

HISTORIAN BARBARA POPE TO SPEAK AT MARCH 26TH BLOODY THURSDAY MEETING

Barbara Pope, debut author of *Cezanne's Quarry* will address the March 26 Friends of Mystery Bloody Thursday meeting. Barbara is an historian, award-winning teacher and the founding director of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Oregon. Her teaching career has taken her to many parts of the world, including France and the Aix-en-Provence where her novel is set. It was during her stay in France that she was drawn to the people, history and countryside. She also led tours of the area where artist Paul Cezanne lived and worked.

In her novel, a young woman moves to Aix-en-Provence with her lover, a Darwinian scholar. Her beauty captivates many men, including Cezanne, who is married and has a son. When her body is found, brutally slain in a nearby quarry, an investigation turns up many clues, some of which point to Cezanne. A junior magistrate, Bernard Martin, is faced with the task of proving the guilt or innocence of Cezanne.

The novel received many positive reviews from *Publisher's Weekly*, *Library Journal* and *Booklist*. It was also selected as a Historical Novels Review Editors Choice, and Boston Globe

reviewer Hallie Ephron named it as one of her three favorite mysteries of 2008.

Barbara was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and now lives in Eugene, Oregon. Her second Bernard Martin mystery, *The Blood of Lorraine*, is due to be published later this year.

We hope that you will join us for this interesting event. The meeting will be held in the Good Samaritan Medical Center auditorium, 1040 NW 22nd Avenue, (corner of 22nd and Marshall). The event will begin with a reception at 7:00 pm, followed by the program at 7:30 pm. The meeting is free and open to the public. Free parking is available in the adjacent parking structure. The Portland Streetcar and Tri-Met run on nearby routes.

ANNUAL BOOK SALE SCHEDULED FOR MAY 28TH MEETING

Friends of Mystery will have its annual book sale prior to the May 28th meeting. There will be an assortment of newer and used paperbacks and hardback books, plus mystery audio books and videos. Most paperback books will sell for 25 cents and hardbacks at 50 cents. Some first editions will be priced at \$2 to \$3.

If you have any books to donate for the sale, call Elinore Rogers at 503-244-5271

for pick up or bring them to either the March or May meeting.

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To our members:

In this issue of The Blood Letter, Harriet Stay will begin a series of articles. In each of these she will discuss translated mysteries. We can look forward to mysteries from different cultures.

Harriet is well-known in the mystery publishing world. In the early 80's she and her husband, Larry, were the founders of *Mystery News*, a publication dedicated to mystery reviews, interviews and previews of upcoming books. After more than 10 years, they retired from the publication to pursue other mystery interests. However, Harriet is still a contributing reviewer for *Mystery News*. We are indeed fortunate that she will share her unique insights with our members.

MURDER IN TRANSLATION (Part One) by Harriet Stay

I admit I've had a prejudice against reading translated mysteries and I'm not sure why. I read crime novels set in all parts of the world: from getting drenched with Inspector Ghote during the monsoon; accompanying Detective Nic Costa into the Vatican Reading Room; tagging along with Dr. Siri Paiboun throughout the Republic of Laos; to being frozen in North Korea with Inspector O. I'm an armchair world

traveler. But, for whatever reason, I had never read a translated crime novel until...

A dear friend, whose advice I've always found dependable, suggested I try the Icelandic procedurals by **Arnaldur Indridason**. Well, what a surprise! I loved his books (*Jar City*, *Silence of the Grave*, *The Draining Lake*, *Voices*, and now *Arctic Chill*). One of my favorites has a Christmastime setting. Someone murdered Santa Claus. This is not meant to imply it's a cozy, funny story. It is not. However, it does not lack humor. I find his protagonist, Inspector Erlendur Sveinsson, a wonderfully flawed character. It is understandable why this author has been awarded the CWA Gold Dagger and receives starred reviews from *Library Journal*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *Publishers Weekly*.

A buzz in the mystery community praised several authors from Norway and Sweden, and I thought if I could conquer the Icelandic towns and names, it's not as though I'm reading them aloud, then surely I could tackle those. And I did.

An entire new world of fine writing opened up to me. **Asa Larsson** was my first and a wonderful find. Her books (*Sun Storm*, *The Blood Split*, and *The Black Path*) are set in Sweden and her protagonist, Rebecka Martinsson, is an articulate, Stockholm attorney specializing in accounting / tax law. Larsson's are not cozy, either, by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, there are a few grizzly scenes. These are murder mysteries, after all. The stories are intelligent slices of life, perfectly

paced whodunits and at different times from the perspective of Inspector Ann-Maria Mella or Inspector Sven-Erik Stalnacke.

Anna-Maria is a kick in the pants. Aside from being a police inspector, she is a loving wife and mother. In the *Sun Storm* she is expecting her fourth child. How refreshing to view the police in this light. I had flashes of *Fargo* (surely you saw that movie).

A first novel by Stieg Larsson is *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, part of the Millenium trilogy, and my choice for the best mystery of 2008. The *Girl* is Lisbeth Salander, a brilliant researcher and computer hacker whose quirky behavior and quiet intelligence recalls hints of Carol O'Connell's Mallory. The mystery is about a sixteen-year-old girl who disappeared thirty-six years ago. Investigative reporter Mikael Blomkvist accepts an offer to find out who murdered her.

