

Title

**WILLIAM KIENZLE: THE INNOVATOR**

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CHAPTER I

THE PRECURSORS

For decades detective fiction was considered by literary critics as a somewhat second class citizen in the literary world. In 1945, in a now famous essay called "Who cares who killed Roger Ackroyd?," Edmund Wilson said "With so many fine books to be read, so much to be studied and known, there is no need to bore ourselves with this rubbish." Although Wilson's opinion was very negative, he was not alone in his repudiation of detective fiction. Many of his contemporaries did not deign to consider it at all.

There were to be sure some excellent critical essays written in the 20<sup>s</sup>, 30<sup>s</sup> and 40<sup>s</sup>, but the genre, in general was relegated to critical obscurity until the last two decades when several full length studies have been written. Shorter pieces by individual authors on specific aspects of detective fiction have been collected into anthologies, assembling the literary case for detective fiction.

What then is detective fiction? When did it start? Where? By whom? What circumstances preceded it? Where is it going now?... "Historians of the detective story are divided between those who say that there could be no detective stories until organized police and detective forces existed and those who find examples of rational

deduction in sources as various as The Bible and Voltaire, and suggest that these were early puzzles in detection."<sup>1</sup> Although there are some puzzles contained in the Bible (such as the story of Susanna and the elders), a puzzle, though central to the detective story, does not by itself form a detective story.

The detective novel could not be developed until the end of the eighteenth century because until then torture had been considered the only widely accepted means of detection. By the middle of the nineteenth century some of the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment had filtered down. "Torture had fallen into disrepute, not only because it was cruel; but also because men of the Age of Reason had come to recognize that it was not good enough. Torture guaranteed only that punishment would follow crime; it offered no guarantee that it would fall on the right man."<sup>2</sup>

Most historians of the genre agree that the first work that comes close to being considered crime literature was Caleb Williams by William Godwin, which came out in 1794. This is a story of murder, of finding out who did it, and of a relentless persecution by the murderer of the one who has discovered that he is guilty. Mémoires, by Eugene F.

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<sup>1</sup> Symons, Julian, Mortal Consequences, New York, N.Y. Harper and Row, 1972, page 17.

<sup>2</sup> Stein, Aaron Marc. "The Mystery Story in Cultural Perspective", The Mystery Story, Ball, John ed. Del Mar, Calif. Publish. Inc. 1976, page 38.

Vidocq, the next work of importance came out thirty years later. Vidocq was a former criminal and master of disguises, who in 1811 became the first chief of the Surete and sometime later established the world's first known detective agency. Vidocq solved crimes by realistic, plodding, police work, but not by the intellectual methodology of the detective. Mémoires had tremendous influence on later detective story writers, but it was not in itself a detective story.

The nineteenth century also saw the arrival of the members of the police on the side of law and order. The American cop and the British bobby were no longer working just for a ruler, investigating crimes against him. They were on the side of the common citizen working to protect him against criminals high and low.

The father of the modern detective stories is undoubtedly Edgar Allan Poe with his short story "Murders in the Rue Morgue" first published in 1841. The word detective was unknown at the time the story appeared, but it featured the first amateur detective in history, Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin. The publishing of "Murders in the Rue Morgue" marked the arrival of the prototype of the classical detective story for two reasons. "In the first place...it establishes the principle of the detective as an amateur of genius who is drawn to the solution of mysterious crimes as to a superior form of ratiocinative play and in the second

place, it furnishes a model of narrative art in which the denouement determines the order and casuality of the events narrated from the beginning."<sup>3</sup>

"Murders in the Rue Morgue" is the first of the 'locked-room mysteries'; which so many later authors were to copy, in which the bodies of two (2) young women are found in a fourth floor room totally locked and sealed. The police are puzzled. It is Dupin, a private amateur detective with a brilliant, introspective mind who deduces after much thought that the murderer was an orangutan. Four more consecutive mystery stories followed; two with Dupin as detective, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," 1842 which closely followed an actual murder case and was presented through the use of newspaper clippings, and "The Purloined Letter", in 1844, in which Dupin finds a stolen letter that is in plain view but disguised, after the police have searched everywhere. "The Gold Bug", a tale of hidden treasure, and "Thou Art The Man", in which a mechanical contraption, a type of Jack in the box, makes the corpse point at the guilty one making him confess, round out the mystery series.

Through his five short mystery stories, Poe introduced almost all the themes, and many of the clues and devices that later authors would copy. His amateur detective Dupin,

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<sup>3</sup>Porter, Dennis, The Pursuit of Crime, New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1981, page 24.

was a reasoning machine who was interested in the motives and psychology of people, best evidenced in his story "The Purloined Letter." Dupin's friend and companion was the model for the slow-witted first person narrator who makes the detective's brilliance shine by comparison. Dennis Porter has pointed out the considerable technical advantages of this innovation: "Poe taught his successors how to make their readers wait before providing the solution to a mystery and how valuable for achieving the effect of surprise was a first-person narrator who was not himself the detective."<sup>4</sup>

Poe's contributions to the detective story formula, include: 1. The locked-room mystery. 2. The arm chair detective. 3. The idea that what seems most unlikely is really perfectly obvious. 4. The use of cryptography to solve a puzzle. 5. The use of elementary ballistics. 6. The laying of false clues, and 7. The commission of a crime by the most unlikely person.

In the decades between Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, there were several authors of varying importance. The most famous of these was Wilkie Collins, author of The Woman in White and The Moonstone. The Moonstone is remembered for several innovations; 1. It is the first full length detective novel in English. 2. It makes full use of the

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<sup>4</sup>Porter, page 27.

device of peripeteia or retardation of the action to create suspense. 3. It has a most surprising recognition scene, when Franklin Blake discovers that he is apparently guilty of the theft which he is investigating. 4. The introduction of the remarkable Sergeant Cuff, patterned after the real life inspector Jonathan Whicher, and surely a forerunner of today's many police inspector series.

By far the best-known fictional detective of all time is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creation, Sherlock Holmes. Holmes was patterned after the Nietzschean ideal of the Superman. As Nietzsche proclaimed, "I teach you the Superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed."<sup>5</sup> By this, Nietzsche, an extreme individualist, indicated his contempt for the common man and his belief in great personalities and their exclusive rights.

Holmes does indeed surpass the average detective. Holmes may not be infallible, but we never see him fail. He has an enormous ego, and just as the Superman is extremely self-assertive. We learn gradually the astonishing extent of Holmes knowledge, says Symons. His incredible powers of observation and deduction are seen in the small incident where given an old felt hat, Holmes can deduce that the owner is, highly intellectual, once was well off but is now

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<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Bartlett's Familiar Quotations, ed. John Bartlett, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1968, page 805.

poor, that drinking is probably the cause of his downfall, and that his wife does not love him anymore. Holmes not only states these deductions, but then explains them in detail. Holmes' personality has several characteristics and quirks. When he is bored he takes drugs. He plays the violin, has fits of depression and is proud both of his immense knowledge and abysmal ignorance in fields that don't interest him. His inseparable companion and naive narrator of his stories is the extremely inept Dr. Watson. In his function as naive narrator "the limited range of his awareness is important for the coup de theatre of the recognition scene."<sup>6</sup>

Doyle stressed Sherlock Holmes's apartment as a reflection of his personality, as his refuge. Most stories begin there, and Holmes spends long hours meditating there. This stressing of a detective's lodging was carried over through the classical detectives stories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even into the hard-boiled detective's pad and James Bond's luxurious apartments.

Doyle also occasionally has Holmes pardon a felony in the hope that he is saving a soul. When the law cannot dispense justice, he does so himself, becoming in effect, a final court of appeals. This influence will be seen in the

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<sup>6</sup>Porter, page 37.



hard-boiled detectives stories in particular with Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer.

In writing his stories "Doyle has two premises: the rational scientific idea that events are really linked in an unaccidental chain, and the individualistic notion that a single inquirer can - and should - establish the links."<sup>7</sup>

In the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the detective story, both as short story and as novel, bloomed and developed. It came to be known as the Golden Age of the Classical Detective Story.

Many varied and excellent authors wrote during this period. Their fictional detectives were equally varied and can be divided in two general categories: The Supermen following Holmes and Dupin," with no emotional attachments and little interest in everyday life except insofar as it impinges on any particular problem and the inconspicuous ordinary men who solve their cases by the application of common sense rather than by analytic deduction...The Superman is almost always given his accompanying Watson who may do a lot of the humdrum investigation. The common-sense detective often works alone."<sup>8</sup>

"Rule 10"

made up

<sup>7</sup> Knight, Steven: Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction Bloomington, Indiana Univ. Press, 1980, page 68.

Rule 10

<sup>8</sup> Symons, pages 76-77.

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According to Symons, in the side of the Supermen, we could count:

- a. Prof Augustus S.F. & Van Dusen by Jacques Futcelle
- b. Father Brown by G.K. Chesterton
- c. Old Man in the Corner by Baroness Orczy
- d. Blind Max Carrados by Ernest Bramahsmith
- e. Hercule Poirot by Agatha Christie
- f. Philo Vance by S.S. Van Dine
- g. Lord Peter Wimsey by Dorothy Sayers and others

As ordinary men:

- a. Martin Hewitt by Arthur Morrison
- b. Paul Beck and son by M. McDonnell

Detective fiction had developed into a double duel of wits; one between the detective and the criminal and the other between the author and the reader. Clearly a set of rules was needed as guide for this game of wits and to assure readers that the authors played fair and that the puzzle was presented properly.

These were given by several critics and by the authors themselves. Hillary Waugh in his essay "The Mystery Versus the Novel" tells us there are six (6) rules of fair play. "Rule one: All clues discovered by the detective must be made available to the reader. Rule two: Early introduction of the murderer. Rule three: The crime must be significant. Rule four: There must be detection. Rule five: The number of suspects must be known and the murderer must be among

them. Rule six: Nothing extraneous may be introduced."<sup>9</sup>  
 To him the mystery story was a morality play, where evil is  
 vanquished and justice triumphs.

Waugh felt these rules were strict and that writers  
 must work within their boundaries no matter how confining.  
 "The mystery writer does not have the freedom to digress  
 into his philosophy of life while the action stands still.  
 This does not mean philosophy is not permitted...It only  
 means that he must create plots and story lines of such  
 nature that they will be furthered and developed through  
 such discussion."<sup>10</sup>

To these rules, many more can be added, John Ball in  
 his essay "Murder at Large", tells us that the murderer can  
 be a highly unlikely person but it is forbidden for the  
 supposed victim to have committed suicide. In "A Detective  
 Story Decalogue", Ronald A. Knox gives us his ten (10) rules  
 for writing detective fiction. Some are frankly humorous  
 such as rule #V "No chinaman must figure in the story".  
 Others have a lot of common sense, such as II; "All  
 supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a  
 matter of course. VI No accident must ever help the  
 detective nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition

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<sup>9</sup>Waugh, Hillary. "The Mystery Versus The Novel",  
Mystery, pages 71-73.

<sup>10</sup>Waugh, page 68.

which proves to be right."<sup>11</sup> The use of secret passages, undiscovered poisons or unknown twins were also forbidden by Knox.

Rules ad infinitum were given by Dorothy Sayers and other writers on characters, settings, etc. As can be supposed, what were intended as guidelines and helpful advice soon became a tight constraint which stifled the imagination of those trying to write within the formula. Writers started their own rebellion. In time, although still keeping to the general spirit of the formulas concerning the crime, the detective and the solution, writers deviated one by one from one or more of these rules. They have probably all been broken at one time or another. Symons says that the approach to the crime story is so different today from that of the Golden Age writers that it is almost impossible to believe this era happened. With the very best of intentions "...intelligent men and women who devised the rules did not see that they were limiting the scope and interest of their work."<sup>12</sup>

America was to be the theatre of one of the greatest rebellions of all. I am referring, of course, to the development of the formula that came to be known as the

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<sup>11</sup> Knox, Ronald A. "A Detective Story Decalogue", Detective Fiction, ed. Robin W. Winks, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1980, pages 200, 201, 202.

<sup>12</sup> Symons, page 105.

hard-boiled detective story.

Starting in the 1920<sup>s</sup>, there arose a detective story formula that was as definitely American as the classic detective story was British. The reasons for this were various: Americans have never held eccentrics in as high esteem as have the English; The class differences that exist in England are not as marked in America; Writers felt the need to express themselves in a way more in accordance with reality as they saw it.

The first hard-boiled stories came out in the 1920<sup>s</sup> by the dozens. They were published in the pulp magazines of the era, the most famous of which was "The Black Mask". "Constrained by the limited education of their audience and performing in the bloody arena of a low-brow medium, the hard-boiled writers rejected the sometimes constricting formulas of the formal detective novel. Abandoning the static calm, the intricate puzzle, the ingenious deductions, they wrote an entirely different story, characterized by rapid action, colloquial language, emotional impact and the violence that pervades American fiction."<sup>13</sup>

Dashiell Hammett was one of these early writers who later graduated to full length novels. These are now considered as among the finest of the genre. The Maltese Falcon 1930, The Glass Key 1931 and The Thin Man 1934

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<sup>13</sup> Grella, George. "The Hard-Boiled Detective novel", Detective, ed. Winks, page 111.

are his most famous. Hammett was followed by many other writers, but the two most outstanding are Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald. Mickey Spillane, although a much inferior writer, must be mentioned because of his immense popularity. Who were these new hard-boiled detectives and how did they differ from the classical detectives? The prototypes of the genre were:

1. Hammett's - Continental Op and Sam Spade
2. Chandler's - Phillip Marlowe
3. Macdonald's - Lew Archer
4. Spillane's - Mike Hammer

There were many differences between the classical detective formula stories and the hard boiled detective formula stories. Whereas the classic detective formula resembled the comedy of manners, with brittle, witty dialogue and often took place in a country house weekend, peopled with the rich and famous, aristocracy, and servants; the hard-boiled detective story always had an urban setting. This modern city hid behind its neon facade of glittering lights, a heart corrupted by greed and evil. The streets the hard-boiled detective walks are almost always tawdry and dirty. The people he meets are almost always corrupted. Occasionally these minor characters play a friendly role and aid him in the investigation.

In the classical detective formula, the detective was often from the upper class, or at the very least with a

brilliant analytical mind, like Hercule Poirot. He also almost always had a companion-helper. The police who aid him are often inept and incompetent but they are honest and they mean well.

**Foib** The hard-boiled detective is an average guy with great physical courage who represents the citizen on the street. He "is a traditional man of virtue in an amoral and corrupt world"<sup>14</sup> Tough and cynical, he is a professional working out of a dingy office trying to make ends meet. He is often called "the private eye". The police, when he does encounter them, are brutal and corrupt. The world of the private eye is one of violence. He is capable of giving and receiving great amounts of physical punishment. He is a man of integrity who lives by his code of honor and cannot be bought not even by love. Sam Spade at the end of The Maltese Falcon gives up the girl he loves to the police, for he has found out she is guilty.

**Under** There are differences even in the way sex is handled. Cawelti tells us: "As I have noted, the classical detective rarely becomes romantically involved. Sexual attractiveness, however, is one of the key characteristics of the private eye, and there are few stories in which he does not play either seducer or seduced; but sex tends to be represented in a double-edged way in the hard-boiled story.

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<sup>14</sup>Cawelti, John G. Adventure, Mystery and Romance, University of Chicago Press, 1976, page 152.

