

Pomp & Circumstantial Evidence

The official newsletter of
Magna cum Murder

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Interview with

Ruth Dudley Edwards

by Cameron Pence

Since 1993, Ruth Dudley Edwards has written seriously and/or frivolously for almost every national newspaper in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom and appears frequently on radio and television in the Republic of Ireland, the UK and on the BBC World Service. Ruth describes herself as British-Irish and is comfortable with being culturally both Irish and English.

She was born and brought up in Dublin, educated at University College Dublin and Cambridge University, has lived in London for most of her life, and since 1979 has been a biographer, historian, freelance journalist, and a broadcaster.

The targets of her twelve satirical crime novels include academia (British and American), gentlemen's clubs, the House of Lords, publishing, and literary prizes.

Murdering Americans (set in Indiana) and *Killing the Emperors* (a dark comedy about the lunacy of conceptual art) won Last Laugh Awards. Her most recent book is *The Seven: The Lives and Legacies of the*



continued on page 2

Founding Fathers of the Irish Republic. Her crime fiction novels include: *Corridors of Death, The Saint Valentine's Day Murders, The English School of Murder, Clubbed to Death, Matricide at St. Martha's, Ten Lords A-Leaping, Murder in a Cathedral, Publish and Be Murdered, Anglo-Irish Murders, Carnage on the Committee, Murdering Americans, and Killing the Emperors.*

In addition to her fiction, her non-fiction books are *An Atlas of Irish History, The Pursuit of Reason: The Economist 1843-1993, The Faithful Tribe: An Intimate Portrait of the Loyal Institutions, and Newsmen: Hugh Cudlipp, Cecil King, and the Glory Days of Fleet Street.*

Interview with Ruth Dudley Edwards

PCE: Your career as a writer has a wide span covering several genres including both fiction and non-fiction, as well as journalism. Is there one genre you prefer over the others? Why or why not?

RDE: I enjoy them all, and they feed off each other. Often the inspiration for a crime novel comes as I'm writing about it, for instance, the newspaper industry - especially if I've come across ghastly people I'd like to make fun of in fiction. At the risk of sounding contrarian, I have to admit that when it comes to books, if I'm writing non-fiction, I think longingly about the joy of writing fiction and not having to worry about extensive research and

getting everything right, while when I'm writing fiction, I can't wait to get back to a genre where the plot is already provided.

PCE: Humor is undoubtedly a large part of your crime fiction novels. Is keeping the balance between engaging mysteries and laugh out loud moments something that comes about organically for you in your writing or something you find you have to pay special attention to?

RDE: It seems to come organically. I set out with my first book to write a straightforward whodunnit, and to my surprise found the central character's reflections were irreverently couched and that he always seemed to be seeing the ridiculous side of things in a mordant kind of way. I confess that I frequently find that solemn occasions and people amuse me a lot, which is why, I suppose, I ended up accidentally writing satirical novels about grave institutions like the British Civil Service, the Church of England, the House of Lords and gentlemen's clubs.

PCE: What was it that drew you to the crime fiction genre?

RDE: I grew up in a house full of books – I mean thousands of them – and once I had sampled my mother's large cache of crime fiction, I read little else. Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Marjorie Allingham, Ngaio Marsh, Michael

Innes, Edmund Crispin and lots more always took precedence over homework or essay-writing at university.

PCE: Does your writing process for crime fiction follow a strict outline or do you find your twists, turns, and reveals coming to you more as you write?

RDE: I've never ever planned one. All I do is decide where it will take place and who is the first corpse and see what happens. And I rarely know who the murderer is until quite close to the end. That keeps me interested.

PCE: What authors and stories have inspired you the most as a writer?

RDE: P.G. Wodehouse was another important part of my misspent youth. Between them, my mother and big brother had dozens of his books, all of which I adored. I think from Wodehouse I acquired a taste for seeing the absurdity in so many aspects of life. In crime fiction, Dorothy Sayers was an early inspiration because while of course I admired Agatha Christie's genius with plots, it was Sayers' characterization and settings that fascinated me. When I think back on it, I guess she and Wodehouse both had much to do with this Irish girl growing up in an academic family in Dublin becoming fascinated by the British establishment. And Edmund Crispin, who wrote hilarious books

making fun of academia in general and the intellectually pretentious in particular, also became a major inspiration.

PCE: As a reader, what specifically do you look for in good crime fiction?

