

John Dickson Carr

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John Dickson Carr (November 30, 1906–February 27, 1977) was an American author of detective stories, who also published under the pen names **Carter Dickson**, **Carr Dickson** and **Roger Fairbairn**.

The son of Wooda Nicholas Carr, a U.S. congressman from Pennsylvania, Carr graduated from The Hill School in Pottstown in 1925 and Haverford College in 1929. Carr lived for a number of years in England beginning around 1930, as his career as a mystery writer began, and he married an English woman. Many of his novels had English settings, his best-known detective characters were English, and he is sometimes loosely grouped among "British-style" mystery writers. He is generally regarded as one of the greatest writers of so-called "Golden Age" mysteries, complex, plot-driven stories in which the puzzle is paramount. He was influenced in this regard by the works of Gaston Leroux and by the Father Brown stories of G. K. Chesterton.

Carr was a master of the locked room mystery, in which a detective solves apparently impossible crimes. The Dr. Fell mystery *The Hollow Man* (1935), usually considered Carr's masterpiece, was selected in 1981 as the best locked-room mystery of all time by a panel of 17 mystery authors and reviewers.^[1]

In 1950, his biography of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle brought Carr the first of his two Special Edgar Awards from the Mystery Writers of America; the second came in 1970, in recognition of his 40-year career as a mystery writer. He was also presented the MWA's Grand Master award in 1963.

In early spring 1963, while living in Mamaroneck, N.Y., Carr suffered a stroke, which paralyzed his left side. He continued to write using one hand, and for several years contributed a regular column of mystery and detective book reviews, "The Jury Box", to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Carr eventually moved to Greenville, South Carolina, and he died there of lung cancer in 1977.

John Dickson Carr



John Dickson Carr

Born	30 November 1906 <div>Uniontown, Pennsylvania, United States</div>
Died	28 February 1977 (aged 70) <div>Greenville, South Carolina, United States</div>
Occupation	Novelist
Genres	detective novel, murder mystery
Literary movement	Golden Age of Detective Fiction
Notable work(s)	The Hollow Man, The Burning Court

Influences

Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Gaston Leroux, A.E.W. Mason, Montague Rhodes James, Alexandre Dumas, Robert Louis Stevenson, Thomas Henshaw

<h1>Contents</h1> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 1 Dr. Fell and Sir Henry Merrivale■ 2 Other works■ 3 Critical appraisal■ 4 Radio Plays■ 5 Film and television■ 6 Publications<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 6.1 Novels as John Dickson Carr■ 6.2 Novels as Carter Dickson■ 6.3 Short story collections■ 6.4 Plays■ 6.5 Non-fiction■ 7 Biographical material■ 8 See also■ 9 References■ 10 External links	<div>Stevenson, Thomas Hainsnew</div> <div>Influenced</div> <div>Anthony Boucher, Hake Talbot, Colin Dexter, Joseph Commings, Edward D. Hoch, Paul Halter, Surender Mohan Pathak, Christopher Fowler, Edmund Crispin, Clayton Rawson</div>
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Dr. Fell and Sir Henry Merrivale

Carr's two major detectives, Dr. Fell and Sir Henry Merrivale, are superficially quite similar. Both are large, blustery, upper-class, eccentric Englishmen somewhere between middle-aged and elderly. Dr. Fell, who is frankly fat and walks only with the aid of two canes, was clearly modelled on the British writer G. K. Chesterton and is at all times a model of civility and geniality. He has a great mop of untidy hair that is often covered by a "shovel hat" and he generally wears a cape. He lives in a modest cottage and has no official connection to any public authorities.

