

IN A MELLOW TONE

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Well, spring, at last, has sprung; a pair of collared doves are nesting, a little optimistically, in the tree outside my office window, and the tree itself is starting to blossom. Just days ago, as I first drafted this newsletter, the snow had been drifting down past the window and when I'd gone out to buy the paper earlier that morning it had been sleeting. Extremes of weather (not that, by world standards, this is anything like extreme) were so much more welcome when we were down in Cornwall, wedged between the moors and the sea. I suppose it was what you expected, close to the elements.

Thanks to supreme efforts by the sales and marketing people at Random House UK, the paperback of *Ash & Bone* has been selling well since its publication in February. *Darkness & Light*, the third Frank Elder novel, will be published in hardcover in this country on April 24th, and will be published in the States by Harcourt in July – at which time they will bring out a paperback edition of *Flesh & Blood*.

Ash & Bone, incidentally, has been short listed in the Mystery/Thriller category of Los Angeles Times Book Prizes, along with *The Lincoln Lawyer* by Michael Connelly, *The Right Madness* by James Crumley, *Legends: A Novel of Dissimulation* by Robert Littell and *Strange Affair* by Peter Robinson. The winner will be announced on the evening of Friday, April 28th, doubtless with great panoply and considerable flim-flam, and, although I shall be there in spirit only, there will be a moment, I'm sure, when I will hold my breath and await the opening of the envelope.

Speaking of awards, *Flesh & Blood* is on the long list for The International IMPAC Dublin Literary Prize, where it languishes (at least, until April 5th, it does) in the company of scores and scores of others, ranging from Carlos Ruiz Zafón and Andrea Levy to Jeanette Winterson and V.S. Naipaul. You'll understand why I'm not dusting down my top hat and spats for that particular shindig.

Writers are chosen for the IMPAC award by libraries from many parts of the world – Bogota, Dunedin, Port-of-Spain and Sheffield, to name just a few. The keen-eyed librarian who was hip to the literary ambitions of *Flesh & Blood* resides, or works, in the Cape Breton Regional Library, Sydney, Canada, and she, or he, has my thanks.

The two Charlie Resnick short stories I announced as being imminent in the last *Mellotone* have duly made their appearance. *Home* was published initially in the December 2005 issue of *The Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* in the US, and was then swiftly swept up into *Sunday Night & Monday Morning*, a small press edition of stories by Nottingham writers, which was edited by James Urquhart, and published by Five Leaves Publications here in the city. Tipping it's hat in the direction of Alan Sillitoe's famous novel, it's other authors include Stephen Booth, Clare Brown, Robert Harris, Jon McGregor and Julie Myerson, and it's a collection well worth getting hold of. Five Leaves web site is at www.fiveleaves.co.uk and the ISBN for the book is 0-907123-52-X.

The other story, *The Sun, The Moon and The Stars*, appears in *The Detection Collection*, an anthology of stories by members of The Detection Club, edited by Simon Brett and published by Orion. Reginald Hill and P.D. James have stories here, as do H.R.F. Keating and Colin Dexter.

Maxim Jakubowski, font of many an anthology, has done it again with *The Best British Mysteries 2006* (Allison & Busby), best on this occasion including Jake Arnott, Mark Billingham, John Connolly, Michael Z. Lewin and Val McDermid. My own contribution, *Drummer Unknown*, is set amongst the jazz life of London's Soho in the 1950s, with a smattering of drug dealers, ladies of easy virtue and corrupt policemen for bad company.

The equally indefatigable anthologist, Robert J. Randisi, has marshalled together a fine bunch of crime writers in *Greatest Hits: Original Stories of Assassins, Hit Men & Hired Guns*, which was published in America towards the end of last year by Carroll & Graf. Therein you will find the likes of Lawrence Sanders, Lee Child, Jeffery Deaver, James W. Hall and *Snow, Snow, Snow*, a story of mine set largely in the snow swept fens and featuring a fastidious contract killer named Malkin, who is being pursued, at a distance, by two police officers, Will Grayson and Helen Walker. Randisi seemed to like this pair so much, he suggested that I put them into a full-length novel, maybe even a series.