It is an object of pleasure, yet it also has a disturbing tendency to become a temptation, a trap, and a betrayal".<sup>15</sup>

In the classic detective fiction, the rich and their foibles are objects of amusement or admiration, and even though they kill each other with distressing frequency it is always emphasized that this is an aberrant behavior not to be considered normal or condoned.

In the hard-boiled formula; "The affluent are so often responsible for social problems that a quasi-Marxist distrust of the wealthy becomes a minor motif. The rich are merely gangsters who have managed to escape punishment. A character in The Long Goodbye voices the common condemnation:

"There ain't no clean way to make a hundred million bucks...Somewhere along the line guys got pushed to the wall, nice little businesses got the ground cut out from under them...decent people lost their jobs...Big money is big power and big power gets used wrong."<sup>16</sup>

The hard-boiled formula introduced colloquialism. Since the private - eye lives in a violent brutal world, it is often reflected in his dialogue and descriptions. Profanity is often used. Murder even at its most gory and

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<sup>15</sup> Cawelti, page 153.

<sup>16</sup> Grella, page 111.



brutal is viewed dispassionately. Narrative is understated.

"Get away from me, you son of a bitch", she said...

I never thought", he said quietly. "It just came to me out of the blue. You turned me in to the cops. You, Little Velma.

I threw a pillow, but it was too slow. She shot him five times in the stomach. The bullets made no more sound than fingers going into a glove".<sup>17</sup>

The criminal or villain was different in both formulas. So was the ending. In the classical formula, the criminal almost always acted alone and he had a personal rational reason for committing the crime. The ending was a classic scene with variations in which the detective assembled all the suspects, unmasked the criminal and explained the steps he had taken to reach the solution. In the hard-boiled formula, the criminal rarely acts alone. He is usually working for an organization or crime syndicate. Rarely does the detective assemble the suspects for an explanation and unmasking. The criminal has usually been vanquished. The private eye is rarely without his gun.

In style the hard-boiled writer most resembles the terse economical prose of Ernest Hemingway. In his somewhat fatalistic acceptances of his circumstances the hero has naturalistic tendencies, but he does not accept fate

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<sup>17</sup> Chandler, Raymond Farewell My Lovely, from Cawelti, Adventure, page 179.

totally. He fights for what he believes and emerges triumphant.

The formula was immensely popular. It has spawned hundreds of imitations on TV and in the movies.

In the 1950<sup>s</sup> the detective formula took a new twist with the appearance of the police novel or police procedural as it is sometimes called.

Based in a large city, sometimes identified, for example, New York in Ed Mc Bain's work, sometimes not, tells of one or more police detectives in a particular precinct. The forerunner was a TV program named "Dragnet" and the reason according to Symons was "The massive shift from Westerns to urban crime stories on the American TV networks in the sixties occurred because an older largely rural audience liked Westerns, while younger urban viewers preferred police stories."<sup>18</sup>

In America the foremost practitioner was Ed McBain. In his police novels, McBain uses the weather as a source of distress for his heroes. Characteristically, the weather changes for the better just as a case is about to be solved. The news media is also a focus of disgust for the police detectives. They see it as a hindrance to their work. There exists "...an untheorized hostility to the media's

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<sup>18</sup> Symons, page 188.

treatment of police work"<sup>19</sup>

Another characteristic of this formula is to see the investigation of half a dozen cases at the same time. This tempts us, of course, to skip-pages in order to follow the more interesting case. John Creasy under the pseudonym of J.J. Marris uses this technique with the most success.

Dialogue in the interest of realism is brisk and believable. Women are depicted in secondary roles. For the most part it is a man's world. Knight tells us, "there are many women in the stories, but they essentially support the masculine narcissism of the detective's world as victims, villains, witnesses and police comforts."<sup>20</sup> It is only recently with TV shows such as Police Woman and Cagney and Lacey, that women have been depicted in starring roles.

The links between the police department and the forensic laboratory are also stressed. Many formal clues are presented, such as ballistic reports, autopsy reports, blood-group analysis, pistol licenses, etc., but these add little new to the investigation and do not bring about an arrest instead often initiating a false trail.

Knight tells of one other important characteristic: The long interrogations of witnesses and suspects, long conversations between detectives themselves whose most

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<sup>19</sup> Knight, page 180.

<sup>20</sup> Knight, page 186.

striking feature is their total irrelevance to the plot"<sup>21</sup>  
 The author's motive seems to be to create verisimilitude for his portrayal of the dull, plodding work that is the lot of the average policeman.

phil McBain, John Creasey as J.J. Marris and other writers have had good success with the police procedural, but there doesn't seem to be much range within this formula.

As in all of nature for a form to survive, it has to adapt and change to conform to the mores and attitudes of its time. Such a change - showing perhaps the versatility of all the different formulas is the work of a new author, William Kienzle.

Kienzle's novels are strongly influenced by the classical detective formula. But as Julian Symons writes in his critique of The Rosary Murders that appear in Punch magazine, his work is also "a police procedural of sorts". On close examination, some elements of the hard-boiled formula are also seen in his work. Father Robert Koesler, his amateur detective, has a tendency to get involved personally in his cases far more than the average classical detective.

It is about Kienzle's work, that hitherto has not been given much critical attention, that the rest of this thesis will deal.

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<sup>21</sup> Knight, page 174.

Kienzle, a former Catholic priest is one of a group of new writers who are exploring fields up to now forbidden to the detective writer. They particularly go against Hillary Waugh's opinion of a detective story writer expressing his philosophy of life in his work. Other writers following this formula, no doubt influenced by the raising of social consciousness in the 60<sup>s</sup> and 70<sup>s</sup>, are Amanda Cross with her explorations of feminist views and Harry Kemelman, who does for Judaism what Kienzle does for Catholicism.

Kienzle's spokesman is Father Robert Koesler. His main preoccupations are the changes brought about in the Catholic Church Post Vatican II and the divisions within the faithful these changes created. The dismal lack of vocations and the exodus of ordained priests are also prime concerns. The nature of sin is a recurrent motif. All of these subjects are causes for doubts and preoccupation in the modern Catholic.

But Kienzle goes even further as he explores the role of the police and the Press, abuses of power, and the Negro's place in society and within the Church among other themes.

With the introduction of social criticism to further his plots, Kienzle's work becomes in my view, not only "an enjoyable self-indulgence" as Joseph Wood Krutch calls detective fiction in his essay "Only a Detective Story", but food for thought, raising questions of morality even in his

endings which can lead to a heated debate. Only occasionally does the repetition of a theme make him fall into didacticism.

And Kienzle is a very recent writer. His first work, The Rosary Murders was published in 1979. He has produced one a year since then: Death Wears a Red Hat 1980, Mind Over Murder 1981, Assault with Intent 1982, Shadow of Death 1983 and Kill and Tell 1984, Sudden Death is due to come out in mid April, 1985. He has introduced a number of innovations in subject matter and style that make his works, filled with humor and irony, seem fresh and appealing. One of these innovations is the development of strong secondary characters with personalities and personal lives that grow with each book. Another is the mixture of hard-boiled and police procedural elements, within the classical detective formula. Yet another is the twist given to standard devices such as finding a diary or the secret of the confessional. Most surprising is the large variety of humor found in his works. All of these changes to the classical detective formula and his ability to make us ponder on the social evils exposed, makes his works a worthy subject for this dissertation.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE ROSARY MURDERS

The Rosary Murders, published in 1979, is the first and most well-known of William Kienzle's detective stories. Like the five other novels that have followed it, it is an experimental blend of comedy and serious social and religious criticism, within the format of the classical detective story, but with very definite influences of the police procedural and the hard-boiled detective story.

The Rosary Murders has as main theme the condemnation of the priests and nuns who from indifference or other motives, fail in their obligations to help, advise, and console the troubled souls of Catholics in their charge. As a secondary theme, the novel explores the anguish and pathological quest for revenge such indifference can create. This concern for the soul of the murderer lifts Kienzle's work from the ranks of the traditional or classical detective stories. Dorothy Sayers once observed that "the detective story presents us only with the FAIT ACCOMPLI, and looks on death and mutilation with a dispassionate eye. It does not show us the inner workings of the murderer's mind - it must not for the identity of the murderer is hidden until the end of the book"<sup>1</sup> But Kienzle has accomplished just

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<sup>1</sup>Kakutani, Michiko "Mysteries Join the Mainstream" The New York Times Book Review, Jan. 15, 1984 P. 35-37.

such a feat, for in The Rosary Murders the murderer's mind is open to us by the simple device of having him go to confession with Father Koesler. It is here we, the readers, along with Father Koesler, learn of the man's incestuous relationship with his daughter, of the indifference of the priest and nun whom both of them had asked for advice, of his suffering when his tormented daughter commits suicide and finally of his pathological quest for revenge by killing priests and nuns. It is also clear to us and Father Koesler that the man hopes to be stopped from continuing the killings, even though he is driven and cannot stop himself. In focusing on incest as the man's sin, Kienzle is again departing from classical detective fiction, for in the genteel world of Agatha Christie's and Dorothy Sayers' novels, incest would be unthinkable, indeed taboo as a subject to be treated in a novel. The device of the secret of the confessional is not in itself new since many books and quite a few Hollywood movies have used this motif in their plots. What is new in the confession with Father Koesler is the problem of whether it was a valid confession or not. That is, a confession in which the penitent repents and promises not to commit this sin again, and is then granted absolution by the priest. When Koesler asks the murderer if he would like to make it a valid confession,



there is at first silence. "Then: Oh, God! Oh God! I can't I can't! I can't! I'm NOT DONE YET!"<sup>2</sup> Father Koesler's instinct is to reveal immediately to Koznicki the killer's motive and the fact that he isn't finished killing yet, but he is haunted by the possibility that he may be breaking the secret of the confessional. He finds that a "sacramental confession" occurs when a person tells his sins with the intention of being forgiven; and that a priest must protect the seal in the face of any doubt. There is no way that Koesler can be sure that the killer did not enter the confessional with at least the intention of being forgiven. Koesler, therefore, will remain silent. He will have to crack the killer's code without using any of the knowledge learned in the confessional. This wait, however, gives a chance to the killer to kill again twice.

At first glance, the influence of the Classical Detective Story is what figures most prominently in Kienzle's work. First there is the use of the amateur detective. In Kienzle's stories old-fashioned classical detection is done by reason and the use of the intellect, and is represented by Father Robert Koesler, a detective story buff, who reads mysteries "like some priests read the Bible." But detection is shared by both police and dedicated newspapermen, even on one occasion (in another

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<sup>2</sup>Kienzle, William. The Rosary Murderer, New York, Andrews and McMeel, 1979, page 173.

novel) by a black Haitian deacon, a friend of Koesler, named Ramon Toussaint. But these helpers differ from the classical detective story helpers, in that they are not slow, obtuse and/or incompetent as Watson, Sherlock Holmes friend and confidant or Captain Hastings, who served the same function for Hercule Poirot. One of Koesler's aides is "Lieutenant Koznicki, Polish Catholic and exemplary family man, is the perceptive relentless professional detective."<sup>3</sup> Other helpers are Reporter Joe Cox, who wins a Pulitzer prize for his work in covering the rosary murders and his girlfriend, Pat Lennon, who assists, Koesler in this and other mysteries.

In his full use of the "red herring" or false clue to mystify and confuse the puzzle, Kienzle shows another debt to the Classical Detective tradition. All his stories feature a copycat death, or attempted death which mimics the other murder victims. The police know that it isn't a true part of the sequence because the victim lacks the "calling card" of the murderer. In The Rosary Murders the death of Father Palmer is initially thought to be another in the series of murders, until the rosary found with the body is seen to be different and is not placed on the wrist in the usual way. Later on in the story another "red herring"

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<sup>3</sup>Dix, Winslows "From Massacre in Maine to Murder in Miami" Rev. of The Rosary Murders by William Kienzle Chronicle of Higher Education, 18, May 29, 1979 A 15.

comes along when a limping man (the killer is known to have a leg wound) attends a church ceremony. This man, moreover, physically resembles the murderer in general appearance. After initial turmoil the man is found to be congenitally lame.

The classical final scene is which the detective explains all is also part of Kienzle's work, but with some innovations. Reporter Joe Cox is the first to make the connection between the rosaries left with the victims and the days on which the victims are being killed. The murders, so far, had been on Ash Wednesday and the Fridays in Lent, a period of penance for Catholics. He surmises correctly, that the killer will strike again next Friday, and that the rosary is left with the victims because it is a common penance given by priests during confession for major sins.

The killing of a priest and a nun in spite of the massive police surveillance prompted by Cox's theory, forces Father Koesler to do some serious thinking. There is still left Good Friday, the last Friday in Lent, when presumably the killer will strike again. Kienzle, a former Catholic priest, uses his considerable knowledge of Catholic Dogma and traditions to enable Father Koesler to reach his conclusion. The most commonly assigned penance is to say five Our Father's and five Hail Mary's. Most Catholics alternate them. Therefore the victims have been a priest

and a nun in alternate order up to eight victims so far. But why have these particular victims been chosen? Father Koesler makes the connection between the victim's names in the order that they have been killed and the Ten Commandments, starting with Father Harry Lord and the first Commandment "I am the Lord thy God". From here he can check in the Directory for priests and nuns in the archdiocese of Detroit and come up with the names of the victims on Good Friday who will be related to the ninth and tenth Commandment. A triumphant Koesler finally can call Koznicki to explain, certain that he has broken the killer's code but without revealing anything he learned in the confessional. It is a clever answer to the puzzle. The book does not end here, but continues on to reveal the surveillance of the intended victims, and the wounded killer's single-minded attempt to continue with his quest which finally costs him his life. It is a rather unusual ending for the suspense is not found in who the killer is or even in who the next victim will be, but in the question: Will the killer succeed despite overwhelming odds?

Besides having the Classical Detective Fiction characteristics, The Rosary Murders resembles a police procedural novel of sorts. One of the reasons is that Inspector Koznicki plays an important part. Naturally we are involved in the investigation not only from Father Koesler's viewpoint, but also from Koznicki's. This means

that many scenes take place at police headquarters, that we follow many minor characters in their daily round of interrogations of suspects and witnesses, and that we see the humdrum methodical pursuit of leads that make up a routine police investigation. Although they are thorough and professional, the police seldom, on their own, get anywhere. However in The Rosary Murders, following a clue of three letters spelling the name ROB on the floor that one of the victims wrote before she died, the police are only a step behind Father Koesler. The next name on the list of names that they were to investigate was that of the murderer, Robert Jamison. Kienzle is perhaps making the point that sound police procedure, although slow, works in the end. In general Kienzle seems to admire the police he has observed and written about, and corrupt or incompetent cops do not exist in Koznicki's ranks. Yet they do make mistakes, such as the policeman who fails to follow sound police procedure by allowing the priest he was assigned to protect to enter a house alone without checking it first. This mistake cost the priest his life.

