

HOWARD
HAYCRAFT
and the art of
DETECTIVE
FICTION



HOWARD HAYCRAFT'S grandfather served in the Civil War from Illinois, and in 1868 he homesteaded in Blue Earth County in south central Minnesota (named for the bluish green earth found there along a small river). Howard's father, Julius Haycraft (1871-1951), grew up on the farm and then read law with a judge in Madelia, Watonwan County, just west of Blue Earth County. He married Marie Stelzer, a schoolteacher and the daughter of German immigrants who came to Minnesota in the 1860s. Julius Haycraft practiced law in Madelia until 1914, and was postmaster there for ten years, before moving to Fairmont, where he was judge of the district court for many years.

Howard Haycraft was born in Madelia on July 24, 1905. His sister Anna was born about a year later. The first book he read was *The Swiss Family Robinson*, by Johann David Wyss. It took him three months. Then he read it again in about two months. While he was reading it the third time, his father said, "My dear boy, there are other books to read." Thus began his life with the world of books. Eventually he became a publisher, author, editor, anthologist, and the dean of mystery critics.

During his high school years in Fairmont he worked for the local newspaper after school and while on vacation. When he attended the University of Minnesota he wrote for the student newspaper, *The Minnesota Daily*, and became managing editor his junior year and chief editor when he was a senior.

The main event of his college years occurred in March 1927. Reverend William H. Riley was the leader of the Minnesota Anti-Evolution League and for a number of years had been attacking the University of Minnesota. Haycraft later described Riley as "a tall, strikingly handsome man with a leonesque mane of white hair, a resonant voice, and a commanding presence. If he had not been a preacher he could have been an actor." After an anti-evolution bill was introduced in the state senate, Haycraft led the student body against it. At a public hearing on March 8, 1927, Riley claimed at the conclusion of his speech that the students favored the bill. At that moment Haycraft brought forward a roll of paper containing a resolution against the bill signed by 6,500 students of a

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HOWARD HAYCRAFT
and
the art of
DETECTIVE FICTION

an exhibit
June 11—July 31, 1993

*To the Norwegian Explorers
after a great evening
together.*

Molly Costain Haycraft

(or, proudly, Mrs. Howard Haycraft)

Special Collections
Wilson Library
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis



Howard Haycraft in his office
the last day before retirement
from The H.W. Wilson Company,
December 31, 1971.

HOWARD HAYCRAFT'S grandfather served in the Civil War from Illinois, and in 1868 he homesteaded in Blue Earth County in south central Minnesota (named for the bluish green earth found there along a small river). Howard's father, Julius Haycraft (1871-1951), grew up on the farm and then read law with a judge in Madelia, Watonwan County, just west of Blue Earth County. He married Marie Stelzer, a schoolteacher and the daughter of German immigrants who came to Minnesota in the 1860s. Julius Haycraft practiced law in Madelia until 1914, and was postmaster there for ten years, before moving to Fairmont, where he was judge of the district court for many years.

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Julius Haycraft

Howard Haycraft

total enrollment of 9,500. The bill was defeated the next day. On March 10, 1927, Lotus D. Coffman, President of the University of Minnesota, penned the following letter:

Dear Mr. Haycraft:

It may be some consolation to you for the hard work you have done recently, to know how much I have appreciated the good sense and sound judgment you have displayed in your evolution articles and editorials. And your speech at the capitol; it was the most effective speech of the evening.

Sincerely,
L. D. Coffman

In January 1929 Haycraft moved to New York City and began working for the H. W. Wilson Company, the publisher of numerous periodical indexes and other reference works for libraries. Halsey William Wilson was a Minnesotan who as a student had operated a bookstore on the campus of the University of Minnesota in the 1890s. To purchase books for his customers, who often did not have all the necessary information—author, title, publisher, and price—he had the tedious task of examining a large assortment of publishers' lists. To solve this problem, he conceived the idea of publishing a monthly cumulative list of new books. The first issue of the *Cumulative Book Index* was published in 1898, and it continues today. To avert the great expense of resetting all the type for each succeeding cumulation, he interfiled the linotype slugs as one does in a card file. This method was used for printing his first periodical index, the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, begun in 1901, as well as the numerous specialized periodical indexes that followed. It was mainly these H. W. Wilson publications that changed the character of American libraries. As the company grew, its Midwest location, far from the eastern centers of publishing, had increasing disadvantages, and Wilson decided to move the firm to the East Coast. Everything was packed, and in the summer of 1913 a caravan of fourteen loaded freight cars pulled out of the Minneapolis railroad yards.