RDE: I like my crime fiction literate, thoughtful, telling a convincing story and free from horror and nastiness. I don't mean that I don't expect bad things to happen, and I'm all for tackling difficult issues, but I hate gratuitous scenes of gory violence and explicit sex. Perhaps because as a journalist and in some of my books I deal with terrorism and its awful consequences, I don't want what I read for pleasure to give me nightmares. I've had enough of them from writing about real life. My favorite crime writer of modern times is Reginald Hill, who described himself as being on the Jane Austen wing of crime fiction. That is where I am firmly planted.

PCE: The humor in your crime fiction tends to flesh itself out in not-so-subtle swipes at the prevailing culture, for example taking on issues of political correctness and academia in *Murdering Americans* and the... interesting world of contemporary art in *Killing the Emperors*. How do you pick your "targets?"

RDE: No one ever called my satire subtle. I keep up more than is good for me with contemporary social trends, particularly on campuses and in the arts, that make me cross.

Whatever particularly maddens me tends to dictate what will be the next target. It was after several years of fulminating in art galleries about the lunacies of conceptual art that I went for it in *Killing the Emperors*.

PCE: What's next for you?

RDE: Unsurprisingly, the latest manifestations of fashionable nonsense on campuses proved irresistible but I've never had such a hard struggle with the book as I've been having with *Death of a Snowflake*, so swiftly has truth become stranger than fiction.

When I began making fun of the “woke” generation - with their terror of hearing any opinions they don’t approve of and their demand for safe spaces and trigger warnings - I did not expect that in 2019 a woman complaining about the presence of a bearded man in a dress in a ladies’ restroom could be arrested by the police for “hate crime.” Pity the poor satirist!

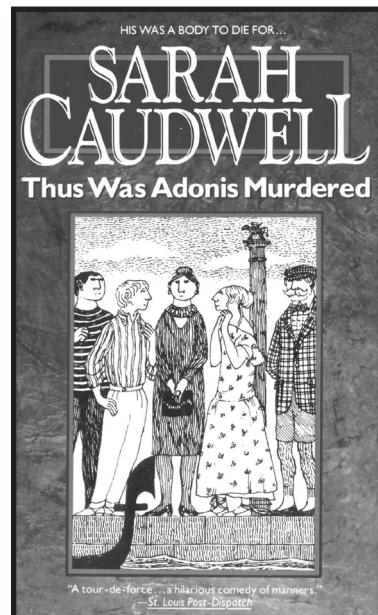


Cameron Pence is a committed Magna cum Murderer.

Coming to Magna this year?

Don’t miss “One Festival, One Book!” Read *Thus Was Adonis Murdered* by Sarah Caudwell before Magna cum Murder.

If you’re not familiar with our “One Festival, One Book” program, there will be several discussions held formally and informally throughout the weekend.



Magna Memories

by Molly Weston

Do you keep a scrapbook? I don't really, but I do find myself using all sorts of prompts to recall special times, places, people, and events. Thinking about all the Magna cum Murder conferences I've attended brings back happy memories and I thought I would share some of them with you.

If you know me, you won't expect things to be in chronological order—or always correct. But. After all, these are MY memories. I hope you'll enjoy them and they will prompt good ones.

I don't remember how I first learned about Magna, but I definitely remember talking with Kathryn about attending. I'd just realized at the last minute that I would be able to make the trek, and I happily reported that I was coming—and that my check was in the mail. "I wouldn't expect it to be anywhere else," she replied in that delightful Georgia accent. I knew I would be in good hands!

In those days, the rule was "if you get to the state of Indiana we'll come get you." Volunteers met flights in Indianapolis and drove attendees to Muncie. My first trip was with Kathy Lynn Emerson.

We've been conference friends ever since.

*I knew I would
be in good
hands!*

I think it was at my first Magna that I encountered the comedy team of Abbott and Coben (Jeff and Harlan). They kept everyone in stitches. I'd known Jeff since his first book was published, but hadn't met his teammate. Individually, they're funny; together, hilarious.

I really loved the grand old Roberts Hotel. It was rundown, inconvenient, and lovely. Perhaps part of its history was its location—near the train tracks. Having grown up on the Eastern Seaboard, I never even heard trains in the night, so I was never bothered. Not so one of the British authors. I was told that he presented himself at the front desk, properly clad in robe and slippers, and inquired of the student manning the desk, "Could you tell me, please, at what time this hotel leaves the station?" Not sure if this is true at all or something Parnell Hall made up to enliven a panel.