Other mistakes are related to leaking to the press. In fact press and police relations are discussed more than once. The general attitude of distrust that police detectives have towards the news media is shown here. As Koznicki says "Too much publicity can be counterproductive

to police work...and the news media already have access to a wealth of detail about these murders."<sup>4</sup>

Eventually Cox and Koznicki arrive at a sort of understanding and cooperative with each other as they realize that both are professionals, intent on doing their job. As Cox explains to Lennon why he and Koznicki have helped each other out, "I figured him for a straight shooter. I've honored his embargoes. I've told him what I know. Maybe I've told him more than I would've another cop. But it's worked both ways. He's made sure I got a few breaks too. But he hasn't let me in on any of his bottom-line secrets. I didn't expect him to."<sup>5</sup>

Finally, in his choice of Detroit, a large city, as locale for most of his stories, Kienzle shows another debt to the police procedural tradition. This tradition sets its heroes in police precincts in large cities, be they the 87th Precinct books by Ed Mc Bain, set in New York, or the Elizabeth Linington - Dell Shannon - Lesley Egan, set in Glendale and Los Angeles. Other authors did not specify in what large city their action took place.

The hard-boiled detective story also has left its mark in Kienzle's work. Although Father Koesler does not resemble the gun-toting, tough, wise-cracking private eye,

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<sup>4</sup>Kienzle, page 42.

<sup>5</sup>Kienzle, page 214.

he is physically more active in the investigation than the classical amateur detective. Sometimes by accident, like when he finds the corpse of the second victim, others by choice, like when he volunteers to accompany the possible ninth victim to both support and protect him.

Kienzle's approach to sex is also much closer to that of the hard-boiled detective fiction. For example in his choice of incest as theme, Kienzle is departing from the classical detective tradition and although not a major theme, there are numerous references to Joe Cox's sexual escapades. Sex, in fact, is mentioned several times. Sometimes it is in conversations between the priests about changing sexual mores among Catholics today. Other instances are in the graphic description of the nurses in the hospital by the policemen or the mildly blue jokes told by Father Joe Farmer. Sex is criticized only when Pat Lennon's boss tries to indulge in sexual harassment. Karl Lowell, Lennon's boss, has asked her to go to bed with him and has indicated that "her corporate advancement would be directly correlated to her erotic availability."<sup>6</sup> When Lennon refuses him, she knows that her days in the Free Press are numbered, and that she will eventually have to leave her job. Not even does the sexually active, unmarried relationship of Cox and Lennon, come in for any criticism.

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<sup>6</sup>Kienzle, page 154.

Perhaps the biggest influence of the hard-boiled tradition in Kienzle's work is seen in his use of language to describe some of the murders. As Winslow Dix says in his review of The Rosary Murders, "Kienzle's meticulous description of each murder is chillingly graphic. The prose suddenly halts, and the slow motion camera assumes control, as in the final scene of "Bonnie and Clyde" when the anti-heroes are gunned to smithereens."<sup>7</sup> The example given is that of the murder of Father Dailey, but almost all the other murders are described as vividly. "It was a small sound, not unlike a popping champagne cork. But the bullet crashed through Dailey's head, scrambling much of his brain in its wake, and embedded itself in the wall. Dailey fell from his chair like a puppet whose strings had been cut. He lay on the floor of the confessional room with blood beginning to ooze from his mouth, nose, and the bullet hole in either side of his head."<sup>8</sup>

When a writer's past life and experiences are integrated into his written work, the work that emerges is rich with deeply felt anecdotes that reflect his vision of life and his inner knowledge of the issues. Several modern detective writers fall into this pattern: Carolyn G. Heilbrun is a professor at a major eastern University and a

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<sup>7</sup>Dix, page 15.

<sup>8</sup>Kienzle, pages 71-72.



noted feminist. Under the pseudonym of Amanda Cross, she writes wonderful detective stories with a central female character who is a professor at a major eastern university. One of the fascinating aspects about her work is "...her ability to construct a mystery around the ideas of a single literary or intellectual figure, her application of research on androgyny and a feminist history..."<sup>9</sup> Dick Francis is a former popular and successful jockey. "In such thrillers as Forfeit and Slayride, Dick Francis turned the morally ambiguous world of horse racing into a kind of metaphor for the world."<sup>10</sup>

Kienzle was a Catholic priest for twenty years, two decades that included the changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council, modernizing the church rituals and revitalizing it with fresh new ideas. But along with change came unrest. At first, there were just mere stirrings, but they finally gathered force into a deluge of protest that seemed to strip the Church of most of its priests and nuns and to divide the congregation of faithful into innumerable factions, from the archconservatives who oppose all changes as evil to the liberals who feel that not enough has been done. Kienzle comments on this division among Catholics and

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<sup>9</sup> Carter, Steven. "Amanda Cross" In 10 Women of Mystery Ed. Earl Bargainnier, Bowling Green Bowling Green State Univ., Popular Press, 1981, page 270.

<sup>10</sup> Kakutani, page 36.

other problems directly or indirectly related to the Post Vatican II reforms such as the dearth of vocations, the closing of parishes and parochial schools, the reluctance of many Catholics to follow the church's ban on contraception, and even the practice by some parish priests of quietly effecting their own sub rosa reforms. One such reform is the "pastoral solution" to canonically impossible marriages. If the priest is satisfied that the present marriage is solid, he encourages the couple to start receiving the sacraments, even if an annulment for a previous marriage cannot be granted. Some priests oppose this solution, for it is against Canon Law. This "pastoral solution" briefly commented upon in The Rosary Murders, will be featured as an important theme in a later book called Mind Over Murder, just as Harry Langdon, leader of an arch conservative group called the Tridentines, who is briefly mentioned in The Rosary Murders will play a much bigger role in Assault with Intent. These two examples serve to show a Kienzle characteristic of introducing a theme or minor character in one book that he will later develop in another book.

But Kienzle does not limit his social criticism to Catholic issues and the problems created by Vatican II. Years of training as a parish priest involved in the problems, moral and otherwise of his community, show in his work as he embarks on a crusade of sorts with several

particularly rankling subjects surfacing over and over in his stories. Some of the social themes that show up in The Rosary Murders are:

a) The abuse of power, no matter who is being the abuser. Mother Mary, one of the eight victims, works in a slum neighborhood and fights those who seek to prey on the poor whether they be the city council trying to evict tenants by force from very livable houses, in the name of urban renewal, or the large supermarket chains who abuse the ghetto residents by overcharging or dumping inferior products on them. They know that ghetto residents do not have the money to go elsewhere or don't even know about comparison shopping. Kienzle comments also on the pressure brought by the bad publicity about Detroit's black mayor, Maynard Cobb, for failing to solve the murders. He, in turn, will exert pressure on Frank Tany, the Police Chief who presumably will pressure Koznicki, and so on.

b) Improper newspaper practices come in for some veiled criticism. First, there is the penchant for sensationalism in order to sell newspapers. In particular even though the flashy headline after Father Lord's death, "Priest murdered in Catholic Hospital" is technically correct, Koesler muses that "the headline still seemed gross" and calls it a "screaming headline". Koesler is also irked by the inordinate amount of attention and headline space given by the news media to anything said by the Popes

or bishops. "The Pope and most bishops, at least most U.S. bishops, seldom say anything important. Yet, they are forever getting publicity..."<sup>11</sup> He also feels that sex and violence take up entirely too much space in the average newspaper. Cox, although personally an ethical and professional reporter, feels himself lucky to be working for Nelson Kane, equally ethical and professional, for he feels that "there were few enough ethics or principles left in the news business."<sup>12</sup>

c) Psychiatric quacks are ridiculed in the person of Dr. Fritz Heinsohn who is forever seeking attention from the media, following the police after sensational crimes to give wildly erroneous theories and character sketches and make emotional appeals to the criminal to surrender. He changes his method whenever a new therapeutic approach becomes popular and clearly gives the psychiatric community a bad name.

d) Prejudice against blacks and their fight to succeed also becomes a theme for social criticism. Kienzle is careful to try to combat prejudice by putting blacks in positions of authority. He portrays a very able Mayor Cobb who has fought his way up from the ghetto; Detective Sergeant Ned Harris, Koznicki's right-hand man, is almost as

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<sup>11</sup>Kienzle, page 277.

<sup>12</sup>Kienzle, page 95.

tall and just as professional as Koznicki. Despite some good-natured racial jokes, it is quite obvious that Koznicki admires and respects Harris. Last but not least, there is Lieutenant Washington, who according to the rules has two strikes against her, - she is black and a woman. Yet Kienzle says of her, "And like all women filling jobs formerly the exclusive domain of men, she was several times better than any male counterpart simply because she had to be."<sup>13</sup> This comment on Lieutenant Washington plus the comments on the problems encountered by the beautiful and very curvaceous Pat Lennon reflect the concern Kienzle feels for women's role in society. Clearly he feels they should be given a much bigger role, not only in society but also within the church. As the two hospital nuns wishfully comment when they can't find a priest to anoint the dying in the emergency room. "If only we could anoint. The people would accept it. And we are here. -Yes, we're here, but we can't anoint. People tell us their troubles and their sins, but we can't absolve. It's not fair. It doesn't even make any sense."<sup>14</sup> But in the conceivable future nothing much will change as far as greater responsibility for women within the church.

One of Kienzle's most successful innovations as a

<sup>13</sup>Kienzle, page 220.

<sup>14</sup>Symons, Julian "The Theory and Practice of Crime" Punch, 277, October 24, 1979, page 739.

detective story writer is in the use of humor. Humor has been rare in the history of detective fiction. Almost nonexistent in the classical detective stories with the exception perhaps of the clever repartee between Lord Peter Wimsey and his man servant in the stories by Dorothy Sayers, it surfaced as a one-liner wisecrack in the hard-boiled detective. But here it was usually meant as sarcasm rather than humor. In the police procedural, if found at all, it was usually in connection with an unsavory character or maybe a situation that crops up in the precinct, something like a practical joke between cops. But in The Rosary Murder humor takes three forms.

First: there is the short humorous description, such as the one which describes Koznicki as "an elephant who went to ballet school" to show the smooth way he carries his body. Or on the occasion of a visit by Koznicki and Koesler to the archbishop's office. "Koznicki sat at the edge of his chair. It was as if a condor had perched on the small swing of a birdcage."<sup>15</sup> Second: there is the longer humorous anecdote given to illustrate a point or just for humorous effect, such as the one about the nuns placing a red candle in the window to show the neighbors their brand new chapel was open. And the neighbors telling the nuns just what a red light in the window meant in that neighborhood! This

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<sup>15</sup>Kienzle, page 220.

showed the innocence and vulnerability of this particular group of elderly nuns. Third: there are the out-and-out jokes. Simply the telling of a joke complete with punch line. Julian Symons lauds the book for "freshness in his behind the scenes view of the clergy, using buzzers as warning of a penitent's presense in the confessional, and telling mildly blue jokes over dinner"<sup>16</sup> And the integration of jokes within a detective story format is where Kienzle is unique. Ralph McInerny who writes mysteries featuring another parish priest, Father Roger Dowling, sometimes likes to poke fun at some of the outrageous reforms he sees some liberal priests putting in practice, but it is never in the form of a joke.

~~date~~ Kienzle's jokes are told usually between priests, and often are mildly blue as Symons points out. The purpose seems to be to humanize the priests that pepper the Kienzle stories. Celibates all, they spend many nights drinking, playing cards and/or telling stories.

~~Res:~~ The Rosary Murders is an interesting and entertaining book, but I believe Kienzle got carried away with the inclusion of too many characters. Besides the many policemen and newspaper personnel and priests who appear in the book, there are also the personnel at the Detroit Catholic, the newspaper of which Koesler is editor, the ten

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<sup>16</sup>Symons, "The Theory", Punch, page 739.

victims or intended victims, the suspects, and the many incidental inhabitants of hospitals, parishes, monasteries, etc., where the victims live and work. It becomes eventually a bit confusing. Although humor in general, enhances the story, and the jokes succeed in illuminating character, there are just too many of them, and a few of the encounters between Father Joe Farmer, the main joke teller, and Father Pompilio, Koesler's superior, his friend and audience, could have been deleted with no ill effects to the book.

In traditional detective fiction, "justice prevails...the way it does in a morality play; and reason, too, is triumphant. It is taken for granted that the detective can solve the mystery and translate his knowledge into socially efficacious action."<sup>17</sup> But Kienzle is not content with leaving us with a satisfied feeling that order has been restored and all is well. He wants us to ponder on the social evils that have been exposed. At the end of The Rosary Murders, the final scene shows an unfeeling, uncaring priest, unwilling to help and understand the troubled penitent, who came to confess the sin of incest. As the man runs out into the night shouting, "I need help...I don't need the god-damn rosary!" one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that it could be happening all

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<sup>17</sup> Kakutani, page 37.



over again. Nothing is resolved, for the root cause, the priests' indifference to their role as helpers of souls still exists, and may be creating another "Rosary Murderer".

The Rosary Murders has firmly placed Kienzle as an innovator in detective fiction because of the many changes it makes in the classic formula. In order of importance I would rank the inclusion of religious and social criticism as first, for the effect it has of impressing and influencing the reader. His second claim to originality, his striking use of humor, is the most unusual addition to the formula, since it is rare for so much humor, particularly in such variety, to be included in detective fiction. Other innovations worth mentioning in his work are the heavy mixture of police procedural and hard-boiled elements and the development of strong secondary characters. Finally, the ironical ending in which nothing seems to be resolved, order has not been restored, and an uncaring priest is perhaps creating another murderer is most unusual in detective fiction. With these major alterations in the classic formula, and other minor ones such as the twist in the secret of the confessional Kienzle admirably starts his career as an innovator in detective fiction.

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## CHAPTER III

### DEATH WEARS A RED HAT

Death Wears a Red Hat, one of the most violent of William Kienzle's mysteries, is also one of his most ambitious in theme, presenting a statement on the nature of sin. This emphasis on delivering a philosophical message, in addition to a detective puzzle, is one of several innovations that make Kienzle's mysteries unconventional and sets them apart from traditional classical detective fiction.

The first innovation is in the matter of plot. In order to make his statement on the nature of sin, Kienzle chooses as his victims six evil types. The first three are major sinners and the last three are lesser ones. This gives him a wonderful opportunity to really lambast the abuses which their respective crime careers represent.

Of the crime rackets that come under the fire of Kienzle's social criticism, four are abuses against society in general and two are abuses against women, a favorite Kienzle theme. The first evil type represented is Rudy Ruggiero, Detroit's top gangster boss, whose decapitated head is found inside Cardinal Mooney's hat at Blessed Sacrament Cathedral. Organized crime, mafia style, is seen to be taking advantage of the community. Having lived a violent life, Ruggiero had many enemies. For them his death

is a relief and it does not prompt the police to wear black armbands.

The second major crime figure is Stud Harding, Detroit's top pimp, whose severed head is found on top of the statue of St. Cecilia. The effects of his evil life on women is depicted in more detail than Ruggiero's. Kienzle shows him recruiting a young girl, freshly arrived in Detroit, with the offer of friendship, a job and a place to stay. He is impassively shown watching the girl being raped by five thugs he has hired in order to break her spirit. He will then step in as her saviour and protector in exchange for her becoming part of his stable of prostitutes, whom he has presumably recruited in a similar manner. In Kienzle's view the prostitutes are the victims of the pimps whom they allow to run their lives. Prostitution is a crime against women; as a way of life, it is condemned for demeaning the victims, the major sin being in the abuse of these women's minds and lives not in the act of prostitution itself.