Haycraft started out doing promotional and editorial work for the firm. He was appointed to the board of directors in 1934, and was made vice president in 1940, when the company then employed 350 people (today there are 515). In this capacity he planned and supervised publications and sales campaigns, and handled employee relations. In 1953 he became president, succeeding the founder, Halsey W. Wilson. And in 1967 he was elected chairman of the board. Upon his retirement in 1971 he continued to serve as board chairman.

His first book was *Authors Today and Yesterday*, edited by him and Stanley J. Kunitz, the poet who was later

awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and with whom he compiled and edited six other biographical reference books. *Authors Today and Yesterday*, H. W. Wilson, 1933, was a companion volume to the firm's *Living Authors*, 1931, and contained 320 biographical sketches. In compiling and writing these articles, the editors asked the selected authors to write about themselves, most of whom complied, and each brief autobiographical statement was published as part of the sketch. These two biographical dictionaries were superseded by their monumental *Twentieth Century Authors*, 1942, containing more than 1850 biographies illustrated by more than 1700 portraits. Then and now this reference book is found in virtually every library in America. *Twentieth Century Authors: First Supplement*, 1955, brought up to date the original material and contained some 700 new entries.

Most of the autobiographies written for *Twentieth Century Authors* were straightforward accounts. Christopher Morley, however, then a very popular writer, apologized for the delay because he had been finishing *Kitty Foyle*, and submitted a sprightly, self-critical "obituary," but he wondered whether it was suitable for a reference work. Haycraft wrote him the following letter:

December 14, 1939

Dear Mr. Morley:

I have read and liked very much your obituary.... The firm of Kunitz and Haycraft has no rule that insists on factual rather than imaginative accounts. In fact, we could wish that more of the authors we have addressed would come down off the platform and meet their readers as you have done here.... I feel that your candidness and outspokenness are distinct assets.

Congratulations on *Kitty's* outstanding success. I am hoping to meet her when I leave the end of next week for a brief winter holiday.

Cordially,
Howard Haycraft

Apart from his publishing career, he loved music, sailing, and reading detective stories. In his apartment he acquired a large collection of phonograph recordings and attended concerts regularly, sometimes with Lorena Hickok, a journalist for the Associated Press in New York City, who was a friend and confidante of Eleanor Roosevelt. "Hick," as she was called, had survived a miserable childhood in South Dakota. She had had a brutal father and her mother had died when she was thirteen. At fifteen she was working as a domestic servant. When she read *Dawn O'Hara*, 1911, Edna Ferber's first novel, which is about a young woman who works on a newspaper, she became determined to become a newspaperwoman, and she had the talent and drive to rise to

prominence in the field. Among other friends, Haycraft entertained "Hick" and Eleanor Roosevelt, when she happened to be in New York City. Through a friend of "Hick's," Haycraft rented a place at Mastic on Long Island and sailed his small craft on Great South Bay. Later he built a year-round cottage nearby on a high point of woodland.



The Haycraft year-round cottage on Long Island.



The Boys' Sherlock Holmes dust jacket illustration by George Annand, which was used in the numerous reprintings of the first edition.

The Howard Haycraft Collection at the University of Minnesota consists of his library and papers concerned with crime fiction. His books were his working library for writing and editing the dozen books and other publications in the field, and they include a great number of presentation copies inscribed to him by mystery writers and critics. His papers include his manuscripts and his extensive correspondence with authors, critics, and publishers. Haycraft bequeathed his collection to his alma mater, from which he had received its Outstanding Achievement Award in 1954.