Larsson's story and writing captured me immediately (jumping up and down with excitement), and despite having over 500 pages, I did not want the book to end. The second translated in the trilogy is *The Girl Who Played With Fire*, which I've just ordered from the UK. I cannot wait for it to cross the pond. The extremely sad news is Stieg Larsson suddenly passed away after turning in the three manuscripts. A fourth is in his computer but a court battle rages. His intention was to write ten in all. What a loss!

Because there are so many exciting authors to tell you about, this is part one of three Murder in Translation articles. Please watch for part two in your next issue of The Blood-Letter.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Friends of Mystery members will participate in the Multnomah County Library's Writers Resource Fair, which will be held on Sunday, March 15, 2009 at the Central Library at 801 SW 10th Avenue from 12 noon to 3 pm. Please stop by our table and say hello to our representatives.
- Murder By the Book and Friends of Mystery will host a joint event on Thursday, April 16th at 7:00 pm to present UK author David Hewson. We are indeed fortunate to have him visit us during his US tour for his latest Nic Costa mystery, *Dante's Numbers*.
- (See an interview with Mr. Hewson below.)
- Our next regularly scheduled Bloody Thursday on May 28th will feature author/lecturer Jessica Morrell, who will discuss villains and anti-heroes. Prior to the lecture we will have our annual book sale.

LATE BREAKING NEWS

Two-time Spotted Owl Award winner Kris Nelscott (for *Stone Cribs* and *Days of Rage*) was named first place winner by the readers of *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* for her July 2008 story "The Secret Lives of Cats". She writes for *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* under her real name, Kristine Kathryn Rusch.

An Interview with David Hewson

by John Walsdorf

John Walsdorf: You write one ongoing series (the Rome Nic Costa books), but you have also written a number of stand-alones. If you would, please tell us a little about the series and what triggers your interest when you decide to write a stand-alone.

David Hewson: I never meant to write a series, honest. The first Nic Costa book was written as a stand-alone, my sixth book in a career that was on the verge of disappearing. Then my new publisher said: this is a series. I'd sort of suspected that myself when I finished the book, but I needed someone to say it out loud. After that I just got in the habit of going to Rome at regular intervals, mooching around town, thinking up ideas. Every three or four years I like to write something different to change the pace. It's not necessarily a stand-alone. The next project will be a collection of short stories all set in Venice. There's no grand plan here. I know when I need to do it, then get it out of my system and get back to Rome.

JW: Your early background came in journalism, how has that translated into your fictional writing?

DH: Journalism is both good and bad for a fiction writer. The good is it teaches you that words aren't delicate little things that are easily bruised. They benefit from being rolled around, chopped up, edited and, on occasion, thrown to the wolves. People who've never written for a living often don't appreciate that. The principal bad thing about journalism for authors – and it is very bad – is that the whole craft relies on the truth. Fiction is fiction. Fact is fact. You have to kill the honest guy inside you and become an accomplished liar to make fiction work. Or, to put it another way: good journalism should provide answers. Good fiction should provide questions.

JW: In addition to being an author, you are also involved with teaching writing. How did you become involved with that, and any famous alums?

DH: I blame it all on Book Passage, the Marin County book store. They asked me to talk at their mystery writers' conference three years ago and I suddenly found myself on a platform with Martin Cruz Smith trying to say something useful about writing. Given that Martin is one of my all-time heroes – without him I could never have written the Costa books – this was more than a little nerve-wracking. But they keep asking me back, so something must have clicked. No famous alums yet, but since I've only been doing this for three years it's probably a bit early. My favorite topic, by the way, is a rant about how we ignore the left

brain at our peril. So much talk about writing is to do with right brain creative stuff we often forget that the left brain – organization, research, control, editing – has to be working too. Otherwise you never finish the book.

JW: Nic Costa is a very intriguing character. What came together to shape and form him?

DH: One way of finding out what you want to write is to determine what you don't want to write. When I set out on what was to become the first Costa book my first novel was being filmed in Seville. It was a cop story set in Spain. I decided I wanted to go back to that kind of scenario. But I didn't want some Chandleresque figure at the center: someone who was middle-aged, melancholic, alcoholic, divorced...you get the picture? So, I went for a character who was naïve, honest, brimming over with integrity, essentially an everyman figure. Best decision I ever made...though I still get the occasional email from hardened crime fans whining that he isn't a super hero and couldn't drink for toffee. Oh well...

JW: In the US our exposure to talented foreign authors sometimes takes a while longer. Is there anyone working in the UK/Europe right now that you particularly admire?

DH: I tend to read outside the genre for a variety of reasons (one of them being that I think the genre idea can be constricting and bad for readers and authors). A lot of my reading is of strange non-fiction and old, dead authors. Right now I am very interested in Somerset Maugham, for example. Of living writers, the Australian John Harwood is someone I find very interesting. His first book, *The Ghost Writer*, was a very adventurous ghost story in the vein of M.R. James, someone I admire too. He's got a new book out called *The Séance*, which I want to read when I have the time. That's not UK/Europe, of course...

JW: What's next for you?

DH: I'm currently working on the ninth Costa novel, which will be set entirely in Rome. The eighth, which will be out next year, is done and dusted. After that I will finish off this short story collection, then, around the end of this year, start work on the tenth Costa novel. There are some other possible projects in other areas, but in the present climate it's impossible to say whether they will come off. But it's nice to be published around the world in lots of different languages. From the outset I wanted to be an international author, not one tied to a single geographic area.

JW: Thanks very much, and I am looking forward to seeing you in April!

Note: More information about David Hewson can be found on his website:
<http://www.davidhewson.com/>