"Mr. Carr can lead us away from the small, artificial, brightly-lit stage of the ordinary detective plot into the menace of outer darkness. He can create atmosphere with an adjective, alarm with an allusion, or delight with a rollicking absurdity. In short he can write - Dorothy L. Sayers "

"H.M.", on the other hand, although stout and with a majestic "corporation", is physically active and is feared for his ill-temper and noisy rages. In a 1949 novel, *A Graveyard to Let*, for example, he demonstrates an unexpected talent for hitting baseballs improbable distances. A well-heeled descendant of the "oldest baronetcy" in England, he is an Establishment figure (even though he frequently rails against it) and in the earlier novels is the head of the British Secret Service. In *The Plague Court Murders* he is said to be qualified as both a barrister and a medical doctor. Even in the earliest books the bald, bespectacled, and scowling H.M. is clearly a Churchillian figure and in the later novels this similarity is somewhat more consciously evoked.

Many of the Fell novels feature two or more different impossible crimes, including *He Who Whispers* (1946) and *The Case of the Constant Suicides* (1941). The novel *The Crooked Hinge* (1938) weaves a seemingly impossible throat-slashing, witchcraft, a survivor of the *Titanic*, an eerie automaton modelled on Johann Maelzel's chess player, and a case similar to that of the Tichborne claimant into what is often cited as one of the greatest classics of detective fiction. But even Carr's biographer, Douglas G. Greene ^[2]), notes that the

explanation, like many of Carr's in other books, seriously stretches plausibility and the reader's credulity.

Dr. Fell's own discourse on locked room mysteries in chapter 17 of *The Hollow Man*, is critically acclaimed and is sometimes printed as a stand-alone essay in its own right.

Other works

Besides Dr. Fell, Carr mysteries feature three other series detectives: Sir Henry Merrivale (H.M.), Henri Bencolin, and Colonel March. Many of the Merrivale novels, written under the Carter Dickson byline, rank with Carr's best work, including the highly praised *The Judas Window* (1938).

A few of his novels do not feature a series detective. The most famous of these, *The Burning Court* (1937), involves witchcraft, poisoning, and a body that disappears from a sealed crypt in suburban Philadelphia; it was the basis for the French film *La Chambre ardente* (1962).

Carr wrote in the short story format as well. "Most of Carr's stories are compressed versions of his locked-room novels, and at times they benefit from the compression. Probably the best of them are in the Carter Dickson book, *The Department of Queer Complaints* (1940), although this does not include the brilliantly clever H.M. story *The House in Goblin Wood* or a successful pastiche which introduces Edgar Allan Poe as a detective."^[2]

In 1950 Carr wrote a novel called *The Bride of Newgate*, set in 1815 at the close of the Napoleonic Wars, one of the earliest full-length historical whodunnits. *The Devil in Velvet* and *Fire, Burn!* are the two [historical novels]] with which he himself was most pleased. With Adrian Conan Doyle, the youngest son of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Carr wrote Sherlock Holmes stories that were published in the 1954 collection *The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes*. He was also honored by the estate of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle by being asked to write the biography for the legendary author. The book, *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, appeared in 1949 and received generally favorable reviews for its vigor and entertaining style.

Critical appraisal

For many years now Dr. Fell has generally been considered to be Carr's major creation. The British novelist Kingsley Amis, for instance, writes in his essay "My Favorite Sleuths" that Dr. Fell is one of the three great successors to Sherlock Holmes (the other two are Father Brown and Nero Wolfe) and that H.M., "according to me is an old bore." This may be in part because in the Merrivale novels written after World War II H.M. frequently became a comic caricature of himself, especially in the physical misadventures in which he found himself at least once in every novel. Humorous as these episodes were intended to be, they also tended to have the unwanted effect of diminishing his overall persona. Earlier, however, H.M. had been regarded more favorably by a number of critics. Howard Haycraft, author of the seminal **Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story**, wrote in 1941 that H.M. or "The Old Man" was "the present writer's admitted favorite among contemporary fictional sleuths". In 1938 the British mystery writer R. Philmore wrote in an article called "Inquest on Detective Stories" that Sir Henry was "the most amusing of detectives". And further: "Of course, H.M. is so much the best detective that, once having invented him, his creator could get away with any plot."

There is a book-length critical study by S. T. Joshi, *John Dickson Carr: A Critical Study* (1990) (ISBN 0-87972-477-3).