Series, I don't know, but both detectives are central to the book I'm currently working on, set in Cambridgeshire and Nottingham and titled *Gone to Ground*. Thanks, Bob, for the suggestion.

Several people responded to my comments in the last newsletter concerning Peter Temple's fine crime novel, *The Broken Shore*, by tracking down the original Australian edition (Text Publishing, Melbourne) and none were disappointed. The good news for the rest of us is that it will be published in the UK by Quercus this summer. As to the book itself, which has

just been long-listed for the Miles Franklin Literary Award in Australia – the first crime novel ever to have done so – I can only repeat what I said before: lovely characterisation, a serious theme, a prose style that is brusque and tender, according to need, and an atmosphere you can all but reach out and touch.

Brian Thompson, author of, amongst other things, two of the best British crime novels in the last twenty years, has recently published a marvellous memoir, *Keeping Mum: A Wartime Childhood* (Atlantic Books). Brian's a mate, and lest you think there's some kind of Labour Party big loans equals peerages quid pro quo going on, let me quote Christina Patterson from today's *Independent*.

"In *Keeping Mum* he tells the astonishing tale of a childhood with a mother who would sleep for days, wander round naked and then go dancing with Yanks at night, and a father who, on one of his rare trips home, would set his puny son 'herculean' challenges. His resilience is reflected in the writing, which is warm, funny and utterly without self-pity. ... it's a fine example of that increasingly rare beast: the memoir not as money-spinning project, or as therapy, but art."

Oh, those two crime novels ... *Bad to the Bone* (Viking, 1991) and *Ladder of Angels* (Slow Dancer Press, 1999), are both, shockingly, out of print, but when I checked a few moments ago, Abe Books (www.abebooks.co.uk) was listing a number of copies of each, reasonably priced and, apparently, in good condition.

Finally, speaking of memoir writing as art, let me remind you of Derrick Buttress' *Broxtowe Boy*, which recounts his Nottingham childhood during the 30s and 40s. It is published by Shoestring Press (www.shoestringpress.co.uk), the ISBN is 1-899549-98-6, and the good news is that Derrick is working on a sequel, taking the story on through his teenage years and possibly beyond.

Finally, a handful of events over the coming months.

Lincoln Book Festival

Monday, 15th May, Lincoln Drill Hall, evening
Reading/talk/discussion with Mark Billingham
Details: www.lincolnbookfestival.co.uk

Broadway Media Centre, Nottingham

Tuesday, 16th May, evening
Introducing and interviewing Alexander McCall Smith
Details: www.broadway.org.uk - 0115 952 6611

Waterstone's, Nottingham
Monday, 12th June, evening
Introducing Mark Billingham & Christopher Brookmyre
Details: 0115 948 4499

Two Readings with the jazz group, Second Nature:
Lowdham Book Festival, evening
Sunday, 18th June
Details: www.lowdhambookfestival.co.uk - 0115 966 4143

Jazz at Dexter's
The Five Ways, Sherwood, Nottingham
Tuesday, 20th June, evening
Details:

Harrogate Crime Writing Festival
Friday, 21st July, evening
In Conversation with Ian Rankin
Saturday, 22nd July, afternoon
What's Wrong with Popular Fiction?
Discussion with Kate Mosse, Mo Hayder, Robert Goddard & Ian Rankin
Details: www.harrogate-festival.org.uk - 01423 562303

D H Lawrence Festival
Durban House, Eastwood, Notts
Out of the Shadows - talk about crime fiction, my years as a writer and my connections,
mostly accidental, with D H Lawrence
14 - 20th August, exact date to be confirmed
Details: 01773 717 353

Edinburgh International Book Festival
Tuesday, 22nd August, evening
Reading/Talk/Discussion with Mark Billingham & Declan Hughes
Details: www.edbookfest.co.uk - 0131 718 5666

Noir Sur la Ville
Saturday/Sunday 18th/19th November
Lamballe, Brittany
Details: www.fureurdunoir.com

*John Harvey, April 2006
Nottingham, England*