It wasn't only the light sleepers who had instances with the Roberts. One Sunday while everyone was saying long goodbyes in the lobby, one of them activated the

automatic lock on all the rooms. No one realized it until we went back to collect our luggage! Fortunately Indiana is in the Midwest and everyone was very nice about the mishap and nobody had to pay a late charge!

It must have been the year that Kathryn asked me to moderate a small panel of John Gilstrap and Tess Gerritson. I was fortunate enough to be invited to a Friday night dinner at the E.B. and Bertha C. Ball mansion. What a double honor! I don't remember anything on the menu with the exception of delicious orange rolls. Everybody asked for seconds. One year, everyone rode a dilapidated school bus from the Roberts to the mansion. Sara Paretsky climbed aboard, seemingly as happy as a first grader on the first day of school.

For years the Arsenic and Oolong Society graced the halls of Magna. Members dressed in Victorian costumes and circulated amongst attendees. I was surprised once to see Mirbane, the butler, standing at my side (he was at least 6'4" to my 5'2") with a white towel over his arm and a silver compote in his outstretched hand. "Red herring?" he murmured. Later he was back, "Private eyeball?" Those dear folks added so much to everyone's fun.

One year they sponsored a pizza party. As I got on the elevator headed for my Italian fix, I met William Kent Kruger whose *Iron Lake* I still recommend. I read the name on his badge and blurted, "I loved your book!" He delighted me by responding, "I loved your review!" (I think Ellen Hart had shared it with him.)

Fun has always been the hallmark of Magna. Even though I never wore a Halloween costume (too much trouble to pack!), I did enjoy watching the march around the banquet hall with pirates, skeletons, and witches.

After the banquet one Saturday night, Les Robertson sat down at the grand piano in the Roberts lobby and began playing show tunes. Folks gathered around to sing. From my vantage point on the mezzanine, I could see Mary Higgins Clark seated beside him, head back, belting her heart out.

These are some of my memories of Magna's early years. What are yours?



Molly Weston lives, writes, and works in North Carolina. She is the editor of the Sisters in Crime quarterly, inSinC.

Current Registered Authors

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Allen Eskens	August Norman
Susan Furlong	Ben O'Neal
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Parnell Hall	Lori Rader-Day
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T. Lee Harris	Brenda Robertson Stewart
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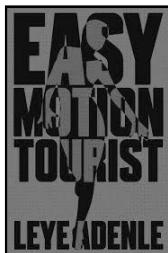
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Easy Motion Tourist

by Leye Adenle



A writer on assignment in Lagos foolishly lies about being a reporter for the BBC, putting him square in the crosshairs of corrupt cops when he stumbles across a dead body in Leye Adenle's *Easy Motion Tourist*.

“Easy Motion Tourist” is a Nigerian classic rock song, if that gives you an idea of the vibe the novel is trying to convey.

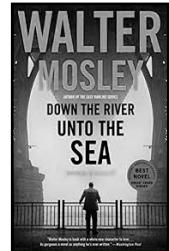
Adenle's debut is as crackling a crime novel as I have read in a while, as the writer and his savior--a lawyer with her own complicated agenda--try to stay one step ahead of both the police (such as Sergeant Hot-Temper) and a colorful collection of criminals (with names like Knockout, Go-Slow, and Catch-Fire). Teeming, raggedy, dangerous Lagos is almost a character in itself, and expertly portrayed.

Down the River Unto the Sea

by Walter Mosley

A cop trying to overthrow a heroin operation finds himself framed by crooked cops, and after a stint in Rikers, looks for redemption in himself and for another framed man, in Walter Mosley's *Down the River Unto the Sea*.

Mosley's Easy Rawlins mysteries, which are slowly tracking through the 40s, 50s and 60s along with its aging detective protagonist, are definitive. But now and then, Mosley has introduced other detective characters, and Joe King Oliver is one.

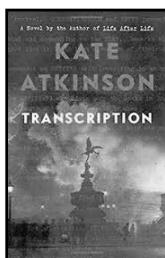


There are a lot of similarities with his other detective characters, including having a close friend and partner who happens to be a psychopath (like Mouse to Easy in his main series), but Oliver also has his own unique elements.