The crime career that gets the biggest share of criticism and is seen as the major scourge of society is the distribution and selling of drugs. This is represented in the book by Dutch Strauss, Detroit's most important drug dealer. Kienzle attacks drugs for the enormous toll they take on youth, one of whom dies from a drug overdose. He also attacks drugs for the addiction they create, forcing

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many of their victims into a life of crime in order to support their habit, He focuses on the life of a young addict, Willie Monroe, who in the throes of drug withdrawal, runs over a priest in order to rob him, attacks and kills a pharmacist in an unsuccessful bid for money, and finally tries to kill a pursuing cop but instead is killed himself. Such a horrible waste of human lives, Kienzle seems to say. As in the case of prostitution, Monroe, in spite of his violent but short-lived crime career, is seen as a victim of drugs, and not as a criminal. The real evil is done by the dealers who reap huge profits from this illegal trade.

Strauss finishes the trio of the first major criminals. Now Kienzle will focus on three lesser ones, the first one of these being Dr. Robert Schmidt, a notorious abortionist. Although abortion is legal in Detroit, Kienzle, a Catholic, cannot condone it. In a Catholic's view, it is a crime against life, that of the unborn baby, and also, in the case of the botched up abortion, that of the mother. Abortion is essentially a crime against women, the second one depicted by Kienzle. Two women die as a consequence of abortions performed by Schmidt. His clinic is seen as only a step up from the back-alley, clothes-hanger variety of abortion. Of his two assistants, both women, one is depicted as almost as evil as Schmidt himself. Through five years of working for Schmidt she has steeled herself not to feel any sympathy for the victims who come to the clinic. A trained nurse, she

doesn't tell one of the victims that she isn't pregnant and allows her to go through an unnecessary abortion that causes her death. Although all the evil types represented are men, women can also be their partners in crime. Tod McCloskey, whose head is found on top of the statue of St. Joseph, becomes the second lesser criminal. He is a small-time con-man who preys on poor, old and lonely victims like so many other con men. He cheats them of their life savings by insisting they need repairs to their homes and overcharging them outrageously for these so called needed-repairs. He stands for thousands of sting men who cheat innocent victims out of their hard earned money by selling them land that doesn't exist or oil deals that never materialize, to name just a few. The last of the small time criminals is Elmer Dessalen whose decapitated head is found on top of Cardinal Mooney's tomb. Dessalen, who runs a garage, overcharges his customers on all their routine repairs. He especially takes advantage of women, who he considers ignorant about their cars, and of busy business men who are generally in a hurry and do not check their repair work.

The decapitated head of Garnet Fitzgerald, one of the top men in the numbers racket, turns out to be a red herring and not part of the series of murders. But it gives Kienzle an excuse to briefly explore how poor people are cheated out of their winnings in this illegal type of lottery.

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One consequence of all these killings is a wave of honesty among Detroit's business population, be they lawyers, or moving-company people. Kienzle is making the point in comparing the three major sinners, Ruggiero, Harding and Strauss, with Schmidt, McCloskey and Dessalen, the three lesser ones, that sin is just as evil whether it is on a grand scale or on a smaller one if abuse of innocent victims is involved.

Besides the abuses perpetrated on society by the criminal careers of the murdered men, Kienzle comments on several other social evils or religious matters that give him cause for concern and are part of his overall message. These concerns reappear frequently in many of his books. The changes and division that have occurred within the Catholic Church Post Vatican II is one of those concerns. On January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII called a Vatican Council. One of the prime reasons was in order to reform canon law, which had not been revised in centuries. The consequence that most upsets Kienzle is the division between the faithful, both laity and clergy, into liberal and conservative groups. Both groups are unhappy with Vatican II. Some feel it didn't go far enough in its reforms and others that it went too far. Kienzle also laments the drastic fall in vocations and the fact that the Pope is still asking his priests to obey the old canon law even though it is antiquated and out of date.

Besides exploring the problems within the modern Catholic Church, Kienzle uses Death Wears a Red Hat as a vehicle to attack prejudices and the injustices that blacks have had to endure within contemporary American society and the position of blacks within the Catholic Church. These two themes become an important part of the message of the book. Kienzle achieves this by several devices that are more or less innovative. He presents Ramón Toussaint, a black Haitian Deacon, who happens to be a close friend of Father Koesler, as the villain/hero of the mystery. Villain, for he is undoubtedly murdering people, taking justice in his own hands vigilante style. Hero, because in the eyes of most of the citizens of Detroit, he is ridding the city of many of its criminal elements. Furthermore, he is killing his victims by means of a Voodoo ceremony called a "death conjure" performed by his wife Emerenciana, a "mambo" or voodoo priestess. In order to share in the act with her he disguises himself and with the help of a worldwide network of voodoo friends injects his victims with cobra poisoning. A final touch is the sending of a statue of St. Expeditus, a bogus saint who is venerated by voodoo practitioners, who stands for justice now. The introduction of voodoo to the plot is one of the most innovative techniques used by Kienzle to advance both plot and social criticism. Besides adding a rather bizarre twist to the plot, the use of voodoo gives Father Koesler, Kienzle's

amateur detective, an opportunity to explore it seriously as hocuspocus, religious ritual and/or cultural tradition of the blacks. Voodoo came to America, Koesler tells Koznicki and Lennon, when the Africans were forcibly brought here as slaves. "Most of the native Africans under slavery were virtually forced to become members of one or another of the Christian denominations...they were able to blend voodooism with Christianity in ways the early missionaries could not have imagined." Later on Koesler is shocked when he learns that Emerenciana, nicknamed Ciane, is the mambo responsible for the death conjure. Afterwards he reevaluates his own prejudices. "The priest had pictured Ciane as a most cultured woman, certainly above the practise of voodoo. But as he continued this consideration, he wondered why he would place voodoo 'below' anything. To the Africans and at least some of their descendants, it was as meaningful a religion as Christianity was to Western civilization."<sup>1</sup>

In his long conversation with Toussaint at the end of the book, Koesler gets a taste of how it feels to be a black in America and later muses on the evil of prejudice. When he asks Toussaint how he managed to get close enough to his victims to inject the venom, Toussaint answers; "Oh, Bob, in this country, if a black man is wearing an appropriate work uniform, whether it be coveralls or a busboy's jacket,

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<sup>1</sup>Kienzle, Death Wears a Red Hat, Andrews and McNeel, New York, 1980, page 195.



nobody notices him, pays any attention, or even knows he's around. He is not only faceless; he might as well be invisible a non-person. There are few things worse, Koesler thought, than being so far removed from consciousness as not to be noticed...there was no way of really tasting prejudice without being black brown - red or yellow - skinned or female."<sup>2</sup>

Koesler explores the Negro's place within the Catholic Church by pointing out Toussaint's work as a black deacon in an inner city parish. There are very few black priests, and even black deacons within the Catholic hierarchy due to the long period of preparation required, Koesler tells us. Toussaint creates "The Ministers of Services", men who are sort of deacons and can perform many of the services of both priests and deacons such as baptism, distribution of communion, anointing and preaching. But they only have to take two or three months of preparation. These deacons fill a big need, for without them, the black Catholic Community would be without any black leaders. Their creation also tells us "that Toussaint was not the type to wait around interminably for the solution to a problem."<sup>3</sup> His decision to eliminate the six evil types reflects a similar impatience for solutions.

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<sup>2</sup>Kienzle, page 263.

<sup>3</sup>Kienzle, page 244.

pat The exposé of the abuses perpetrated by the six evil types the problems within the modern Catholic Church, the problems and injustices suffered by blacks in contemporary American society, as well as the problem of blacks within the Catholic Church, sum up the bulk of Kienzle's rather lengthy social criticism in Death Wears a Red Hat. But Kienzle is unconventional in other ways as well. More than most classical detective story writers, Kienzle likes to flesh out the lives of his characters by pointing out changes in their lifestyles and even growth within their personalities. For this second book in the Father Koesler series Kienzle shifts the role of helper to the amateur detective to the beautiful and able shoulders of Pat Lennon. We learn that Pat has been taken off the case of the Red Hat Murders by a boss seeking vengeance for her refusal of his advances. Pat reevaluates her position at the Free Press and comes to the difficult conclusion that she is on a treadmill going nowhere as long as she continues to work there. She then applies for and is given an even better job at a rival newspaper, The Detroit News. There, her new boss, gives her the respect due a professional. She now finds herself competing with her lover, Joe Cox, who remains at the Free Press, since they cover the same assignments for rival papers. It is Pat who first discovers the connection between the heads and where they are found. With the help of an old priest she learns that some saints are

patrons of particular causes, and notes that the head of the top pimp appears on top of St. Cecilia's decapitated statue, the patroness of virginity; the head of the worst abortionist on top of St. Bridget patroness of midwives and newborn babies; and so on. Pat is also the first one to see the significance of the little statues found near the victims and to identify them as St. Expeditus. This is the first hint the investigators have that voodoo is involved in the macabre deaths. Pat's thorough research proves her intelligence and high professionalism.

Joe Cox's character is also fleshed out but not as much as Lennon's. We see him constantly thinking of her, waiting for Pat to come home and realizing how much he loves her. We learn of his anguish when he makes a mistake in covering the Red Hat Murders. He isn't jealous of Pat, who keeps a step ahead of him throughout the entire mystery. He is simply upset with himself. His relationship with his immediate boss, Nelson Kane, is also looked into, as Kane scolds, praises and cajoles the younger man whom he so obviously admires.

As is to be expected the biggest change is seen in the life of the principal character, Father Koesler. He is no longer the editor of the Detroit Catholic, and is now Pastor at St. Anselm's, Koesler, who in The Rosary Murders had occasionally been in disagreement with the Catholic hierarchy, welcomes this change in lifestyle. He was

grateful that since he was no longer editor of the Detroit Catholic, "he no longer had the duty of expressing his opinions publicly for all to read. It had been a duty that had gotten him into trouble many times."<sup>4</sup> Not only in public but also in private, Koesler expresses his increasing dissatisfaction with church rules in a discussion with some priestly friends over the Pope's enforcement of strict adherence to the old Canon Law. Canon Law has been under study for twenty years without any meaningful reform, even though it was generally agreed to be outdated. Koesler was disturbed to be asked to conform to what he considered 'bad law'. When told by Father McNiff that the Pope insists we obey Canon Law until revised, Koesler snaps back, "That's his opinion." McNiff shocked persists "Do you or do you not believe in the Holy Pope of God?" "Sometimes" Koesler answers.<sup>5</sup> With private opinions such as these it is not surprising Koesler does not want to see them in print.

the Koesler, we also learn, has stopped smoking and is now chewing toothpicks as an oral substitute. This tells us something about his inner tensions and makes the priest seem more human. He battles the addiction to nicotine, for he deems it damaging to his health but he has to supplant it with another one, that of destroying toothpicks. This habit

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<sup>4</sup>Kienzle, page 85.

<sup>5</sup>Kienzle, page 44.

also is used by the author as a red herring, for the killer, Toussaint, who knows Koesler's habits, leaves a false trail of chewed toothpicks to momentarily throw the police off the trail. This interest in his characters personal lives and personal opinions is unusual but not unique in detective fiction. Dorothy Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey, is another example of detective whose personal life enters the stories. Kienzle makes it one of his trademarks, especially in the case of the moral and theological preoccupations of Father Koesler.

Death Wears a Red Hat also deviates from the classical detective novel, by the inclusion of elements of the police procedural and the hard boiled detective novel. The police procedural influence is still strong in this second book of the Father Koesler series. Many scenes are set in police headquarters. Other scenes follow police officers as they interrogate possible suspects. Still others show Ned Harris receiving the coroner's report on the clues that the severed heads provide. All in all, police activities take up a large part of the book's action. The hard boiled influence can be seen in the description of Alice Reardon's demeaned and pathetic condition, lying naked after being brutally gang raped, knowing her five tormentors are still there waiting to start again. It can also be seen in the effect of drugs on Willie Monroe's life and actions. Kienzle's prose can also turn hard-boiled at times. For

example, at the end of the car chase between Monroe and a cop, Monroe is described as trembling from drug withdrawal symptoms. He gets out of the car, fires and misses. The cop (Harris) fires back. "Monroe's body jerked backward as if he were a puppet whose string had been pulled. The bullet had passed through his heart. Never again would he go through the agonies of withdrawal."<sup>6</sup>

Another similarity between Death Wears a Red Hat and the hard-boiled detective novel is in the attitude of the detective to the solution of the murder mystery. In the classical detective tradition we find "what Northrop Frye calls 'the wavering finger of suspicion' passing across a series of potential suspects."<sup>7</sup> The hard-boiled detective "finds that he must go beyond the solution to some kind of personal choice or action...it ends with a confrontation between detective and criminal, (There is) a greater personal involvement on the part of the hard-boiled detective."<sup>8</sup>

Very often the hard-boiled detective must take a personal moral stance toward the killer. It is this desire or need to personally confront the killer that prompts Father Koesler to hide in Cardinal Mooney's grave to wait

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<sup>6</sup>Kienzle, page 43.

<sup>7</sup>Cawelti, John G. Adventure Mystery and Romance, Chicago, The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976, page 142.

<sup>8</sup>Cawelti, page 143.

for the killer to arrive with the last head. Koesler has correctly surmised that the killings are a series forming a pattern, starting with the first decapitated head found inside Cardinal Mooney's hat and now ending with the sixth head and last of the series, which he feels will be left on top of Cardinal Mooney's tomb. His reasoning is that these are the last two remaining relics of the Cardinal. Father Koesler, like the hard-boiled detective, waits alone, and alone he chases after the killer through darkened rooms and corridors, something that the classical detective was seldom called upon to do. Father Koesler recognizes but does not catch Toussaint, and this makes him arrange a meeting with Toussaint in order to confront him with his knowledge.

This long confrontation with Toussaint and its consequences are also rather unusual in classical detective fiction. It does perhaps, show the influence of the G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories on Kienzle's work. Chesterton once said that "the only thrill even of a common thriller, is concerned somehow with the conscience and the will." In his short stories featuring his detective Father Brown, whom Kienzle mentions often, Chesterton occasionally lets the guilty one go, as a matter of conscience. Father Brown, "would rather save a criminal's soul than see him punished for a crime...He views the wrongdoer as a soul in need of salvation, and often allows the crime to go unpunished, foiling official police efforts to apprehend the

culprit."<sup>9</sup> In a complicated ending, Father Koesler does all of the above. After listening, incredulously at times, to Toussaint's story, his first reaction is to worry over Toussaint's soul. He then asks Toussaint if he wants to make this talk a confession. Ramón replies "I am guilty of no sin!!", for he believes that the end justifies the means. Koesler, although in disagreement with this belief, which is against Christian doctrine, decides that "conscience" unless hopelessly pathological was the supreme personal arbiter."<sup>10</sup>

His final reasoning, in an "ending (that) carries a heavy freight of extremely dubious morality that may will infuriate many readers,"<sup>11</sup> is that Toussaint would not have revealed his secrets, if he, Koesler, had not been a priest. "This placed the knowledge solidly in the professional secret category...Professional secrets could not be revealed unless the public good demanded it or unless, without the revelation, someone will greatly suffer."<sup>12</sup> Since he knows that the series of killings are now over, that the Toussaints are leaving for San Francisco and that nobody else is being accused of these murders,

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<sup>9</sup>Penzler, Otto "The Amateur Detectives" The Mystery Story, eds. John Ball, Del Mar. Calif. Univ. Extension, Univ. of Calif. 1976, page 95.

<sup>10</sup>Kienzle, page 268.

<sup>11</sup>Viet, H.C., Rev. of Death Wears a Red Hat by William Kienzle, Library Journal, 105: 1105, May 1, 1980.

<sup>12</sup>Kienzle, page 272.



