

Writers Admit Killing Stories Bring Fine Response

Dr. Ralph S. Banay, well-known criminologist is a harsh critic of what he calls today's "popular sport" of musing on murder. In this article, the fourth of a series, he attacks the tendency to glamorize murder in television and radio dramas, mystery stories—even humor.

By DR. RALPH S. BANAY

Murder engages so much public attention that the wonder is that homicide is not more rampant than it is. It often seems that the population is divided into two parts: those engaged in killing and those brooding on the fascinating theme of murder.

Every form of amusement is saturated with the concept of violent death. Whodunits and other fiction hinging on murder because millions delight in fancies of ingenious life-taking—proving, incidentally, that crime does pay, in royalties.

Television and radio drama devote endlessly around gory enigmas posed by the inevitable dead body. Stage and screen thrillers rely largely on bloodshed for their popularity. Newspaper headlines attest to the popular fascination of the real-life violence that is echoed in the fictional's sanguinary tales.

The tragedy of abrupt, premature ending of life has always been a stock fixture of literature and drama, but never before as today has the idea of death so obsessed the public mind. Nor, it would seem, has there ever been so keen a sense of identification with the killer.

IN THE FABLE and fairy tales and even the horror and

detective stories of former times, the agent of death usually was given so evil a character that sympathy with him was effectively inhibited. Nowadays, the dealer of doom is likely to emerge as such an appealing figure that the reader or viewer is left in doubt as to whose side he should take.

In short, vicious murder has taken on the dimensions of a popular sport.

A lifelong fixation on one's rendezvous with death is, of course, one of the common denominators of human nature. Conversational clichés speak with "If—Drop dead!" "This will slay you!" "I thought I'd die!" And so on down the list.

It is the kernel of innumerable proverbs and maxims, the gist of jokes and humor. Just as we tend to revere courage by pool-poohing the coves of childhood and the nemesis of later life, we try to dull the anxiety of anticipated death by perpetually lampooning it.

One question suggested by the current trend in amusement is: What makes the province of murder and death so alluring?

This factor becomes more pertinent when one considers the increasingly high content of extreme and bizarre violence and explicit sadism faced with supercharged sex that characterizes so many of the popular crime stories.

Up to a reasonable point, an absorption in the subject of murder as a classic element of drama is a natural inclination. But when it becomes a habitual indulgence in perverted forms of carnage and cruelty, it is hardly to be recommended, especially to the young or to those with potential or actual psychopathic

inclination.

Another question is whether the addition of so many people to escapism is a healthy sign.

True, the detective story is for many a form of relaxation, a change of mental pace, a sort of tranquilizer, sedative or energizer. But if it is a habit formed to withdraw from reality and to dodge the facts of life—since through the image one can at least partly relax his own aggression and hostility without punishment—then it would be timely to ask what makes the social situation so distasteful as to prompt the wish to escape from it.

ONE MUST RECOGNIZE that for the greater part of his history man has been a creature of volatile emotions, quick to anger and alert to react violently or any threat to his security or personal do-

main. In only a few centuries he has been domesticated, as the addition of so many people to escapism is a healthy sign.

The primitive heritage is dormant, but it can easily be aroused. Conceivably, the fascination of murder is associated with this submerged part of the personality. If so, mild excursions into crime fantasies could help work off the proddings of aggression. Thus the addiction affords for some the same release others find in gold, tennis or bridge.

Whatever the merits or innocuousness of crime stories in general, no conscientious adult can view calmly the volume and content of the inimitable amusement fare being fed to young people in this country.

The virtually universal epidemic of what has been called TVitis imposes a strong obliga-

tion to keep so powerful and persuasive a medium as free as possible from deleterious influence. The potential educational and enlightening value of such communication is obvious, but constant and protracted exposure to related, violent and sudden death, presented with the artificial allurement and glamor, is a destructive influence.

The big-business vendors of comic books have recognized the harmful potentialities of lurid presentations of violence by subjecting their industry to an ethical code. The difficulties of censorship, and of drawing a line between what is legitimately exciting and what may be harmful, are manifest.

Nevertheless, there are many young people, and others, who are susceptible to suggestion and incitement from what would be harmless reading for others.

A telling commentary was provided recently when the beloved father of a boy of 14, who had shot and killed his mother and sister in a family quarrel, explained: "He's been reading too much about killers."

Everyone knows from his own experience how dominant a part the fictional heroes of our childhood play in the development of personal criteria. If the idols of youth are gunmen and such floggers of law and reason, need we wonder if young people react to the gun and the knife as impulsive solutions for quandaries that they have not the strength to bear?

From a psychological stand-

point, one feels that the creators and consumers of the spate of imagined crime that occupies so much of the video and film output, radio time and the printed page are unknowingly actuated by a desire to tone down the anxiety about death that is common to everyone. It is part of the proverbial practice of whitewashing in the cemetery to alleviate the constant fear of one's own end of life.