Mosley writes a great mystery, and this one is chock full of crooked cops, honorable crooks, laws broken for good, and laws followed for evil. The ending relies on a lot of dominoes falling just right, but is ultimately satisfying, and I hope Mosley returns to Joe King Oliver.

Transcription

by Kate Atkinson



In 1940, a young woman works for MI-5 as a transcriptionist, helping snare a group of pro-Nazi Brits; in 1950, she now works for the BBC, and sees her past catching up to her in Kate Atkinson's *Transcription*.

Atkinson writes across all genres, from literary fiction to mysteries; I believe this is her first quasi-spy novel, but it is filled with her quirky style. She writes complex characters, from the protagonist's closeted boss and later sort-of fiancé to a prim old lady who might also be a murderous Jew-hater. Alliances are murky and violence can be sudden and sometimes absurd. The novel features a genuine surprise ending.

I have enjoyed Atkinson's novels, especially her Jackson Brodie detective series, but this is a great standalone for readers who enjoy spy fiction as well as literary fiction.

The Nearest Exit

by Owen Steinhauer



A reluctant spy and more reluctant double agent is asked to kill a teenage girl under mysterious circumstances; when he refuses, thinking of his own daughter, murderous dominoes begin to fall all across the world in Owen Steinhauer's *The Nearest Exit*.

This worthy sequel to Steinhauer's *The Tourist* once again dives into the gnarled politics of the secret Department of Tourism, seemingly largely staffed by emotionally crippled "tourists" whose black ops on behalf of the U.S. cause shenanigans all across the globe.

Steinhauer writes with the density of John le Carré and the tough action of

Len Deighton; if you like either or both of these writers, Steinhauer is a great contemporary addition to the spy canon.

Big Sister

by Gunnar Staalesen



A private eye gets a job hunting a missing woman from a half-sister he never met in *Big Sister* by Gunnar Staalesen. Soon our aging but determined PI is mixed up with a motorcycle gang and a long-buried sexual assault amidst a myriad of other crimes.

Staalesen is riffing on Raymond Chandler, from the title (cribbed from *The Little Sister*) on through to his terse style and murky family dynamics.

I enjoyed this thoroughly and was deeply surprised to find out this story was some twenty novels into a series, and that Staalesen and his protagonist are huge in Norway, having also spawned a dozen or more movies and a commemorative statue. I would definitely say more of Staalesen's writings need to be translated into English as only a few seem available.



John Dalton is the Director of Communications and Marketing for Indiana University East in Richmond, Indiana, by day and a freelance writer by night.

How well do you know the legends? Dashiell Hammett

Dashiell Hammett, one of the best hardboiled detective writers in mystery history, started his career as a high school dropout. After several years in the United States Army and a serious illness, he realized he couldn't return to his love as a detective so he did the next best thing... he wrote about it. Hammett incorporated much of his experience at the detective agency in his character "the Continental Op." Hammett followed a whirlwind of literary fame, only to fall to political ruin in the end of his career.



1. Dashiell Hammett was born on ____ 1894.

- a. June 18th
- b. July 12th
- c. August 1st
- d. May 27th

2. Hammett's formal education was cut short when he left school at the age of ____.

- a. Fourteen
- b. Sixteen
- c. Thirteen
- d. Eleven

3. After leaving school and working a series of low-paying odd jobs for several years, Hammett joined the ____ detective agency in ____.

- a. Baldwin- Felts; 1915
- b. Pinkerton; 1918
- c. Baldwin- Felts; 1918
- d. Pinkerton; 1915

4. Hammett's contraction of ____ during his Army enlistment affected his health to the point that he was unable to return to his detective work.

- a. Hepatitis C
- b. Tuberculosis
- c. Typhoid Fever
- d. Melanoma

5. Hammett enlisted in the U.S. Army first during WWI, then again after ____.

- a. Pearl Harbor
- b. The Spanish American War
- c. The Korean War
- d. The Yalta Conference

6. After the deterioration of his marriage, Hammett became romantically involved with a playwright, ____ in 1931.

- a. Nell Martin
- b. Lillian Hellman
- c. Josephine Dolan
- d. Anne Bond

7. The first detective story that Dashiell saw published was in 1922 by the society magazine ____.

- a. *The Smart Set*
- b. *New England Review*
- c. *One Story*
- d. *The Writer*

8. Hammett found himself best suited for pulp crime magazines and ____ was published in *Black Mask* in 1923.

- a. *The Thin Man*
- b. *The Maltese Falcon*
- c. *Arson Plus*
- d. *The Glass Key*

9. After Hammett wrote ____, he never wrote another novel and he instead devoted himself to activism.

- a. *The Maltese Falcon*
- b. *The Glass Key*
- c. *Red Harvest*
- d. *The Thin Man*

10. As the president of the New York Civil Rights Congress, he posted bail

for a group of communists on trial for conspiracy. Hammett's communist association led to him serving a ____ jail term after his second enlistment.