Father Koesler decides to remain silent and not reveal what he knows. The police reluctantly close the case. Thus we have an ending that is a radical departure from classical detective fiction. Here everything is explained in a personal confrontation between killer and detective, but the killers are allowed to go free without so much as an admonition. It is an ending that must have given some qualms even to Kienzle, for he brings Ramón Toussaint back in another book, in a different role, where he is decidedly not allowed to go unpunished.

The last major innovation of Death Wears a Red Hat and the one that is more unusual, though not unknown, in detective fiction is the use of humor. Humor provides an important contribution to the dialogue, making it snappy and witty at times. It takes various forms from the silly anecdote at the beginning of the book about the archbishop's fall during Mass to one liners such as the one about Father Koesler, who is chewing toothpicks instead of smoking. "Yeah, instead of dying from lung cancer, he'll probably die of Dutch Elm disease."<sup>13</sup> The slightly risqué running gags among the seminarians about jock straps, and the recurring adventures of the false Anonymous Gourmet are another variety of humor. These adventures also serve to introduce Monsignor Al Thomas, head of Detroit's Catholic

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<sup>13</sup>Kienzle, page 53.

Marriage Court. They also introduce Thomas's aversion to the inner city priests who ignore the rules of Canon Law and perform canonically impossible marriages. This character, with a name change to Monsignor Thomas (Tommy) Thompson, and his aversion figure prominently in the next book in the series, Mind Over Murder. Yet another humorous situation is presented by the phonetic use of dialect whenever Marge, the coroner's Texan secretary, is present. Humor is less distracting in this mystery than in The Rosary Murders, and serves to relieve the tension and to humanize many of the characters.

Most criticism of Death Wears a Red Hat seems levied at the introduction of voodoo as a means of murder. H.C. Veit in his review says, "the plot stumbles seriously when voodoo is dragged in."<sup>14</sup> The Kirkus Review is even more explicit in its criticism. "There are virtually no followable clues (except phony ones implicating priests) till figures of disreputable St. Expeditus are found at the homes of two victims, implying...voodoo. That's a bit hard to take (though cobra venom is also involved)..."<sup>15</sup> But as I have pointed out earlier, voodoo is one of the innovative techniques added to the plot. The majority of voodoo practitioners are the descendant of the black slaves

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<sup>14</sup> Viet, Rev. of Death.

<sup>15</sup> Rev. of Death Wears a Red Hat by William Kienzle. Kirkus Review, Feb. 15, 1980 F. page 247.

brought over from Africa. This gives Kienzle a chance to explore the effects of years of injustices and prejudices on the lives of the blacks. This Kienzle does with a very sympathetic eye to their feelings and dignity as human beings.

The Kirkus Review also mentions that "the multitude of sleuths and the repetitiousness of the murders combine to produce a meandering focus."<sup>16</sup> This flaw does make following the plot, at times a bit confusing. There is one amateur detective, two amateur helpers, Cox and Lennon, and two major police figures, Koznicki and Harris plus many police detectives, priestly characters, seminarians, etc, in addition to the seven murdered men, the victims that surround their lives, Toussaint and his wife plus many other minor characters. Kienzle will try to correct this flaw in his next book Mind Over Murder.

One last criticism would be the fact that Kienzle tackles too many issues as targets for his social criticism. The effect then is diluted. A more powerful attack would be to concentrate on one or two major issues in each book. A good example, is again Mind Over Murder, where the Church laws regarding divorce and remarriage become the main issues in the book.

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<sup>16</sup>Rev. of Death, Kirkus, page 247.

But in general Death Wears a Red Hat is a very good ecclesiastical thriller with enough violence to satisfy blood thirsty readers and a good dose of social and religious criticism to make more thoughtful souls happy. Kienzle's innovative mixture of detection, humor and social and religious issues, although aimed at the Catholic market, has found a much wider audience. This is perhaps in part due to his obvious concern for the underdogs of society, be they women, or minorities and for his sensitivity to pathos and foolishness and obvious dislike of rigid ideologies. This concern is what makes Death Wears a Red Hat more than just a mere puzzle to solve and then put down.

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## CHAPTER IV

### MIND OVER MURDER

Mind Over Murder is one of the most concise of William Kienzle's mysteries insofar as theme is concerned. Primarily, it attacks Canon Laws, especially those that deal with divorce, annulment, and remarriage in the Catholic Church, and the often arbitrary ways that these laws are applied. Secondly, it attacks abuses of power and explores the themes of revenge and retribution.

The story provides an excellent base for examining the flaws in the practice of Canon Laws by focusing on the disappearance and presumed murder of Monsignor Tommy Thompson, Head of Detroit's Matrimonial Court or Tribunal. According to this law, Monsignor Thompson has the power to accept or reject a case for annulment. He can also expedite or let a case lie dormant. He uses this power at whim, and in the process creates a lot of suffering for many innocent people. This arbitrary use of power "would chill the heart of even Cardinal Pericle Felici, prefect of the Vatican's highest ecclesiastical court and vocal critic of 'lenient' American tribunals"<sup>1</sup> and, of course, is the basis for the feelings of resentment and revenge that form the nucleus of Mind Over Murder.

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<sup>1</sup> Reese, Thomas J., Rev. of Mind Over Murder, America, 13th June, 1981, page 492.

The motives that five people have for revenge are revealed in the Monsignor's diary, a device that again points up Kienzle's talent for using time-tested devices in a different way. Using the contents of a diary to further a plot is not in itself new, of course, but the several other different purposes that Kienzle gives it are quite original. Among them are the presentation of the five initial suspects, and the developing of the main religious criticism against Canon Laws. The diary, found by Joe Cox and handed over by him to the police after photocopying, will give the police the information they need to get the investigation going. But it also serves as a path into the Monsignor's mind and a means for observing the callous and high-handed way in which he has toyed with the last five cases that have come before his Tribunal. Ever more damning, from a moral point of view, are his crude and lewd comments about the two women that have come before the Tribunal with their respective marriage problems. The second purpose of the diary is to introduce the five prime suspects in the Monsignor's disappearance. A sixth suspect not mentioned in the diary appears later when it is discovered that he is also a victim of the Monsignor's strict interpretation of Canon Law.

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Since Kienzle's prime moral message in Mind Over Murder is to attack Canon Law particularly as it deals with annulment and remarriage, the five suspects give him an opportunity to explore a few of the problems that come before a Tribunal. Two or three decades ago, it was almost impossible to obtain an annulment for a Catholic marriage except in cases where it could be proven that a marriage had not been consummated. With the changes that followed Vatican II, came a gradual relaxation of the interpretation of Canon Law, and a speeding up of the whole process. Where it used to take years and years to get an annulment, it now could be obtained in a year or eighteen months. Inevitably, critics of the American Church claimed that the pendulum had gone too far, that the whole process had become too lax. This is not the case with Monsignor Thompson since he is strict not as a matter of principle but as a way of enjoying his own power.

Thompson's victims represent several different aspects of the marriage problem. For example, Mrs. Angela Cicero's dilemma is that even though the marriage case of her future son-in-law is very well prepared, the Monsignor refuses to help in speeding its snail like pace through the Roman bureaucracy, so that the permission to marry will arrive on time for the arranged wedding date. Angela, a woman who likes to take matters into her own hands, decides to personally petition the Monsignor for help. But the

interview is not successful. The Monsignor leers at Angela and hints that if she became sexually available, the case might be solved on time. Angela ends up furious, both at the Monsignor's lack of help and at the innuendoes he throws at her.

Another victim, Lee Brand is the perfect foil for Monsignor Thompson. He is an unscrupulous, wheeler-dealer businessman, whose approach to business is just as arbitrary and unjust as the Monsignor's. He seeks the Monsignor's help in getting an annulment for his future son-in-law so that the young couple can have a church wedding by a certain date. The reason offered for the annulment is that the former wife did not want to have any children. The Monsignor at first thinks of helping Brand and using him socially for his influence, wealth and connections. But he is later repelled by Brand's pushiness and changes his mind, allowing Brand to think that he is doing everything possible to expedite the case when in reality he is not even making the minimum effort. Brand eventually finds out and vows revenge. However, although he manages to hold the wedding on the scheduled date, without the annulment, with the help of an inner city priest, Father Shanley, he is irked that the lavish wedding has had to be held in this core city parish instead of the fashionable one he had planned on.



Father Norman Shanley, the inner city priest, who performs the Brand wedding, is a victim of both Brand and Thompson, and of his own convictions. Tricked by Brand into believing that the kids really want a Catholic wedding and that the wedding itself will be small intimate and private, he reluctantly agrees to perform it. With the enormous media attention from newspapers and T.V. that surrounds the wedding, Shanley's precious anonymity is gone forever. Monsignor Thompson is furious that Brand has gotten his way and that Shanley has flaunted his authority. But there is a lining to his cloud, for in Father Shanley, he finally has caught one of the inner city priests whom he has long suspected were breaking the rules of Canon Law and witnessing canonically invalid marriages, since in conscience, they considered them to be valid, a solution called "The Pastoral Solution". Thompson makes it a personal vendetta to see that Shanley gets punished. He eventually forces Archbishop Boyle to suspend Shanley from his priestly duties for a month. "In successfully prosecuting Shanley, Thompson had made his first successful incursion against the core-city-ministry."<sup>2</sup> If Thompson is allowed to continue his persecution, the inner-city ministry for the poor of Detroit would be finished, Shanley

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<sup>2</sup> Kienzle, William, Mind Over Murder, New York, Andrews and McMeel, 1980, page 195.

thinks and, therefore he determines to do something to stop Thompson.

The case that Father David Neiss presented to the Tribunal was also very well prepared. It asked that Harry Kirwan's first civil marriage be annuled as he had never been married in the Church. His former wife was Catholic and, therefore would have needed a Catholic ceremony to have a valid wedding. Kirwan's only request was that his former wife not be contacted, as their divorce had been bitter and she made life miserable whenever possible for him and their children. But Thompson comes back with a new rule he has invented. In the case of a Pole (and Kirwan's first wife was polish), they have to be interviewed, for according to Thompson, Poles, more than other nationalities, tend to marry in the church. This puts Father Neiss in a terrible spot for he has promised Kirwan that his first wife will not be contacted. It angers Kirwan, who feels that he has been deceived by Neiss and who decides to marry his fiancee anyway, but in a civil ceremony. Both Neiss and Kirwan vow revenge. Kirwan becomes the sixth suspect in the investigation, although he is not mentioned in the diary, when Neiss gives his name to an investigating reporter, Bob Ankenazy.

The last suspect mentioned in the diary is the most surprising and marks another innovation by Kienzle. She is Pat Lennon, Father Koesler's helper from other mysteries,

and in this story Pat changes roles from assistant sleuth to victim-suspect, through the simple device of trying to have her first marriage annuled. Her lover, Joe Cox, who hs taken years to convince her to marry him, has finally persuaded her to attempt to get her first marriage annuled. He believes that if Pat cannot be married in the church she would not bother to get married at all. Pat feels that her motivation for her first marriage was simply to punish her parents. In a way, it was their opposition to the marriage that forced her to go through with it; therefore, she feels, her marriage was not really valid, since she entered it without a lifetime commitment. Her first interview at the Tribunal goes well, but her second interview, this time with Monsignor Thompson is a disaster. Thompson lecherously eyes her, asks improper personal questions and as in the case of Mrs. Cicero, hints that the case will be expedited if Pat becomes available. Pat leaves the Tribunal humiliated, furious and feeling somehow soiled by the whole experience.

The introduction of five or six suspects is not in itself new, as multiple suspects are after all the backbone of classical detective fiction. What is new in Mind Over Murder is the clever way that "Kienzle presents each of his suspects scenarios for murdering Thompson in quite convincing detail, so convincing in fact, that all appear to

be guilty."<sup>3</sup> At no time does Kienzle give an inkling that they are daydreams, plans and not reality. The reader after the second or third scenario realizes that something is wrong and that Monsignor Thompson cannot have been murdered in so many different ways by so many different people, but it is still a surprise to find out the truth. One important reason that the scenarios work is that they are all based on facts surrounding the suspects lives and on knowledge given about their personal lives and characters. For example, in the case of Mrs. Angela Cicero, the reader knows beforehand that she and her husband are building a brick wall in their basement, that she is reading a volume of Poe's works and has reached the story called "The Cask of Amontillado" in which a man is entombed behind a brick wall alive, and that she has learned of the Monsignor's lewd comments about her. We also know that she is an active lady who likes to plunge in and make things happen. It is then entirely plausible to watch her send her husband off to a bowling game with his buddies, call the Monsignor and make a date with him at her home, and see her plan to dispose of the Monsignor by hitting him over the head with a board on their way down the basement steps. The Monsignor, we know from the diary is infatuated with her and might go to an assignation if he thought that no risk of discovery was involved. We next see

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<sup>3</sup> Kaufmann, James, Rev. of Mind Over Murder, Christian Science Monitor, May 11, 1981, page 14.

her putting in the last brick in place after having dragged the unconscious Monsignor behind the almost finished brick wall. In similar fashion all the other scenarios are developed one by one before our eyes each in equally realistic detail, each leaving us puzzled at which one is in truth the real one.

Besides exploring the difficulties in annulment and remarriage for Catholics, Kienzle launches an attack against abuse of power, his two main subjects being Thompson and Brand. Of Thompson he says, "he enjoyed the power inherent in the position of officials. Almost at whim, he could make people deliriously happy and grateful or crush their hopes and spirits."<sup>4</sup> Thompson is aware that power is precarious. Just as he got it, he could also lose it, but he loves to repeat to himself and others, "Nothing ever happens to me" as a sort of reassuring litany. In presenting one after another of the victim-suspects cases, Kienzle stresses again and again how Thompson has overstepped his authority and acted in an overbearing way.

Because he has a similar personality, Lee Brand more than any of the other characters is locked in a power play with Thompson. He is by far the richest and the most powerful of all the suspects. Kienzle shows him dealing with several of his subordinates giving orders in an

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<sup>4</sup>Kienzle, page 52.

overpowering way. His motto for getting what he desires is "Money is no Object". Father Koesler is amazed at Brand's arbitrary way of making business transactions. Brand gives approval for a huge loan at a low interest rate to a socially prominent man with a house in Switzerland while denying another loan with excellent collateral because the client's wife had gotten drunk at one of Brand's parties. Kienzle also criticizes the insensitive way in which Brand deals with Father Shanley. To Brand, the whole world is up for sale, the question is finding the right price.

Revenge, another secondary theme, is explored in the well plotted scenarios of the suspects plans to eliminate Thompson. Since with the exception of Brand, all the suspects are basically good people, none of the plans go through. Even Brand's plan for revenge is only half-done. There seems to be enough satisfaction and catharsis in simply planning the revenge so that the vengeance does not have to be carried through.

Retribution becomes another subtheme. By any measure, Monsignor Thompson gets his just desserts. Although it turns out that his disappearance and presumed murder is bogus, The Monsignor's reputation, and with it his clerical status and the respect of his peers has been destroyed. Joe Cox is the one who has found the diary which although genuine has been planted in an easy to find location by Brand's men. Cox gives the diary to the police, but keeps a

copy to himself. Cox, as representative of the Press soon makes public the revelations from the Monsignor's diary, just as Brand had planned and Tommy Thompson's reputation is left in shreds; so even though nothing physically has happened to the Monsignor, he has suffered spiritually to a considerable extent and he loses his material position of power through his transfer to another Diocese against his wish as an obscure instructor in a seminary.

