I'm still hurt by harsh remarks, I've learned to accept them. My attitude towards criticism reached a turning point after I produced *The Nameless Woman* in 2010 and submitted it for the second Soji Shimada Mystery Award. Though it gained critical acclaim, it also received very harsh criticism from one of my fellow Taiwanese authors. Eventually, I revised the novel based on his comments and it was published in 2012.

**What was translating your own work like?**

At first, it felt surreal, because that is a rare thing for a mystery writer to do. And then came a painful process, because many sentences in my narration are long and complicated—a feature of my early works. Under Locked Room International publisher John Pugmire's guidance, I trimmed and reshaped the text quite a bit so that it flows much better than in the original version. I have learned that succinctness and terseness can be a great virtue, at least for Western readers.

—LENNY PICKER



Lucy's wedding. *Agent: Nancy Yost, Nancy Yost Literary. (Nov.)*

**The Vineyard Victims: A Wine Country Mystery**

Ellen Crosby. Minotaur, \$25.99 (336p) ISBN 978-1-250-07662-5

In Crosby's full-bodied eighth Wine Country mystery (after 2016's *The Champagne Conspiracy*), Virginia vintner Lucie Montgomery has to swerve on a rain-slick road to avoid a head-on collision with a speeding car driven by her neighbor Jamie Vaughn, an unsuccessful U.S. presidential candidate. When Jamie slams into a stone pillar at the entrance to her property, Lucie leaps from her vehicle and races to the wreckage. She's in time only to hear his dying words: "Tell Rick I need him to forgive me." Most people who knew Jamie figure it was an accident, but Lucie is sure that the crash was deliberate. When Jamie's nearest and dearest begin acting suspiciously, Lucie becomes determined to find Rick and deliver Jamie's message. The intrigue grows, as does the danger to herself, after Lucie learns that Rick was an old friend of Jamie's who's now on death row for the murder some 30 years earlier of a brilliant doctoral student at the University of Virginia. Crosby keeps the reader guessing until the exciting climax. *Agent: Dominick Abel, Dominick Abel Literary Agency. (Nov.)*

**Buenos Aires Noir**

Edited by Ernesto Mallo, trans. from the Spanish by John Washington and M. Cristina Lambert. Akashic, \$15.95 trade paper (288p) ISBN 978-1-61775-522-4

Crimes of passion, politics, and perversity pervade the 14 selections in Akashic's noir volume devoted to Buenos Aires, where the grim past of the dirty war and present tumult provide a rich backdrop. From the mannered, gothic homage to Edgar Allan Poe in Inés Fernández Moreno's "Crochet" to the hyperkinetic prose of a coked-up bomb maker in Gabriela Cabezón Cámara's "The Golden Eleventh," the styles are as varied as the Argentine capital's neighborhoods. Alejandro Soifer's gritty "Chameleon and the Lions" stands out as a model of hard-boiled detective work, with a couple of grim twists. Alejandro Parisi's taut, unsettling "Fury of the Worm" describes