

Three Poems by Wendell Berry

To a Writer of Reputation

Having begun in public anonymity,
you did not count on this
literary enterprise by which
some body becomes a "name"—
as if you have died and have become
a part of mere geography. Greet,
therefore, the roadsigns on the road.

Or perhaps you have become deaf and blind,
or merely inanimate, and may
be studied without embarrassment
by the disinterested, the dispassionate,
and the merely curious,
not fearing to be overheard.
Hello to the grass, then, and to the trees.

Or perhaps you are secretly
still alert and moving, no longer the one
they have named, but another,
named by yourself,
carrying away this morning's showers
for your private delectation.
Hello, river.

The Rejected Husband

After the storm and the new
stillness of the snow, he returns
to the graveyard, as though
he might turn back the white coverlet,
slip in beside her as he used to do,
and again feel, beneath his hand,
her flesh quicken and turn warm.
But he is not her husband now.
To participate in resurrection, one
first must be dead. And he goes
back into the whitened world, alive.

In Art Rowanberry's Barn

In Art Rowanberry's barn, when Art's death
had become quietly a fact among
the other facts, Andy Catlett found
a jacket made of the top half
of a pair of coveralls after
the legs wore out, for Art
never wasted anything.
Andy found a careful box made
of woodscraps with a strap
for a handle; it contained
a handful of small nails
wrapped in a piece of newspaper,
several large nails, several
rusty bolts with nuts and washers,
some old harness buckles
and rings, rusty but usable,
several small metal boxes, empty,
and three hickory nuts
hollowed out by mice.
And all of these things Andy
put back where they had been,
for time and the world and other people
to dispense with as they might,
but not by him to be disprized.
This long putting away
of things maybe useful was not all
of Art's care-taking; he cared
for creatures also, every day
leaving his tracks in dust, mud
or snow as he went about
looking after his stock, or gave
strength to lighten a neighbor's work.
Andy found a bridle made
of several lengths of baling twine
knotted to a rusty bit,
an old set of chain harness,
four horseshoes of different sizes,
and three hammerstones picked up
from the opened furrow on days
now as perfectly forgotten
as the days when they were lost.
He found a good farrier's knife,
an awl, a key to a lock
that would no longer open.

Over My Dead Body

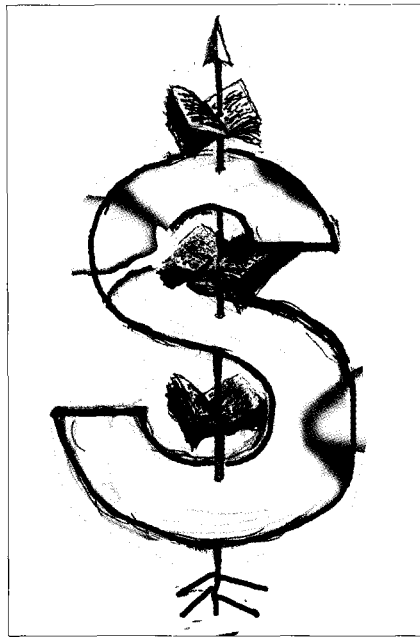
by J.O. Tate

“The thing is to squeeze the last drop out of the medium you have learned to use. The aim is not essentially different from the aim of Greek tragedy, but we are dealing with a public that is only semi-literate and we have to make an art out of a language they can understand.”

—Raymond Chandler

**Crime Novels: American
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Anna Myreck-Wodecki

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These two volumes of crime novels, bound and printed as classics, challenge our notion of the American canon. Or perhaps they simply remind us of what we were actually reading when we were supposed to be reading something else. If reading is good for you, bad reading is even better.

To put it another way, our *Pleiade* has become a *Serie Noire*. It was ever thus. In the British tradition, of course, there was that scandalous background extending from Robert Greene's pamphlets on coney-catching to Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and Fielding's *Jonathan Wilde*, and on to the Gothic novel, the Newgate novel, *Oliver Twist* and *The Moonstone*, and the early Greene. The French tradition, meantime, offers an extended parallel in criminal fiction. In Balzac, Stendhal, Zola, and Camus, we ratchet the guillo-

tine. Dostoyevsky's ax murderer was possibly redeemed, but not before he was a very bad boy indeed. Here in Hicksville, we have our own distinctive tradition of rough stuff. Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville limned the metaphysics of transgression in ways that have immortalized their names. They left upon the vectors of crime a stink of intellect—a Limburger of cerebration. The other tradition is the vulgar one, the most notable practitioner of which was George Lip-pard. But we must not forget in our puritanical/sentimental way, that Huckle-berry Finn himself was a notable juvenile delinquent. Louisa May Alcott, who made nice in *Little Women* and *Little Men* and *Under the Lilacs*, also scribbled subversive melodramas on the side. American innocence has always been related to violence. Billy Budd was, we tend to forget, technically guilty. Where

else but in America would Truman Capote, of all people, have written *In Cold Blood*? Leslie Fiedler and Norman Mailer are not the only Americans who have understood a relation between Captain Ahab and Charles Manson. Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway, perhaps more than any others, connected the American traditions of Gothic ter-ror to the authentic voice of our own speech.

Thus the stage was set for the crime novel as a work of art in the vein of the “lyrical novel” as we have known it—the best tradition of American fiction. So the question about these crime novels is not whether they are criminal enough, but whether they are sufficiently novels. Are they, after all, literature? Not all of them were published as paperback originals, though we may remember them that way. Geoffrey O'Brien's *Hardboiled America* reminds us of the glory days of paperbacks back in the late 40's and 50's, when Faulkner's and Steinbeck's books looked like Cornell Woolrich's. You may perhaps remember those lurid covers, icons of American art—unmade beds, whiskey bottles, lots of underwear, sometimes a handgun—which somehow said more to me than any other images of books ever did. And yet it is not hard to see many of the crime novels as moral fables. These narrations are defined by crime, but they are as wholesome as Sunday School lessons. Crime doesn't pay. That's a point that was made by Allen Tate in testimony about the

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