The definitive biography of Carr is by Douglas G Greene, *John Dickson Carr: The Man Who Explained Miracles* (1995) (ISBN 1-883402-47-6). From an obituary published in Greenville, South Carolina, Carr would appear to have written under the name of Fenton Carter but no works by anyone of this name have yet been identified.

Radio Plays

Carr also wrote many radio scripts, particularly for the Suspense (radio program) series in America and for its UK equivalent *Appointment With Fear* introduced by Valentine Dyall, as well as many other dramas for the BBC, and some screenplays. His 1943 half-hour radio play *Cabin B-13* was expanded into a series on CBS in 1948-49 for which Carr wrote all 25 scripts, basing some on earlier works or re-presenting devices that Chesterton had used.^[3] The 1943 play *Cabin B-13* was also expanded into the script for the 1953 film *Dangerous Crossing*, directed by Joseph M. Newman and starring Michael Rennie and Jeanne Crain. Carr worked extensively for BBC Radio during World War II, writing both mystery stories and propaganda scripts.

Film and television

Carr's works were the basis for a number of films, including 1951's *The Man with a Cloak*, and *Dangerous Crossing* in 1953. *The Emperor's Snuffbox* was filmed as *That Woman Opposite* in 1957; *La chambre ardente*, from 1962, was a loose adaptation of *The Burning Court*.

Various Carr stories formed the basis for episodes of television series, particularly those without recurring characters such as *General Motors Presents*. In 1956, the television series *Colonel March of Scotland Yard*, starring Boris Karloff as Colonel March and based on Carr's character and his stories, ran for 26 episodes.

Publications

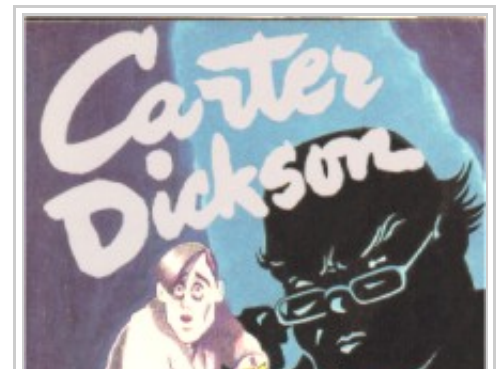
Novels as John Dickson Carr

- *It Walks By Night* (detective Henri Bencolin) - 1930
- *Castle Skull* (Bencolin) - 1931
- *The Lost Gallows* (Bencolin) - 1931
- *Poison In Jest* - 1932
- *The Waxworks Murder* (Bencolin) - 1932 (US title: *The Corpse In The Waxworks*)
- *Hag's Nook* (detective Dr. Gideon Fell) - 1933
- *The Mad Hatter Mystery* (Fell) - 1933
- *The Blind Barber* (Fell) - 1934
- *The Eight of Swords* (Fell) - 1934
- *Death-Watch* (Fell) - 1935
- *The Hollow Man* (Fell) - 1935 (US title: *The Three Coffins*)
- *The Arabian Nights Murder* (Fell) - 1936