Besides the attacks, on the Canon Laws concerning marriage, abuse of power, and revenge and retribution, Kienzle briefly criticizes several other minor themes in Mind Over Murder. One is the preparation that young seminarians are getting today for the priesthood. According to Kienzle, most seminaries are not preparing their charges for the problems encountered by young priests, especially that of celibacy. That may be one of the reasons so many leave a few years after ordination. Another problem is the lack of vocations and the low quality of some of the candidates for the priesthood. One example of this is Father Koesler's own assistant, Deacon Les Schroeder, "who is a caricature of the young seminarian who spouts jargon and has the pastoral sense of a clod".<sup>5</sup>

Deacon Schroeder gives Father Koesler a lot of anxiety for he is perennially getting into trouble. From a six

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<sup>5</sup>Reese, Rev. of Mind, page 492.

hundred thirty-one dollar monthly liquor bill to entertain his youth group to his setting of a wedding date for the Cicero wedding while the annulment is still pending, he keeps Koesler exasperated. When Koesler has to leave the parish for a week in Schroeder's hands to assist in the Monsignor's investigations, he does so with considerable trepidation. The characterization of Schroeder does serve a very useful and innovative purpose besides that of comic relief; he introduces the general theme of the next Kienzle mystery, Assault With Intent, which focuses on less than perfect, even very incompetent and clumsy candidates for the priesthood. This is a favorite Kienzle ploy, that of linking themes from book to book.

The Kienzle strength of in-depth characterization for his major characters, which makes him stand out among detective story writers, is also evident in Mind Over Murder. This third book in the series of Father Koesler mysteries has the assistant sleuths divided almost equally between Joe Cox and Bob Ankenazy, Patricia Lennon's new boss at The Detroit News. Cox's devotion to Lennon is made increasingly apparent by his insistence on marrying her and by his concern for her when her interview at the Tribunal goes wrong. It is this devotion that keeps him from interviewing her even after he knows that she is a prime suspect in the investigation of the Monsignor's



disappearance. This will eventually give Ankenazy the edge in the story when he interviews her first.

Pat Lennon's character emerges in a different perspective. She refuses to accept the assignment to cover the Monsignor's disappearance, since she considers herself too emotionally involved to be objective. She suffers a cold during most of the book that keeps her out of the action, but we see her in a different light when we witness her explosion of fury at Monsignor Cox and everything else in front of her when Ankenazy confronts her with the contents of the Monsignor's diary and gently asks her for an interview. We are also led to appreciate her excellent relationship with her new boss, who is very fond of her and aware of her feelings, yet maintains a perfectly platonic business relationship without any sexual overtones.

The book is also unusual in that its prime villain is also the suspected victim. Kienzle does an excellent job in the characterization of Monsignor Thompson. For a priest, he is shown as a most unspiritual person. He is money-conscious, drives a Cadillac, and likes to boast about his friendship with rich and powerful friends. He does keep to clerical black, but of the \$300.00 a suit variety. Kienzle spends a lot of time developing this character's personality, even including details about his childhood as the son of the chauffeur of a rich man to explain his present hunger for power and recognition among the rich.

Kienzle also explores the monsignor's likes and dislikes, from the food and drinks he prefers, to his phobia against disobedient inner city priests.

Father Koesler's character does not undergo any major changes in his personal life. He is still stationed at St. Anselm's parish where he suffers the help of Deacon Schroeder. However, in this book he is more active in the physical aspects of the investigation than in any of the previous two stories. He is assigned by Koznicki to go with a pair of detectives to interview all the suspects. True, during most of these visits Koesler feels somewhat like extra baggage, since he recognizes his ignorance of police procedures. His interview with Mrs. Cicero, coupled with the facts that she is reading Poe's story "The Cask of Amontillado" and that the Cicero's are building a brick wall in their basement leads Koesler to propose a totally wrong hypothesis concerning the whereabouts of Monsignor Thompson. It is a measure of his integrity and strength of character that he dares to give a second hypothesis soon after this first fiasco, and this one proves to be right. Father Koesler's slightly liberal opinions are also explored, and we are told that "he always felt vaguely uncomfortable in the company of the ostentatiously rich."<sup>6</sup> In his occasional criticism of the effects of great wealth ill

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<sup>6</sup>Kienzle, page 39.

used, Kienzle reminds one of G.K. Chesterton's mild ironic comments in his short story "The Queer Feet". His amateur detective Father Brown comments, "Odd, isn't it?...that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and secure remain hard and frivolous, and without fruit for God or man?"<sup>7</sup>

Father Koesler's well known impatience and annoyance with Canon Law is surely a reflection of Kienzle's opinion, since Kienzle has been quoted as saying, "I wish I could say I left the Church to get married...the truth is I left because there are 2,414 church laws and I cannot think of one I life."<sup>8</sup> In this respect, Kienzle keeps true to the vision of those writers like Cross, Kemelman and Francis, who transmit their lifetime experiences and convictions through the characters and situations of their detective stories. Keeping to this tradition, it is also not surprising that Mind Over Murder deals mainly with the abuses and injustices of the Marriage Tribunal, since Kienzle has said that in his years as a priest" he was particularly impatient with canon laws regarding marriage.

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<sup>7</sup> Chesterton, G.K. "The Queer Feet", Father Brown Omnibus, New York, Dodd-Mead \* Co., 1933, page 88.

<sup>8</sup> Dolezal, Suzanne. "City's Scenes Keep Kienzle Creating", Detroit Free Press September 15, 1983, Sec., B, page 1B.

He defied church law 'many times' by marrying couples who had not had previous marriages annulled."<sup>9</sup>

Mind Over Murder still keeps to the Kienzle innovative custom of mixing classical detective fiction with hard-boiled and police procedural elements. The hard-boiled influence is not as strong in this book as in the previous books. After all, there is no physical violence and no murder, and the theme although unusual cannot be called shocking or crude. However, some influence of the hard-boiled can still be seen. First, there is the question of the physical involvement of Father Koesler who takes part in the investigation, is given the diary to read, and sits in on the police conferences during almost all the time after the Monsignor's disappearance. Then there is the dialogue, which although most of it cannot be regarded as hard-boiled and "perhaps the better comparison is with the gentle craftsmanship of Emma Lathen,"<sup>10</sup> there are some instances where hard-boiled elements creep in. One instance is the frequent swearing and profanity of several characters. There is the explosion by Father David Reiss when told of Thompson's new inflexible Polish Rule. "Like hell I have got to get it. I have had enough of this

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<sup>9</sup>Dolezal, "City's", page 1B.

<sup>10</sup>Winks, R.W., Rev. of Mind Over Murder by William Kienzle, Library Journal, May 1, 1981, page 106.

bullshit! It is a goddamn asinine policy, and I am not about to do it. Let me talk to Thompson. I want to tell that son-of-a bitch personally!"<sup>11</sup> Even more explicit and definite in its hard-boiled toughness is the outburst of Pat Lennon when shown the contents of the Monsignor's diary that refer to her." Oh, that son-of-a-bitch! Tit for Ass is it! Thinks he could turn my answer into 'another kind of passion does he! Tit for Ass is it! Let me get the bastard! I will kick him in in the balls and cut off his god-damn prick,"<sup>12</sup>...It is difficult to imagine these passages in an Agatha Christie or a Dorothy Sayers detective novel.

The last instance of hard-boiled influence is in the personal moral stance that the detective takes in his face to face confrontation with the villain. In Mind Over Murder, after the Monsignor has been found alive enjoying a free cruise as ship's chaplain on the Brand's cruise ship, Brand invites all the suspects and Father Koesler to a memorial dinner. The dinner is a symbolic apology for the inconvenience Brand caused them by making sure that none would have an alibi. Koesler is included as a thank you gesture from Brand who feels that Koesler's intervention in the case saved him from stupidly murdering Thompson which would have been a big mistake for Brand if he had carried it

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<sup>11</sup>Kienzle, page 66.

<sup>12</sup>Kienzle, page 66.

out due to the high risk involved. Towards the end of the evening, Koesler engages Brand in conversation and admonishes him for deliberately and completely destroying Thompson's reputation, using not his evil deeds but his evil thoughts. When Brand boasts that he feels no danger of revenge from Thompson, Father Koesler reminds him, "There is another kind of vengeance, Mr. Brand. The way the Bible puts it, 'Vengeance is mine. I shall repay, saith the Lord.'"<sup>13</sup> In his effort to arouse, Brand's conscience, Koesler continues to reprimand Brand for his conduct until Brand's eventual burst of anger puts an end to the conversation. Snarling like a despot, Brand tells Koesler "Nobody talks to me like that!...and especially not you!...Never, never cross me again."<sup>14</sup>

The best examples of the police-procedural influence are the many and frequent scenes held at police headquarters, the long interrogations of suspects that frequently lead nowhere, and the introduction of clues and exhibits that do not really shed any light on the investigation and can even be misleading. In Mind Over Murder, it is the finding of the Monsignor's car with an empty shell and blood-stained tissues that originally throws the police off the track. They believe the blood is the

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<sup>13</sup>Kienzle, page 295.

<sup>14</sup>Kienzle, page 296.

Monsignor's and that the shell was used to wound him or worse. In reality, these are red herrings. Both Koznicki and Harris still play important secondary roles and there are many minor police characters.

Humor, Kienzle's major contribution to the detective story genre is shown in Mind Over Murder in several ways. One is by the many and often hilarious confrontations between Father Koesler and Deacon Les Schroeder. Most memorable is the occasion when Schroeder suggests that in order to broaden the world vision of their parishioners and internationalize and orientalize their faith they should put 'Flags of All the United Nations' around the parish square and build a pagoda complete with bell in the yard. Koesler is at first speechless, then finally rallies with the suggestion that Schroeder get up every morning at six to ring the Angelus. Schroeder, a notorious late riser, wisely lets the matter drop. Other humorous situations occur in the little anecdotes about priests at leisure often surrounding a game of golf. Kienzle is also good at the humorous one-line description, usually containing animal imagery. Of Archbishop Boyle dressed in golfing clothes, he says, "He looked strange, like a bird without plumage."<sup>15</sup> There is also a continuous good-natured give and take between the cops and newspaper people.

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<sup>15</sup>Kienzle, page 30.

that the Monsignor would be found acting as ship's chaplain, on the crews list, unaware that in his absence his reputation was being completely destroyed. This ending's controversiality comes from the fact that Brand, the one responsible for the Monsignor's disappearance and loss of reputation goes free because the police cannot find any criminal cause against him. In an ironic twist at the very end, Father Koesler muses on the possibility that Monsignor Thompson and his new Superior, Cardinal Bill Hitchcock, may hit it off so well that Thompson may one day, after all, get the bishopric he has wanted so much.

Some critics of Mind Over Murder have argued that the action is slow and lacking in suspense. That is perhaps inevitable in a book that concentrates on one disappearance and does not follow a stalking murderer, but interest in the plot never lags, first as the victim-suspects are presented, and later as we see their scenarios unfold. Concerning the device of presenting the six suspects with their six different scenarios for murdering Thompson, critics have been divided. In assessing the six scenarios, Newgate Callendar argues that "eventually the 'mystery has to end in a rational explanation, but Mr. Kienzle comes up with a fairly lame one. He is a good writer, but here he is too clever for his own good, and some readers may feel



cheated."<sup>16</sup> James Kaufmann, on the other hand, in his review for the Christian Science Monitor, speaks well for the scenarios calling them convincing and realistic. I tend to agree with Mr. Kaufmann. Each of the suspects is presented planning Monsignor Thompson's murder in ways that are plausible and realistic for them according to their means and way of life. Because none of the suspects ultimately seems capable of murder in cold blood, the explanation that they were all more or less explicit daydreams does not sound lame but in fact realistic. People do sometimes plan revenge, even investigating the feasibility of their plan, and in the planning, there is a purging of the angry feelings and a certain relief at not following through usually follows the abandoning of the plan.

Mr. Kienzle's former experience as a Catholic priest for twenty years has made him a keen observer of human nature. He is especially good in his short anecdotes about the foibles and vexations that afflict humans in their everyday pursuit of life, which he recounts with humor and gusto, woven into the detective story. His strength and originality as a detective story writer come, of course, from the moral, social, and religious criticism which form the backbone of his message.

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<sup>16</sup>Calendar, Rv. of Mind, page 29.

## CHAPTER V

### ASSAULT WITH INTENT

Assault With Intent is William Kienzle's most narrowly Catholic story insofar as its criticism is concerned, focusing as it does on the feelings of anger, revenge and loss that a group of former seminarians feel at having been expelled from the seminaries for being inept, clumsy and incompetent. Assault With Intent does follow Kienzle's innovative tradition of mixing newspaper and police procedures, a healthy dose of humor and social and religious criticism within the format of the classical detective tradition. But it eliminates the hard-boiled influence that has been seen in previous Kienzle mysteries.

The somewhat complicated plot focuses on the attacks on several elderly seminary priests who are known to have high standards in their teaching and to be quite strict with the young seminarians in their charge. Even Father Koesler, although not that elderly and certainly not that strict, is sent a bottle of poisoned gin, thus making him one of the intended victims and involving him early on in the investigations. Fortunately the attacks always fail by a combination of extreme ineptness and bad luck.

In focusing on former seminarians, Kienzle has a wonderful forum to compare and criticize the difference in standards between the seminaries of past and present

decades. He also uses the opportunity to ridicule the phobia of ultra-conservative Catholics about sex education of any kind in schools or seminaries as well as their enormous reluctance to accept any changes in the liturgy.

Assault With Intent concentrates on the problems that confront Catholic seminaries today. The story starts at Sacred Heart Seminary, Detroit's Minor Seminary, a huge elephant of a building, built during the peak of vocations to house a High School and College for Seminarians. Now Sacred Heart has closed its High School and has fewer than forty students in its College. Less than that attend the Major Theological Seminary called St. Joseph's. Kienzle is evidently worried about this decline. He tells us that the shortage of priests worldwide is due not only to the priests and nuns leaving but to the small number of young people entering the seminaries. What seems to concern him most is that the image of the priesthood is changing for the worse. The forties and fifties were "a time when priests were portrayed by such macho actors as Pat O'Brien, Gregory Peck and Humphrey Bogart...Now priests, when they do appear in films, are portrayed as confused, doubt-ridden men who are losing their vocation or faith, or both. In an explosively changing world, few things had changed as much as the image

of the Catholic priests."<sup>1</sup> This statement is perhaps a bit hyperbolic, but there is no doubt that the problem bothers Kienzle. He wants to counter this trend through his fiction by creating an image of strong, human, realistic priests. In an interview he argues: "In current fiction, ...you only have priests who are about to do something else, like leave the priesthood and get married or something like that. None of the priests in my books will ever do that, ...they are completely fulfilled in what they are doing."<sup>2</sup>

All the intended victims in Assault With Intent are priests, and Kienzle gives his usually excellent capsule characterizations of the individual victims, Fathers Ward, Merritt and Sklarski at Sacred Heart, and Fathers Gennardo, Budreau and Feeny at St. Joe's. Old Father Dye, who is the only one actually killed, turns out not to have been an intended victim of the Instrument of Justice Society. (He is killed instead by another religious fanatic, Roman Kirkus, head of the arch-conservative group The Tridentine Society which is the butt of Kienzle's ridicule.)

Father Koesler is also, for most of the book, supposedly an intended victim. But his attack, it turns out

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<sup>1</sup>Kienzle, Assault With Intent, New York, Ballantine Books, 1982, page 10.