- a. Three Years
- b. Six Months
- c. Four Weeks
- d. Five Months

11. After serving in prison, he was let out to find the IRS was charging him ____ in back taxes.

- a. \$50,000
- b. \$75,000
- c. \$100,000
- d. \$250,000

12. Following the high from his literary career and later, his political ruin, Hammett lived in isolation for the last ____ years of his life.

- a. 5
- b. 7
- c. 10
- d. 12

13. On January 10, ____, Dashiell Hammett passed away due to lung cancer.

- a. 1961
- b. 1962
- c. 1959
- d. 1966



Answers on page 14

Magna cum Murder Registration Form

To pay by credit card, register online at magnacummurder.com

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If you have attended Magna before, which years? _____

Select one or more that describes you: Reader Vendor

Publisher/Agent/Editor Other Author (At least one full-length crime fiction or true crime novel or collection of short stories published in 2017 through 2019. Provide titles, publication dates, and publishers. E-mail information to magnacummurder@yahoo.com.)
Authors registered for entire weekend will be considered for panels, but program assignments are not guaranteed.

REGISTRATION OPTIONS (Per Person)

- Full Weekend Registration - \$295 (Includes everything)
- Saturday Limited Registration - \$175 (Banquet extra)
- Sunday Limited Registration - \$75 (Includes lunch)
- Limited Vendor Registration - \$155 (Vendor space extra)
- Spouse Meals - \$200 (Includes meals only, must accompany a full weekend registration.)

EXTRAS

- Saturday Luncheon - \$65 per person
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- Vendor booth space with one table - \$150
- Vendor booth space with two tables - \$200
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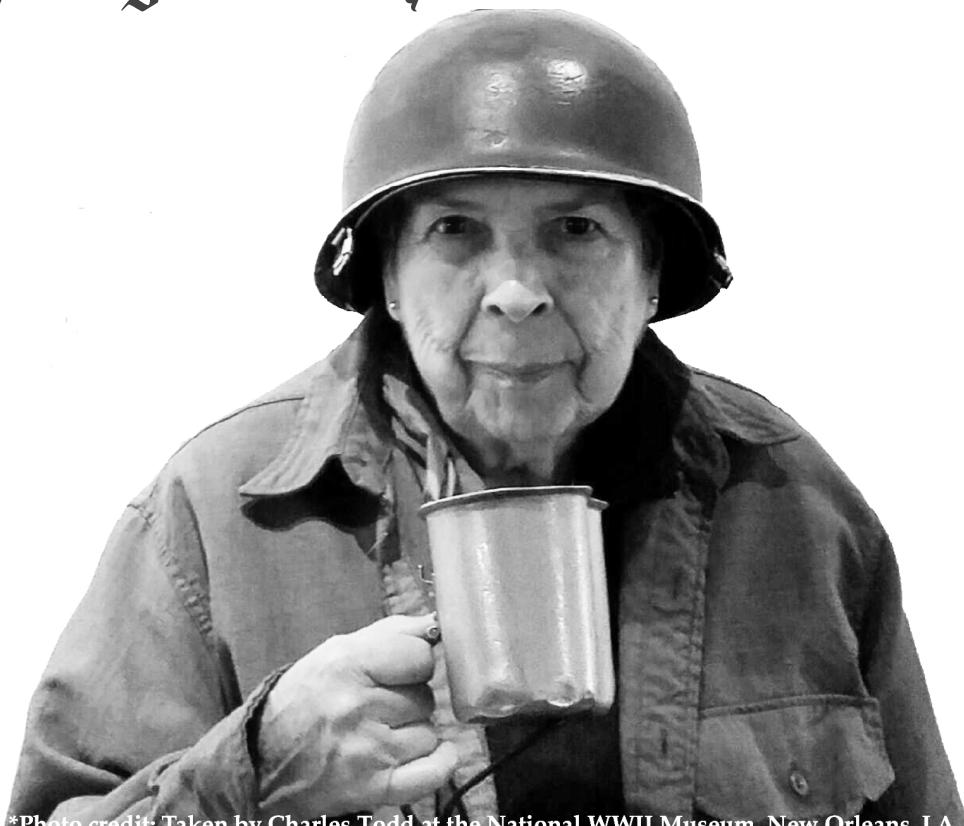
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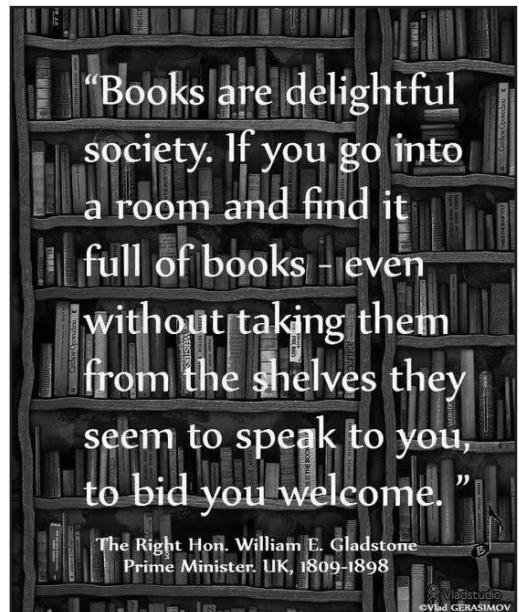
at
Magna cum Murder XXV