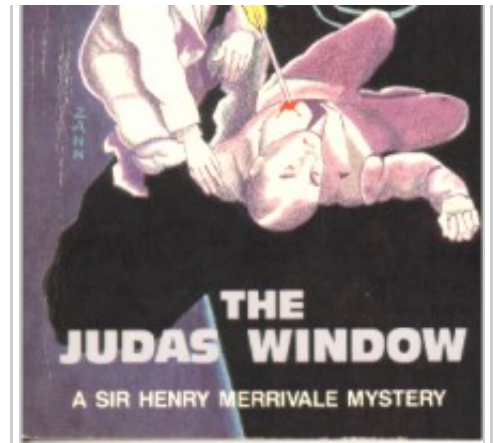
- *The Burning Court* - 1937
- *The Four False Weapons, Being the Return of Bencolin* (Bencolin) - 1938
- *To Wake the Dead* (Fell) - 1938
- *The Crooked Hinge* (Fell) - 1938
- *The Black Spectacles* (Fell) - 1939 (US title: *The Problem Of The Green Capsule*)
- *The Problem of the Wire Cage* (Fell) - 1939
- *The Man Who Could Not Shudder* (Fell) - 1940
- *The Case of the Constant Suicides* (Fell) - 1941
- *Death Turns the Tables* (Fell) - 1941 (UK title: *The Seat of the Scornful*, 1942)
- *The Emperor's Snuff-Box* - 1942
- *Till Death Do Us Part* (Fell) - 1944
- *He Who Whispers* (Fell) - 1946
- *The Sleeping Sphinx* (Fell) - 1947
- *Below Suspicion* (Fell) - 1949 (also features Patrick Butler)
- *The Bride of Newgate* - 1950, historical mystery
- *The Devil in Velvet* - 1951, historical mystery
- *The Nine Wrong Answers* - 1952
- *Captain Cut-Throat* - 1955, historical mystery
- *Patrick Butler for the Defense* (detective Patrick Butler) - 1956
- *Fire, Burn!* - 1957, historical mystery
- *The Dead Man's Knock* (Fell) - 1958
- *Scandal at High Chimneys: A Victorian Melodrama* - 1959, historical mystery
- *In Spite of Thunder* (Fell) - 1960
- *The Witch of the Low Tide: An Edwardian Melodrama* - 1961, historical mystery
- *The Demoniacs* - 1962, historical mystery
- *Most Secret* - 1964 (This was a revision of a novel by Carr that was published in 1934 as *Devil Kinsmere* under the pseudonym "Roger Fairbairn")
- *The House at Satan's Elbow* (Fell) - 1965
- *Panic in Box C* (Fell) - 1966
- *Dark of the Moon* (Fell) - 1968
- *Papa La-Bas* - 1968, historical mystery
- *The Ghosts' High Noon* - 1970, historical mystery
- *Deadly Hall* - 1971, historical mystery
- *The Hungry Goblin: A Victorian Detective Novel* - 1972 (Wilkie Collins is the detective)

Novels as Carter Dickson

- *The Bowstring Murders* - 1934 (Originally published as by Carr Dickson, but Carr's publishers complained that the name was too similar to Carr's real name, so Carter Dickson was substituted.)
- *The Plague Court Murders* (detective: Sir Henry Merrivale) - 1934
- *The White Priory Murders* (Merrivale) - 1934
- *The Red Widow Murders* (Merrivale) - 1935
- *The Unicorn Murders* (Merrivale) - 1935
- *The Punch and Judy Murders* (Merrivale) - 1936 (US title: *The Magic Lantern Murders*)



- *The Ten Teacups* (Merrivale) - 1937 (US title: *The Peacock Feather Murders*)
- *The Judas Window* (Merrivale) - 1938 (US title: *The Crossbow Murder*)
- *Death in Five Boxes* (Merrivale) - 1938
- *Drop to His Death* (in collaboration with John Rhode) - 1939 (US title: *Fatal Descent*)
- *The Reader is Warned* (Merrivale) - 1939
- *And So To Murder* (Merrivale) - 1940
- *Murder in The Submarine Zone* (Merrivale) - 1940 (US title: *Nine - And Death Makes Ten*, also published as *Murder in the Atlantic*)
- *Seeing is Believing* (Merrivale) - 1941 (also published as *Cross of Murder*)
- *The Gilded Man* (Merrivale) - 1942 (also published as *Death and The Gilded Man*)
- *She Died A Lady* (Merrivale) - 1943
- *He Wouldn't Kill Patience* (Merrivale) - 1944
- *The Curse of the Bronze Lamp* (Merrivale) - 1945 (UK title: *Lord of the Sorcerers*, 1946)
- *My Late Wives* (Merrivale) - 1946
- *The Skeleton in the Clock* (Merrivale) - 1948
- *A Graveyard To Let* (Merrivale) - 1949
- *Night at the Mocking Widow* (Merrivale) - 1950
- *Behind the Crimson Blind* (Merrivale) - 1952
- *The Cavalier's Cup* (Merrivale) - 1953
- *Fear Is the Same* - 1956, historical mystery