THE HUGE, MANY-SIDED industrial organism based upon crime fantasy is, in its way, a monument to the all-too-human device of dulling the

barbs of morbid anxieties by bringing them into conscious thought and even joking about them.

The mind is so delicately susceptible a mechanism that it is not surprising that many people carry out in action the violent patterns on which they have habitually ruminated.

It cannot be denied that occasions and methods of murder have been suggested by repetitive fictional treatment of the theme. And yet one must ask whether most of these crimes would not have been committed even if they had not been so prompted.

From an overall viewpoint, it is timely to ask what excessive television is doing to social patterns that are an integral part of collective mental health and security.

We are becoming passatized, semipassatized in our attitudes and aptitudes by its perennial indulgence in a lipid state of mind that permits images, cloudy or emphatic to occupy the consciousness for long and repeated periods.

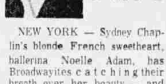
We seem to be withdrawing from actual participation in life's events, surrendering the sense of contribution that makes one a sharer in action rather than a mere passive spectator. We thus tend to whittle ourselves down, to starve ourselves of some of life's best rewards.

The art of conversation, the exchange of wit, the enjoyment of a cohesive family unit profiting from mutual exchange—what is happening to these and other boons of a former day?

TOMORROW: How can we stem the rising tide of murder?



—EARL WILSON— Blonde Dancer An Eyecatcher



NEW YORK — Sydney Chaplin's blonde French sweetheart, hallequina Noelle Adam, has Broadway's cat in her claws and her heavy-lidded eyes are shining in the wings at an Ed Sullivan TV show waiting—and starting at her on a TV set. "Look at Sydney looking," said a stage hand. To which I answered, "Look at me looking!"

"Wait'll 1960 — there'll be some changes made!" Frank Sinatra said (that's when he

gets his \$3 million from ABC TV) — but with his secretary Gloria Lovell here furnishing an early for him on Central Park South, he's evidently starting early. One thing he wants to do immediately is, less.

A fast sleazy little night club guy was a major informant in the CBS-reported vice scandal. He helped run a \$80,000 joint and doubled as a procurer. The girls were given "taken pay" but mostly talked for kicks. In one building in the W. 70s, 13 of the 14 apts. were pleasure palaces. The 14th was occupied by a son of a gun who didn't have to go far for material.

TV taping's doing crazy things — last Saturday night Ed Sullivan taped his July 12 show he'll be playing the Las Vegas Desert Inn in July.

That night and on Ed's regular live show the next night (Sunday night) Comedian Wayne and Shuster did the same Charlie Chan sketch — but the Saturday night sketch, for some reason, was a "request repeat" of the one they did Sunday night. (Have I lost you?)

On Saturday night, Jan. 24 you did a "repeat" of a show you didn't do until Jan. 25? I asked the comics backstage.

"That's right," grinned Wayne. "After we did the sketch Sunday, there was such a great demand, we had to repeat it the previous night — Saturday."

Johnny Carson — a nice guy — must have wined when he raced out of the Steve Allen show, and confused young hollywooders squealed, "Oh, look, Jack Carson!" ... David Carson's off to Europe for a secret meeting with Deborah Kerr (and Peter Viertel) whom he hopes to persuade to brave the English press and attend the London premiere of "Separate Tables."

A star who's been working for Sam Goldwyn phoned an intimate and said, "Why didn't you warn me?" They're quoting Sam's remark to Danny Kaye: "You're a big star because you have warmth and charm."

When A. Gardner arrived in Australia and got a look at Melbourne, she cracked, "I'm here to do a picture about the end of the road — and this is sure to be the place to do it!" ... Walking around Times Sq. the other night, I was so amazed by one of the disgusting trends that I composed the following so-called verse.

"One thing I can't help looking at as I walk
It's a girl on a date dressed up in long pants."
There were fires at both Steve Allen's show and the State Policemen. (Frank Garzanti pointed out that Miami-vacationing Max Asnos, owner of the Stage, an honorary fire chief, missed his own fire.) ... The follows hard-to-follow Carol Channing into the Plaza Wednesday.

TV director John Houseman beamed (leading with Art Linkletter whom he blames for TV murder) was given a rousing party by Blay pals at the Waldorf.

Constance Bennett's shins for her Jamaica vacation made her ill, postponed the trip. Ernest Hemingway's been asked to hand out the Oscar for Best Writing at the Academy Award dinner. ... Gregg Sherwood Dodge will be featured in a TV series called "Wildcats."

Osaka, Japan — Osaka Prefecture is the chief industrial, business, and financial center of western Japan.

In terms of population—about 3,000,000—it ranks next to the metropolis of Tokyo. Seven large cities lie in the prefecture, the largest being Osaka City, with a population of more than 2,700,000.

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