Haycraft had read his first Sherlock Holmes book, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, straight through when he was ten, and the first book that he published in the field of crime fiction was *The Boys' Sherlock Holmes*, 1936. He had planned a volume comprising a selection for those adventures which had come into the public domain, and he composed the following canny letter in seeking a publisher:

Dear _____:

As a member for several years of the editorial staff of the H. W. Wilson Co., library publishers, and particularly as editor of the company's forthcoming "Junior Book of Authors," I have had an opportunity to learn a few things about library buying and juvenile books.

Among other things, I have noticed that once a book wins recognition as the standard juvenile edition of a classic, it sells almost indefinitely. (Examples: "The Boys' Froissart," "The Boys' King Arthur," "The Boys' Life of

Theodore Roosevelt, "The Boys' Book of Battles," "The Boys' Book of Pirates," etc.) Some of these have been in print for twenty-five and thirty years and are still selling today.

It was therefore with considerable surprise that I discovered that there was no adequate selective edition of the Sherlock Holmes stories to fill the gap between the numerous separate volumes and the two-volume complete edition—which is excellent for its purpose, but is both too large and too expensive for the juvenile market. The result of this train of thought was the suggestion of a "Boys' Sherlock Holmes."... Such a book, I feel certain, would without question be accepted both by libraries and the trade as the authoritative juvenile edition of Sherlock Holmes, and should sell steadily for many years.

It did indeed stay in print for many years. The 1936 edition was reprinted a number of times, as was the 1961 enlarged edition.

The author of *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*, 1941, has told why he decided to write it:

I went to the New York Public Library and asked for a factual history and analysis of detective story writing. To my surprise, there was no book that filled the bill, so I began to think of writing one myself. I took the idea to the D. Appleton-Century Company and they liked it. After three years of research and writing, nights, weekends, holidays (for I continued to hold down a full-time job) the book finally was published

Murder for Pleasure contains a critical history of detective fiction from its beginning in 1841 with Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" into the 1930s. It also includes "The Rules of the Game" for writing detective stories, a bibliography of critical literature, and other material, such as his now famous guide for readers and collectors: "A Readers' List of Detective Story 'Cornerstones'" from Poe to Minnesota author Mabel Seeley's *The Listening House*, 1938. An updated list of cornerstones prepared by Haycraft and Ellery Queen was published ten years later in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, October 1951. Ellery Queen included some mainstream authors, from Voltaire (*Zadig*, 1748) to Faulkner (*Intruder in the Dust*, 1948).

Murder for Pleasure received a large number of favorable reviews. For example, Clifton Fadiman wrote in *The New Yorker*, September 6, 1941, "Now that a young man named Howard Haycraft has evolved a serious treatise on the 'life and times' of the detective story, it may be said to have come into its full estate.... Mr. Haycraft treats his subject with the exactness and clarity of an old-fashioned literary historian." The book established Haycraft as the leading critic of detective literature,

*The Life and Times of
the Detective Story*

MURDER FOR Pleasure

Howard Haycraft

Murder for Pleasure. Appleton, 1941. First edition.



The October 1951 issue containing the updated list of cornerstones by Haycraft and Ellery Queen.

and today it still is considered a classic in the field.

Haycraft received many letters about the book from readers and authors of detective fiction. He had praised the stories written by Frederick Irving Anderson for *The Saturday Evening Post* in the 1920s, calling him "one of the finest natural American talents of the era." Haycraft received the following letter from him:

Dec. 2, 1941

Dear Mr. Haycraft,

I have just seen the exceedingly pleasant things you have to say in your murder book about my stories, and I assure you I am not only deeply grateful but somewhat flabbergasted! I have been writing so long for an audience that reads without even knowing the name of the author, that now, in my vegetarian days of rue, I am astonished to discover that a little group of faithful readers are bent on my exhumation!... I was delighted to see the grand review your *Murder for Pleasure* got....