1987 paperback edition

Short story collections

- *The Department of Queer Complaints* (as Carter Dickson) (detective: Colonel March) - 1940 (The 1940 volume contains 7 stories about Colonel March and 4 non-series stories. The 7 March stories were reprinted as *Scotland Yard: Department of Queer Complaints*, Dell mapback edition, 1944.)
- *Dr. Fell, Detective, and Other Stories* - 1947 (Fell)
- *The Third Bullet and Other Stories of Detection* - 1954
- *The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes*, with Adrian Conan Doyle - 1954 (Sherlock Holmes)
- *The Men Who Explained Miracles* - 1963 (Fell, Merrivale, and others)
- *The Door to Doom and Other Detections* - 1980 (includes radio plays)
- *The Dead Sleep Lightly* - 1983 (radio plays)
- *Fell and Foul Play* - 1991 (includes the full version of *The Third Bullet*)
- *Merrivale, March and Murder* - 1991 (includes all the stories from *The Department of Queer Complaints* + one, that is: all Colonel March stories)

Plays

- *Speak of the Devil* - Crippen & Landru, 1994 (a radio play in 8 parts). First publication of Carr's radio script. Written in 1941.
- *13 to the Gallows* - 2008. A collection of 4 stage plays, written during the early 1940s—2 by Carr alone, and 2 in collaboration with the BBC's Val Gielgud (Crippen & Landru (<http://www.crippenlandru.com/>))

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- The Old Time Radio Series "*Suspense*" contains 22 plays by Carr, many of them not available in printed form. The radio plays can be downloaded from this site in MP3 format:
<http://www.archive.org/index.php>]
 - BBC has issued a set of two 90 minute cassettes containing radio versions of *The Hollow Man* and *Till Death us Do Part*.

Non-fiction

- *The Murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey* - 1936, historical analysis of a noted murder of 1678
- *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* - 1949, the authorized biography

Biographical material

- *John Dickson Carr: The Man Who Explained Miracles* - Douglas G Greene

See also

- Crime fiction

References

1. ^ http://mysteryfile.com/Locked_Rooms/Library.html
2. ^ *a b* *John Dickson Carr: The Man Who Explained Miracles*
3. ^ http://otrr.org/FILES/Logs_txt/Cabin%20B-13.txt

External links

- Illustrated Bibliography of 1st Editions (<http://www.classiccrimefiction.com/carrbib.htm>)
- The John Dickson Carr Society on the internet (<http://www.mysterylist.com/carrclub/carrframe.htm>)
- The John Dickson Carr Collector (<http://www.jdcarr.com/>) pictures of first edition covers
- John Dickson Carr: Explaining the Inexplicable (<http://www.mysterynet.com/books/testimony/carr.shtml>) by Douglas G. Greene on MysteryNet.com (<http://www.mysterynet.com/>)
- Page about Carr (<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/jdcarr.htm>) from the Books and Writers (<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/calendar.htm>) site.
- John Dickson Carr - Master of the Locked Room Mystery (<http://www.bitsofnews.com/content/view/4441/42/>) by Alexander G. Rubio at Bits of News.com (http://www.bitsofnews.com/component/option,com_frontpage/Itemid,1/) , 30 November 2006.
- John Dickson Carr One Hundred Years On (http://www.mystericale.com/index.php?issue=071&body=file&file=fuller_column.htm) 'Of the Moment' article by Nicholas Fuller on [1] (<http://www.mystericale.com/>) Spring 2007.
- The Ministry of Miracles: The Detective Fiction of John Dickson Carr (<http://www.reocities.com/hacklehorn/carr/index.htm>) a site made by Nicholas Lester Fuller which

includes book reviews.

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