<sup>2</sup>Dolezal, Suzanne, "City's Scenes Keep Kienzle Creating", Detroit Free Press, September 15, 1983, page 1B.

at the end, was done not by the foursome of attackers, but by a seminarian named William Zimmer, who had heard of the plot and wanted Koesler to get involved. This is a rather lame explanation since the young man in question is extremely bright and fond of Koesler and the Antabuse poisoned bottle of gin that he sent Koesler might not have killed Koesler but would surely have made him extremely ill. A more rational and realistic approach, more in accordance with Zimmer's character would have been an anonymous letter or telephone call or even a confession with a changed voice.

The six intended victims are all elderly, strict, seminary teachers who demand a great deal from their students. They bemoan the days when they could pick and choose among seminarians, when standards were high and only a few made it through their training. They are particularly irked by the fact that inept and incompetent students who are clumsy and not particularly bright academically, such as Lennie Marks at Sacred Heart, and Raphael Doody at St. Joe's, are allowed to continue in their studies for the priesthood. Most of them express their indignation at one time or another with the reforms of Vatican II and its creator, Pope John XXIII. This mood is best seen in Father Feeny's comments, "Pope John XXIII should have been strangled in his crib." At a rejoinder from Father O'Dowd, Feeny replies, "better that he should never have been

born."<sup>3</sup> They express regret that Latin is no longer used in the seminaries and that "the young men we have now don't know the meaning of a lifelong commitment."<sup>4</sup> Father Feeny further complains that "the problem is that we do not dismiss obviously second rate seminarians as we once did."<sup>5</sup>

They all agree that things are different now. How are the seminaries struggling to survive in changing times? Sacred Heart rents part of its space to different offices such as The Office of Pastoral Ministry, The Hispanic Office, The Detroit Catholic Newspaper, etc. St. Joseph's on the other hand, opened its doors to more than a hundred nonseminarians, among them quite a large group of women, both lay women and nuns.

Changes in the seminaries had not been overlooked by some of the laity, among them a super-conservative group called The Tridentine Society headed by the aforementioned Roman Kirkus. Also taking notice of these changes were the members of the secret Instrument of Justice Society, a group of four pudgy small men who always dressed in black and together formed the most incredibly incompetent and clumsy combo since the Three Stooges. All four members of the

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<sup>3</sup>Kienzle, page 100.

<sup>4</sup>Kienzle, page 101.

<sup>5</sup>Kienzle, page 102.

Instrument of Justice Society were at one time seminarians. All had been expelled for faults similar to, or even lesser than, those shown by Marks and Doody. They were dismissed by these same harsh, strict priests that they are now attacking. Father Koesler explains to the Koznickis' that these people and other archconservative Catholics feel as if "they have been virtually forsaken by their Church. And their Church, or the way they perceive their Church in retrospect, is of prime importance to them. They are humorless, aggrieved, abandoned people. Such people can be very dangerous."<sup>6</sup> In addition, these four men, who at one time had a strong spiritual motive for joining the priesthood, also wanted the security and benefits that the priesthood would provide them. With one notable exception among them, they had an especially hard time holding down jobs. Even at the time of their dismissal from the seminary they knew what they would be missing and were bitter about it. Now their bitterness had reached a peak and they planned their revenge on the priests who they held responsible for their present misery and this is the motive for the attacks.

Kienzle's criticism of the archconservatives known as The Tridentine Society focuses on their meetings where he ridicules their penchant for following bizarre cults such as

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<sup>6</sup>Kienzle, page 109.

the non-appearance of Our Lady of Tumarango. He also makes fun of their obsession with sex as seen in their opposition to sex education in the seminaries or in the schools, or their views on dirty pictures supposedly shown in the seminaries. When a TV crew starts shooting a docudrama based loosely on the attacks using St. Joseph's Seminary as background, the society is appalled. When a sexy scene is included in the shooting, they go berserk. As Roman Kirkus explains their views to a TV crew who interviews him, making him an instant celebrity, "Before Vatican II we Catholics knew that sex was for procreation and procreation alone. Now, the bishops and seminary professors want to have sex taught to children who are too young to do it, and seminarians who should never do it. Somebody is going to pay for this perversion of Church Law."<sup>7</sup>

Kienzle takes this opportunity to introduce some backhanded criticism of The Press and TV Media who through their coverage and publicity have made instant celebrities of Kirkus and The Tridentines. Later on he demonstrates how the Press can both praise and attack the same event, in this case, the advantages or disadvantages of the Hollywood TV crew working locally at St. Joseph. "The Free Press carried a page one story by staff writer Joe Cox, exposing the sordid background of the moviemakers and the opportunistic

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<sup>7</sup>Kienzle, page 152.



motives behind the made-for-TV film, "Assault With Intent." This contrasted with the News entertainment feature extolling the benefits, financial and moralewise, Detroit could anticipate from the work of the gurus from LA."<sup>8</sup>

Besides this incidental criticism of both newspaper and TV practices, social criticism in Assault With Intent is concentrated on the morals and standards of the Hollywood TV crew who are taping the "docudrama" of the assaults. Herman Deutsch, the director and writer, is now a drunk whose hands shake if he doesn't have a drink. Bruce Lauther, the executive producer has fallen out of favor in Hollywood for a morals charge of seducing minors. Sol Gould, the first assistant director, spent time in prison for forgery and passing bad checks. In addition to this already discredited group, they then hire as their local "expert" that infamous forensic psychiatrist, Dr. Fritz Heinsohn. Mary Murphy, a local gal who is the only calm, sober professional on the set, explains to Father Koesler that "the answer to any question about why we are doing something this way or that is that it will be the cheapest way of doing it."<sup>9</sup> She also advises Koesler, who is acting as an unpaid consultant at the request of Koznicki, that any concession he wants from the TV crew, should be obtained in writing. The movie

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<sup>8</sup>Kienzle, pages 207-208.

<sup>9</sup>Kienzle, page 179.

is done in haste and without any regard for the actual facts.

Because the four members of the Instrument of Justice Society manage to get jobs as "production assistants", in order to be close to the priests they are trying to kill, all sorts of things go wrong. Movie reels fall in the fish pond. Champagne bottles explode. Chairs collapse and plugs are stepped on. Eventually it becomes too much and the effect is somewhat akin to the slapstick comedy of The Three Stooges. Its effect is to detract attention from the basic story line, which is the assaults on the priests and the efforts that Father Koesler and Koznicki are doing to stop them.

Kienzle's innovations include the growth of his characters' personalities. In Assault With Intent we learn for the first time that Nelson Kane, Joe Cox's boss at the Free Press, has been born and raised as a Catholic, after he gives Cox a lecture on priests. Also we learn about a peculiar side to his personality, which although he is a professional to the core, "made him a hopeless patsy to the offbeat religious story or photo."<sup>10</sup> Kane, in this instance, would try very hard to get the photo of the burning chicken coop, (in which he believes a picture of Christ appears) on the front page of the Free Press. With

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<sup>10</sup>Kienzle, page 158.

the figure of Dr. Fritz Heinsohn, Kienzle continues his ridicule of psychiatric quacks. Heinsohn is shown as somewhat of a dandy, opportunistic and greedy for publicity, and always dead wrong in his hypotheses and conclusions.

Father Koesler's character is rounded out even further when we learn of his tolerance and generosity towards Leo Marks, Sacred Heart's clumsy seminarian. Koesler votes to keep Marks on as a seminarian for to him "Marks" sincerity for outweighed his awkwardness."<sup>11</sup> We are left with no doubt about Koesler's dissatisfaction with Vatican II. One particular point of irritation was the change in the Ancient Latin liturgy which is now offered in the vernacular. Even some of the humor is directed at this change, like the story about the little boy who urinated on the altar rail and a disgusted Usher came back muttering "it must be some new change in the liturgy."

Kienzle continues his innovative tradition of showing some police procedural influence in his story. From the time of the first attack on Father Ward at Sacred Heart Seminary when Father Koesler calls his friend Inspector Koznicki to investigate and try to spare the feelings of Father Ward, (who is old and something of a recluse), to the time that the action moves to St. Joseph's Seminary, the police presence is always felt. They take elaborate

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<sup>11</sup>Kienzle, page 307.

security precautions even memorizing the names and faces of all the people that attend St. Joseph's. They interrogate at length but seldom elicit useful information. Some scenes are held at police headquarters but not as many as in previous books. They even attend Tridentine Society meetings. Police presence, although still important, is less so than in previous Kienzle mysteries. He may be weaning himself slowly from his previous dependence on the police procedural.

One innovation he is happily not distancing himself from is humor. In fact, it may be said that in Assault With Intent. Kienzle uses too much humor. Humor in Assault With Intent is at its best in the stories and anecdotes about priests and seminarians that have become Kienzle's endearing trademark, a legacy from his many years as a priest. Notable is the story Father Koesler tells about the young seminarian who when asked what would he do if he was saying Mass and a mouse ran off with the consecrated host, replied. "I'd burn the church down and throw the ashes in the sacrarium." A sacrarium Koesler explains, is a sink in the sacristy, whose drain pipe leads into the earth to reverentially dispose of the water used to wash the sacred linens.

The most important use of humor in Assault With Intent is in advancing the ineptitude and clumsiness of the assailants. But here is where I believe that Kienzle has

gone too far. The assailants are just too clumsy and incompetent to seem real. They become a caricature of real men. I have already commented upon the scenes where they are present at St. Joseph's Seminary. The clandestine meetings when the members of The Instrument of Justice Society get together to berate themselves for botching up yet another attempt, or to plan a new attack are a good example of the many stupid mistakes. There are some good descriptive lines such as the one when a member pours some sugar accidentally on the floor and then steps on it: "The remainder of the Fourth Man's movements in the kitchenette sounded like a soft shoe dance."<sup>12</sup>

Kienzle's endings are often controversial. This one is no exception, but for different reasons than the others. When Father Koesler explains to Koznicki the motives of the four members of The Instruments of Justice Society, one is left unsatisfied. There is not enough provocation for murder it seems. Furthermore only one attacker is identified by name, Brother Alphonsus, the clumsy speaker at the Tridentine Society meetings. The other three attackers are left nameless and faceless and there is no confrontation between Father Koesler and the attackers such as there has been in previous stories. In addition, Bill Zimmer's participation in the early part of the story is also

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<sup>12</sup>Kienzle, page 173.

unsatisfactory. It simply seems out of character than an intelligent and outstanding young man like Zimmer would resort to poisoning a bottle of gin and presenting it to one of his favorite priests just to get that priest involved in the investigation. Also hard to believe is the fact that he would allow the attacks to continue without warning the police.

The effect of all the blunders and mistakes of the four attackers, is to make it impossible for the readers to empathize with the criminals. One cannot help but feel that these particular individuals were rightly expelled from the seminary.

Another even more damning effect is that they detract from the suspense that is such a vital part of any mystery fiction.

In summary, Assault With Intent, although it has some strong points, seems to be the weakest of William Kienzle's detective stories in plot and denuement. On the other hand his characterizations are excellent as always and his priestly anecdotes remain a delight.

## CHAPTER VI

### SHADOW OF DEATH

Shadow of Death, the fifth Father Koesler mystery, has the distinction of having not one but two groups of murderers, each with their own targets and methods. Both groups have revenge as a motive. The first murderous group to be identified, the Rastafarians, are intent on abolishing the papacy by killing the Cardinals considered as "papabili", (that is, possible candidates for the role of Pope). The second group, the Mafia, are intent on killing Ramón Toussaint, Inspector Koznicki and even Father Koesler as revenge for the death of a Mafia boss several years ago back in Detroit, a death in which all three were involved.

By introducing the Rastafarians as assailants, Kienzle gains a platform to explain at length, through Father Koesler or Ramon Toussaint, not only the Rastafarian creed, but the feelings of hatred and revenge that centuries of slavery created in the black man. Through the Mafia's brutal revenge on Toussaint who had escaped punishment for his previous "vigilante" style killings of a series of Detroit criminals, Kienzle introduces the thought of retribution, that you can't escape the past, that the effect of your actions will come back to haunt you. The title of the book is therefore very appropriate for it is the shadow of those previous deaths that will dominate most of the

book. These become the two main social themes discussed by Kienzle, a trademark in all of his fiction. He also comments briefly on some of the effects that Vatican II has had in the Catholic Church, most notably the changes in the Liturgy.

However, Shadow of Death marks a break with tradition for Kienzle, since the action jumps from city to city, including Toronto, Detroit, San Francisco, Rome, London and Dublin, as it follows the attacks on the Cardinals at first, and then on Toussaint, Koznicki, and Koesler. With the change of locale, Kienzle takes the opportunity to give extensive descriptions of the countryside visited, and lectures on the particular problems of the country involved; in Rome, the history of succession to the Papacy; in London the division between the Catholics and the Anglicans, and in Ireland, the struggle for independence from England.

In classical detective fiction, the author was not allowed to let his feelings and philosophy of life intrude in the plot. "The mystery novel does not contain the equipment to carry messages...It allows an author to speak but not to explore and instruct."<sup>1</sup> Kienzle as a mystery writer has often broken this rule and many others of the classical detective tradition as he presents social and

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<sup>1</sup>Waugh, Hillary. "The Mystery Versus the Novel" In The Mystery Story ed. John Ball, Del Mar, Ca., University of California, San Diego, 1976, page 75.



religious criticism. But the innovation works because the criticism is usually carefully woven into the plot. In Shadow of Death, there is much that cannot be placed in the category of social or religious criticism, or of material to advance the plot. The action follows first the killing of Cardinal Claret in Toronto and then the travels of the entourage of Archbishop Boyle who has been made a Cardinal and is traveling to Rome to be invested, and then the vacation of Father Koesler in London and Ireland. The setting becomes something of a travelogue. In classical detective tradition, the reader "has the right to expect that nothing will be included in the book that does not relate to or in some way bear upon the puzzle...The author is not allowed to rhapsodize over Renaissance Art...he is not to go into irrelevant details on the workings of the Palomar telescope..."<sup>2</sup>

Irrelevant is the key word. The long discussions of the divisions between the Catholics and the Anglicans, and of the history of the Irish people and their centuries of oppression, or the long, long passages describing Father Koesler's travels through the Irish countryside in search of his roots, are irrelevant. Worse still, their sheer length actually renders them somewhat boring. Newgate Callendar in his review of Assault With Intent states that Kienzle's

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<sup>2</sup>Waugh, page 68.

excursions outside the main plot lines only result in didacticism while not furthering the plot."<sup>3</sup> Those lines could have been written for Shadow of Death, since although social and religious criticism woven into the plot make all of Kienzle's mysteries more than just a mere puzzle to solve, anecdotes of local color and descriptions of the countryside do not.

Religious criticism in Shadow of Death is mainly concerned with the effects of allowing the use of native languages in the liturgy. During a Mass held in Rome, Koesler, unable to understand the sermon regretfully muses "that this at first insignificant step into a vernacular liturgy would eventually lead to the discarding and virtual desuetude of Gregorian Chant, as well as to the disappearance of Palestrina and most of the other religious classical music that had evolved so beautifully and lovingly down through the centuries."<sup>4</sup> Another minor subject for criticism is the rather recent phenomenon of retired priests. Koesler tells Ramón Toussaint that "every older priest I knew from the time I was ordained, feared most being forced to retire."<sup>5</sup> Koesler then continues saying

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<sup>3</sup>Callendar, Newgate. "Crime", New York Times, Book Review, May 23, 1982.