Sincerely,

Frederick Irving Anderson

From Patricia McGerr, then a beginning writer who has since written many novels, he was sent the following letter:

January 24, 1947

Dear Mr. Haycraft:

Being unversed in the art of the mystery story, I worked with a pencil in one hand and a copy of *Murder for Pleasure* in the other. And that's almost literally true. Actually, I alternated—first reading a chapter of your book, then writing a chapter of mine.... By the time I arrived at your do's and don't's, I had written too much to correct all the mistakes. It never occurred to me, for instance, that ten suspects were far too many.... So, whatever merit there is in the book, I owe to your guidance....

Sincerely,

Patricia McGerr

P. S. Have you got any idea how difficult it is for the average person to pronounce the word "genre"? I read most of *Murder for Pleasure* aloud to a friend and finally had to give up and substitute "species" wherever it appeared.

As a sound critic, Haycraft's judgments of authors were generally a genial balance of praise and blame. He had praised Erle Stanley Gardner's action fiction but noted a Hammett influence in his work, and Gardner rejoined:

September 3, 1941

Dear Mr. Haycraft:

Dashiell Hammett, Carroll John Daly, and I all got started writing with *Black Mask* at about the same time in the early 1920s.... I think probably Daly was the first to be published; but for practical purposes, the three of us broke into print simultaneously. After Hammett made his spectacular success with *The Maltese Falcon*, Captain Shaw got certain ideas for story development which I thought amounted to Hammettizing the magazine, and after some bickering, making an argument on that point, refused to submit any further work to the magazine for a period of almost a year, at which time, because of reader demand, the magazine executed a contract agreeing to publish my stories without revision or editorial suggestion.

However, you have made a masterly appraisal of the whole mystery field of writing, and, for the most part, your appraisal of authors, stories, and reader reactions have been, as nearly as I can judge, exceedingly accurate....

Sincerely yours,
Erle Stanley Gardner

Molly Costain was working as secretary to the beloved and highly respected Amy Loveman, Associate Editor of *The Saturday Review of Literature*, and one of its founders in 1924, when Howard Haycraft submitted for publication his "Dictators, Democrats, and Detectives" in 1939, arguing that detective stories flourished only in democracies. Amy Loveman accepted the article, and it was reprinted elsewhere a number of times. At the bottom of one letter from Loveman to Haycraft, Molly Costain wrote a note about a typing error: "Imagine the horror, Howard! An imperfect letter going to *you*. But I simply can't do it over. How would you like to come to tea some cool Sunday and meet Miss Loveman? M. C."

Howard and Molly were married on October 9, 1942 in New York. Judge Julius Haycraft was best man for his son. Molly Costain was given away by her father, Thomas B. Costain, the best-selling author of historical novels of the 1940s and 1950s. Molly Haycraft later wrote a number of similar works for young adults, believing that "the lives of the kings, queens, and princesses of England are an inexhaustible source of readable stories." After the war, the Haycrafts visited England many times, usually in October, to pursue their respective research interests.

Soon after their marriage Haycraft was commissioned a captain in the Special Services Division of the U. S. Army. His local draft board had classified him "IV F" on May 15, 1942 ("impossible eyesight"). Among his contributions to the war effort of an educational nature was the anonymously written



Molly Haycraft enjoying her favorite sport.



Pamphlet distributed to American troops in World War II.

booklet, *A Short Guide to Great Britain*, 1942, which was given to all American troops being sent there. It described briefly the country, government, British currency, etc., with many hints about behavior: "To say: 'I look like a bum' is offensive to their ears, for to the British this means that you look like your own backside. It isn't important—just a tip if you are trying to shine in polite society."

During the war he was also mystery critic for *Harper's Magazine* (1941-1942), and later held this position for *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* (1946-1948). He was also one of the founders in 1945 of the Mystery Writers of America, from which he received two Edgar Allan Poe Awards ("Edgars"), in 1947 and 1975, for mystery criticism and scholarship.