*Photo credit: Taken by Charles Todd at the National WWII Museum, New Orleans, LA

Answers to Hammett Quiz

1. Samuel Dashiell Hammett was born May 27, 1894 in Saint Mary's County, Maryland.
2. Hammett left school when he was thirteen.
3. He held several odd jobs but settled into the Pinkerton National Detective Agency in 1915.
4. During his first enlistment in the Army, Dashiell contracted the Spanish Flu then later contracted Tuberculosis.
5. Hammett enlisted in the United States Army in 1918. He reenlisted in 1942 following the attack on Pearl Harbor after pulling some strings due to his past medical history.
6. Josephine Dolan was Hammett's nurse, whom he married in 1921. They had two daughters, but following his TB diagnosis could not live with the family. Dolan rented a home in San Francisco and the marriage fell apart in 1926. He had a brief relationship with writer Nell Martin, but later fell for Lillian Hellman, a playwright whom he spent nearly thirty years with.
7. *The Smart Set* was the first magazine to publish Hammett.
8. *Arson Plus* was the first of the published Op stories, and several were published in *Black Mask* in 1923.
9. *The Thin Man* was the last of Hammett's published works before he turned to activism.
10. Hammett served five months in prison for refusing to name the individuals involved for posting bail for a group of communists.
11. He was charged with \$100,000 in back taxes after being released from prison.
12. After being blacklisted by the government, Dashiell became a hermit in the 1950s spending the last ten years of his life in a remote cottage.
13. Hammett died on January 10, 1961 from lung cancer, diagnosed two months prior.



“There is a temperate zone in the mind, between luxurious indolence and exacting work; and it is to this region, just between laziness and labor, that summer reading belongs.”

-Henry Ward Beecher



“A book is the only place in which you can examine a fragile thought without breaking it, or explore an explosive idea without fear it will go off in your face. It is one of the few havens remaining where a man’s mind can get both provocation and privacy.”

-Edward P. Morgan



“I fancy that at the beginning some fairy may have offered me the choice between great power and station and the privilege of living always among books, and that I, like the good child in the fairy tale, chose the latter.”

-James L. Whitney

“Reminiscences of an Old Librarian”



“A precious-mouldering pleasure-‘tis to meet an Antique Book -
In just the Dress his Century wore -
A privilege - I think -
His venerable Hand to take -
And warming in our own -
A passage back - or two - to make -
To Times when he - was young...”

His presence is enchantment -
You beg him not to go -
Old Volumes shake their vellum heads
And tantalize - just so -”

-Emily Dickinson



“No matter what his rank or position may be, the lover of books is the richest and happiest of the children of men.”

-John Alfred Langford



“Old books smell of dust and the literary smoke of history, of writer soul and the ink of eternity.”

-Terri Guillemets



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