His major book published after the war was *The Art of the Mystery Story; A Collection of Critical Essays*, 1946, a large volume containing fifty-three items on the "mystery-crime-detective story" in 543 pages. Even though his established reputation as a critic in the field opened doors for the gathering of these essays, he still at times had the anthologist's problem of not getting permission to print in the collection some highly desired pieces. He had sent Raymond Chandler a copy of the book, which contained his "The Simple Art of Murder," and Chandler replied:

December 9, 1946

Dear Mr. Haycraft:

Thank you very much indeed for the inscribed copy of *The Art of the Mystery Story*.

Like most anthologies—I might even say like all anthologies—it leaves out some things which the reader thinks must inevitably have been included: for example, Somerset Maugham's article originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post* and Perelman's wonderful parody of the hard-boiled mystery. The latter makes Ben Hecht's rather languid effort, "The Whistling Corpse," look pretty thin. There were probably business reasons for leaving these out....

Very cordially yours,
Raymond Chandler

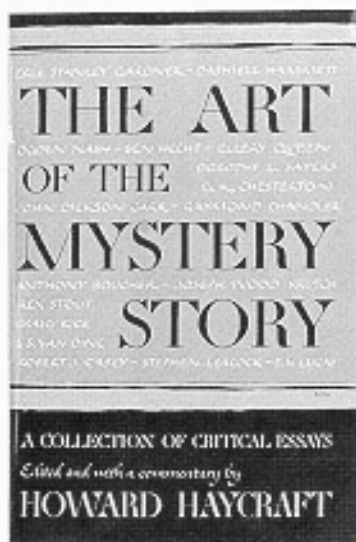
And Haycraft answered:

January 18, 1947

Dear Mr. Chandler,

In mentioning the omission of Maugham and Perelman, you name the only two refusals I had—neither, I was told, because of price. Maugham couldn't be bothered and Perelman wanted to save his for his own collection (my anthology was scheduled ahead of his at the time I requested permission).

Cordially,
Howard Haycraft



The Art of the Mystery Story
Simon and Schuster, 1946.
First edition.

John Beecroft edited three anthologies with Howard Haycraft. The first was *A Treasury of Great Mysteries*, 1957, two volumes (each 576 pages) containing novels, novelettes, and short stories. Beecroft was born in Superior, Wisconsin, and educated at Columbia University and the Sorbonne. He served as editor for book clubs most of his life, and he was chief editor for the Literary Guild of America from 1937 to 1960. He also edited with Thomas B. Costain several collections of short stories.

Publisher Bennett Cerf earlier had asked Haycraft to prepare a revised edition of the Modern Library's *Fourteen Great Detective Stories*. Haycraft had hoped to include in the collection a Nero Wolfe short story by Rex Stout, but he had received the following information from the author:

January 24, 1948

Dear Howard Haycraft:

Coming from you, that letter is far the most flattering one I have ever received. I have never before had any special reason to regret not having written a Nero Wolfe short, but I sure do now. There isn't one, damn it.

I started for you twice the other evening at Baker Street [the annual dinner in New York of the Baker Street Irregulars celebrating Sherlock Holmes's birthday] but got intercepted both times.

Cordially,
Rex Stout

Thus, at a later time, Haycraft was able to include the Nero Wolfe novelette, *Instead of Evidence*, in *A Treasury of Great Mysteries*.

In reference to Stout's letter, it is important to mention that all Haycraft's letters reveal his unfailing magnanimity. He was always kind and understanding to others, even when their actions hindered his own. For any slight courtesy received, he was always grateful; for any honor awarded, he was always self-effacing.

Haycraft compiled and edited four more omnibuses, including *Five Spy Novels*, 1962, a genre that prospered during World War II and the Cold War. His last book was a return to Sherlock Holmes, *Sherlock Holmes' Greatest Cases*, which had been the subject of his first book in the mystery field published thirty-one years before, *The Boys' Sherlock Holmes*. He had been invested in The Baker Street Irregulars in 1950, "in recognition of distinguished services rendered in the Cause of keeping green the Master's memory"; and in 1972 he received its highest honor, The Baker Street Irregulars Two-Shilling Award.

Sherlock Holmes' Greatest Cases, 1967, however, was published by Franklin Watts in a large type edition for the visually handicapped. Throughout his career he was active in promoting library services for the blind and physically handicapped, and he himself became a user of Talking Books in 1960 following four retinal operations. Among the accolades he received from the American Library Association and many other library organizations, perhaps he appreciated most its Francis Joseph Campbell Citation for library service to the blind, which he was awarded in 1966, its first recipient.

Public recognition usually emphasizes the accomplishment and forgets the character of the achiever. Private praise may be more revealing. Eleanor Gould was a copyreader at D. Appleton-Century Company, and she wrote Haycraft a long holograph letter soon after the publication of *Murder for Pleasure*.

Dear Mr. Haycraft:

This is unheard of! When a publisher's copyreader writes a fan letter.... Its sole purpose is to tell you how fanatically enthusiastic I have been over *Murder for Pleasure*, ever since I was first handed the typescript....

I don't know which thing I like best about you, so I don't know what to start lavishing praises on: your style, your choice of subject, your handling of it—or your remarkably satisfying conduct as an author.... You wrote well and managed to transfer your lucubrations to an immaculate typescript. You knew how to mark proof without indulging in diatribes against editor and printer in the margins; all your lists and tables were impeccably alphabetized; and your index was a matter for joy and thanksgiving around the office.... And your letters—why they were as civil as those of one businessman to another! (I wonder where authors got the idea that they were privileged to cast aside ordinary politeness and be as querulous and illtempered as they pleased!)....

Mr. Howard Haycraft, you have a *book* there! And it's not because it's unique, "the first one of its kind," etc., that it's good. It's not even because it has a subject "of interest to all present-day readers." Nor yet is it only because it's a "comprehensive and scholarly treatment of a neglected subject."... No, it's because you are a fine writer.

You remember what Houseman had to say about the way he recognized true poetry? The hair on his skin stood up and his flesh prickled. Well, I've often made people laugh by saying that something I'd read was "so good it made my flesh creep." But it does something still more extreme—something that I don't like to tell people about: it makes me cry.... The most recent occurrence of this phenomenon was due to your chapter on Sherlock Holmes. I can't choose one segment or one aspect of it to enlarge upon, because to me it seemed, from the title and the inevitable excerpt that began it, to

the very end, with its repudiation of sentimentality, a perfect piece of writing. When I'd finished it for the first time, I shuddered and sighed and stretched and remarked to the office at large in dramatic tones: "Oh, you *must* read this book. It's the best thing I've ever read." And my considered judgment still is that it's one of the best things....And Mr. Haycraft, if ever you betray me and let on to the office that I've written to an Author, I'll never recover from the shame of it!

I'm enjoying knowing you.

With respect,
" veneration,
" enthusiasm,
" affection,

Eleanor Gould

He lived fifty more years after this letter was written, and died November 12, 1991, at the age of eighty-six, but we can still say, "Mr. Haycraft, we are enjoying knowing you."

Austin J. McLean, Curator
Special Collections

CHECK LIST OF MYSTERY BOOKS BY HOWARD HAYCRAFT

The Boys' Sherlock Holmes. Harper, 1936. New and enlarged edition, Harper, 1961.

The Boys' Book of Great Detective Stories. Harper, 1938.

The Boys' Second Book of Great Detective Stories. Harper, 1940.

Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story. Appleton, 1941. Newly enlarged edition, Biblio and Tannen, 1968; Carroll & Graf, 1984.

Crime Club Encore. Doubleday, 1942.

The Art of the Mystery Story; A Collection of Critical Essays. Simon and Schuster, 1946.

Fourteen Great Detective Stories. Modern Library, 1949.

A Treasury of Great Mysteries. Edited with John Beecroft. Simon and Schuster, 1957. 2 volumes.

Ten Great Mysteries. Edited with John Beecroft. Doubleday, 1959.

Five Spy Novels. Doubleday, 1962.

Three Times Three: Mystery Omnibus. Edited with John Beecroft. Doubleday, 1964.

Sherlock Holmes' Greatest Cases. Franklin Watts, 1967.