<sup>4</sup>Kienzle, William, Shadow of Death, New York Andrews and McMeel, 1983, page 97.

<sup>5</sup>Kienzle, page 132.

that although he is not sure of the causes for the recent trend of priests to retire before their time, he tends to blame it on their dissatisfaction with Vatican II. "The after effects of the Council appeared to change much of what many of us considered to be the heart of the religion we had been preaching and teaching. Some of us grew to understand that these reforms and many more were needed, indeed overdue. But others never made the adjustment."<sup>6</sup> It is precisely these others who are now opting for early retirement as a subtle way to express their disapproval of the changes.

Much of Kienzle's social criticism is directed at the Rastafarians. In explaining their plot to kill the Cardinals, Kienzle is careful to point out that it is the work of a small violent splinter group and that Rastafarians in general are peaceful black people who believe in their right to return to Africa, their mother country. They worship Haile Selassie, the late Emperor of Ethiopia, as heaven on earth. Many refuse to believe that Selassie is dead. The movement was born in Jamaica as an escape from the oppression and abject poverty of the Jamaican blacks. It has now spread almost worldwide, although its strength remains in the Caribbean area. Many Rastafarians who hate and distrust the whites, "consider the Pope the most

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<sup>6</sup>Kienzle, page 132.

powerful and significant figure in Western civilization", as Toussaint explains.<sup>7</sup> They equate the Pope with Satan. Since the Pope is heavily guarded and almost impossible to attack, they attack the Cardinals whom they deem as possible candidates to succeed him. They believe that by doing so they will eventually eliminate the office of the Pope. This is not a very rational belief, Koesler points out, since as long as there is one Cardinal left, there can be a Pope. Toussaint observes that Rastafarians often rely on marihuana which they call "Ganja" as a form of escape and that the violent splinter group responsible for the attacks is obviously acting under the influence of the drug and is not very rational. Kienzle offers many more details about the history of Rastafarians and about Rastafarianism as a way of life, citing their dependence on the Old Testament for many of their customs, such as not cutting their hair and thereby creating that distinctive hair style called "dreadlocks." Koznicki, Father Koesler, Toussaint and the rest of the group from Detroit, become involved because the Rastafarians consider the newly named Cardinal Boyle, papabili and it is in his defense that they all rally together.

The surprise twist to the plot comes with the introduction of the second group of murderers, that shadowy organization known as The Mafia and their plot of revenge on

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<sup>7</sup>Kienzle, page 97.

Toussaint, Koznicki and Father Koesler. It is a major innovation in detective stories for a previous plot to carry over into a later book. In Kienzle's second book, Death Wears a Red Hat, Ramón Toussaint along with his wife Emerenciana had used voodoo and snake venom to bring about the deaths of a series of major and minor Detroit criminals. One of the victims was a Detroit Mafia chief, Rudy Ruggiero. In that book, Father Koesler, a close friend of the Toussaints allows them to leave Detroit in a controversial ending citing among other reasons, "the professional secret." Koznicki, although strongly suspecting Toussaint, has no real proof and cannot accuse him. The series of murders is filed unsolved. Now Kienzle wants to clarify his view of Toussaint's criminal past and potential for redemption. Toussaint plays a major role in breaking up the Rastafarian conspiracy and with the help of Koznicki, he disarms Cardinal Boyle's attacker during a Rome mass. Later on, he finds out through his contacts the list of "papabili" that the Rastafarians are using, thus making it easier for the police to protect those Cardinals. He is thus shown redeeming himself from his morally dubious deeds of the past, by his present good works in preventing murders. But punishment and suffering seem also to be needed to complete Toussaint's redemption, so in London Toussaint himself is attacked by unknown assailants and is found nearly dead in a coma with virtually every bone in his body broken. Father

Koesler, although at first suspecting the Rastafarians, has doubts about their guilt for this crime when the black fist symbol usually found at the scene of the attacks turns out to be a black hand. When the attacks continue in Ireland, first on Koznicki and then on Koesler, there can be no doubt, since neither of the three men is "papabili".

Kienzle's innovation of bringing back Toussaint for his punishment, and in the process punishing Father Koesler for letting him go and Inspector Koznicki for not solving the crime, sets this book apart from his previous detective stories. He has always tried to link his books by introducing a character or theme with a minor role in one book that he will develop in a later one, as demonstrated in previous chapters. But this is the first time that the connection is made so explicit between a character's earlier actions and his role in a later book. Toussaint becomes the character whose personality is most fully developed in Shadow of Death. He is not the attacker as before, but helps the amateur detective, Father Koesler, and towards the end, becomes one of the victims. He appears to be a very intelligent and courageous man, whose loyalty to the Catholic Church in general and to Cardinal Boyle in particular cannot be questioned since he almost pays with his life for his zeal in defending Boyle. This book rounds out Toussaint's complex personality. We already know from Death Wears a Red Hat that as Haitians, Toussaint and his

wife are firm believers and practitioners of voodoo, and see no conflict between their Catholic faith and voodoo. Now, we know that as a Catholic deacon, Toussaint will put his life in danger, if necessary, in order to protect his Catholic ideals.

Other characters about whom we learn more are Pat Lennon and, of course, Father Koesler. Pat reveals that her maiden name was Cahill, and that she has Irish ancestry. She is very well informed about Irish history and so passes on information to Cox with the help of an old Irish lady. We also learn that she is quite capable of pulling the wool over the eyes of Cox, who is both her lover and competitor, in order to file a news report first.

Father Koesler's character is also rounded out since he reveals to Koznicki that in spite of his German name, he also is Irish on his mother's side. He is very knowledgeable about Irish struggles for independence and catastrophes of nature such as the Potato Famine that starved millions. In addition another side of his character is reinforced as he courageously confronts the Mafia Boss responsible for the attacks.

Inspector Koznicki is shown to be somewhat of a "gourmand", as he guides his friends through several gourmet menus. His status in the book is somewhat akin to that of an amateur detective since as a visiting policeman he has no official authority. Because of this fact, Shadow of Death

contains no police procedural influence, thus becoming the first of Kienzle's detective stories to eliminate it. The reasons for this are obvious: by having the plot move from city to city Kienzle eliminates the possibilities of concentrating on the activities and personalities at a particular precinct.

On the other hand, hard-boiled influence can be seen in the final confrontation at the end, between Father Koesler and the Mafia Boss, Don Louis Licata, at his headquarters. This confrontation reveals that the motive for his attacks on Toussaint, Koznicki and Koesler is revenge for the murder of Rudy Ruggiero and that the Mafia has judged all three in their own court. The Mafia found Toussaint guilty for murdering the former boss, Koznicki guilty for failing to solve the case, and Koesler guilty for being Toussaint's closest friend and confidant. This confrontation is secretly recorded on tape by Father Koesler and enables the police to apprehend Licata.

Kienzle uses this opportunity to make a statement about Mafia morals when he has Don Louis tell Koesler, "we care nothing for the authorities...We are our police. We are our banks. We dispense justice."<sup>8</sup> Don Louis also reveals the details of Toussaint's punishment in a statement that says much about Mafia cruelty. "We left his cranium untouched to

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<sup>8</sup>Kienzle, page 243.



assure he would remain conscious long enough to experience the maximum of pain and fear."<sup>9</sup> Father Koesler argues with Don Louis, both before and after these revelations, about the morality and necessity of trying to kill three people who at most were suspected of a killing, but who have never been charged with any crime. This attempt to reach his conscience is to no avail, since Don Louis explains that Sicilians are very concerned with 'saving face'. All insults or killings will be avenged.

Humor, Kienzle's major contribution to the detective story, here takes various forms, such as the priestly anecdote that starts the book to various descriptions of amusing pile - ups at the scene of the attacks in Rome and again in London. More often though, in Shadow of Death, humor comes from a joke remembered by Father Koesler as he daydreams during a Mass or trip. A typical passage starts, "His mind wandered on to Irish jokes..." and runs from page 207 through a continued recalling of one joke after another until the end of page 209. Besides revealing the fact already known that Kienzle is an excellent 'raconteur' with a memory for every joke he ever heard, the passage, although amusing, is irrelevant to the plot and only serves to mark time and fill pages.

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<sup>9</sup>Kienzle, page 243.

Kienzle's ending is surprising. His interpretation of the black fist-hand, the calling card of the killers, and virtually the only clue, is clever. Father Koesler reasons that the Rastafarians have never been associated with the Black Power movement, which uses the black fist symbol. Furthermore, it was after he received a message that the Rastafarians were not in Ireland and that Cardinal Boyle was therefore safe, that he and Koznicki are attacked and a black hand left at the scene of Koznicki's attack. Moreover, he remembers that the Mafia is also known as the Black Hand Society. But what reason could the Mafia have for attacking Toussaint, Koznicki and himself? The answer is the old almost forgotten case of Death Wears a Red Hat. From there, it is just a step to Don Louis Licata who has taken over the Mafia family previously headed by Rudy Ruggiero.

Criticism of Shadow of Death concentrates on the large amount of irrelevant information given. The Kirkus Review a typical critic, is very strong in his condemnation. "As usual, Kienzle stretches out his thin, creaky plot with digressions here. This time, however, though one or two church issues are sturdily addressed, most of the filler is uncommonly tedious."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rev. of Shadow of Death by William Kienzle. Kirkus Review, March 1, 1983, page 271.

Although I agree in general about the tediousness in this book, I also think that some of the descriptions are very good in giving one the feel of the country and adding to the sense of reality, such as the description of the sightseeing bus ride that took the weary travelers from Detroit around the outskirts of Rome to give the hotel time to fix their room and the one about Irene Casey's problem with the tour guides, an almost universal grievance. However, clearly a little local flavor goes a long way, and all those detailed descriptions of meals ordered and eaten are superflous. One would have been enough. The same holds true for those long passages of descriptions in Ireland.

The social criticism in this book is also weak. The depiction of the Rastafarians for example, fails because Kienzle's portrayal is too negative and he says too little about what caused them to become that way. One is left with the impression that maybe they deserve to be downtroden. Clearly, this was not Kienzle's intention for he has often, in past books, spoken sympathetically about blacks and their causes.

The major achievement in Shadow of Death is the retribution and redemption of Ramón Toussaint. As a Catholic priest for twenty years, with a strong respect for human life, Kienzle could not leave his readers with the impression that the murderer of six people, no matter how evil the victims and no matter for what good a cause, could

be allowed to go unpunished forever. The detective story's tradition has always been that of a morality play where evil is always vanquished and good is always triumphant. Ramón Toussaint was not an evil man, but in taking justice in his own hands he had done an evil deed, and for this he had to be punished.

It is ironic but somehow fitting that the group he was working so hard to unmask and bring to justice, the Rastafarians, is not the group that attacks him. It is the Mafia with their long arm for revenge that is responsible for his retribution and, through his intense suffering, his ultimate redemption. The controversial ending of Death Wears a Red Hat is now brought to a satisfactory conclusion.

For this, if for no other reason, Shadow of Death makes a contribution to detective fiction and marks another innovation in Kienzle's long string of surprising additions to the genre.

CHAPTER VII  
KILL AND TELL

Kill and Tell, the sixth book in the Father Koesler detective mystery series, has as its message the bad effects that the stress of living beyond one's means can cause in a sensitive soul. At the same time it is a serious criticism of big business vices such as ambition without rein and the abuse of power that such ambition often engenders. Although Kill and Tell has some religious criticism such as the difference in confessional practices, the divisions among priests, and birth control among Catholics, they do not overshadow the main plot, but are integrated into it. One example is the custom of parish shopping, a practice wherein a Catholic assigned to one parish by geographical boundaries, chooses to attend services at another. This practise will bring Charles and Louise Chase, (victims of a scam, and suspects of murder), into Father Koesler's parish.

The book marks a first for William Kienzle in more ways than one. First it eliminates all the usual newspaper involvement and doesn't even include Joe Cox and/or Patricia Lennon in a brief appearance. Second, because the book deals with life in the business world, almost all religious characters disappear, with the notable exception of Bishop Rattigan, a friend of Koesler's and a suspect in the case. Third, it eliminates almost completely the police procedural

influence. No scenes are set at police headquarters. Almost all scenes in which Koznicki and Koesler meet are held over a dinner table and although Sergeants Papkin and Ewing conduct an investigation at the scene of the crime, and interrogate several suspects in their homes, it is a very inconspicuous performance in comparison with other Kienzle mysteries, with the exception of Shadow of Death. The effect is highly positive, since it focuses attention on the plot and not on newspaper offices or police headquarters.

Religious criticism concentrates on confessional practices before Vatican II and after. Father Koesler is ambivalent about the changes. In the "good old days" on days of confession, especially the Thursday before First Friday of every month, the nuns in parochial school would bring in every child in every class from third grade on up. In the afternoon and early evening would come the adults in droves. Now, of course, it is rare to find in most parishes a line to go to confession and, in some cases, a priest to whom one can confess. The confessional of yore was considered a torture box ---uncomfortable, cold in winter, hot in summer. Even the name of the Sacrament of Confession has changed. It is now called Sacrament of Reconciliation. Modern confessionals allow a penitent to talk face to face with the priest, and confessions of what Kienzle calls a "laundry list of sins" are discouraged.

Confessions are very important in Kill and Tell since a vital part of the plot hinges on two confessions by a person with a strange androgynous voice who claims to be the killer and to be possessed by the devil, thus facing Father Koesler again with the dilemma of the confessional seal, but this time, with a different twist, the possibility of a demon possessed person, who cannot receive, indeed, does not seek, absolution. Another example of religious criticism is the clear cut divisions among the clergy. In the Pre Vatican II days, the divisions that existed were mostly the results of age differences, such as those found between young assistants and older pastors. By and large everyone believed in one doctrine and one morality. Now when groups of priests meet there is virtually no intermingling. Priests find a small group of compatible companions and stay with them.

Kienzle, through Father Koesler, continues to express his preoccupation with this trend by stating that "popularly, the blame for the recent sharp divisions in the Church was laid at the door of the Second Vatican Council. The Council was indeed responsible for drastic liturgical change."<sup>1</sup> But by and large much of the opening of new thoughts that the Council had encouraged was now stifled by the Roman Curia. "Koesler had long thought the far more

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<sup>1</sup>Kienzle, William, Kill and Tell, New York, Andrews and McMeel, page 204.

likely, if subtle, cause of divisions among the clergy as well as laity must be ascribed to the decision made by Pope Paul VI to override the majority opinion of his own birth control commission. On July 29, 1968, the Pope had released his encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*,<sup>2</sup> forbidding all methods of birth control except the rhythm method and abstinence. Many older priests considered the subject closed. But many of the younger priests and most of the laity considered the Pope to be wrong. As a result, the Church lost some of its former authority and created the splits that still exist.

Yet another religious topic criticized is parish shopping. Parish shopping may occur because of a desire for a more convenient schedule, or because of a preference for the priest or any other reason. It causes problems of congestion at some parishes and leaves others without enough parishioners to support them. It is convenient to mention it in Kill and Tell because the plot involves Charles and Louise Chase, former parishioners of Koesler, who continue to attend St. Anselm even though they've moved to a richer neighborhood.

As part of the social criticism in Kill and Tell, there is a brief mention of the different aims of Eastern gurus and Western missionaries. Eastern gurus come to America among other things to raise money for their churches

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<sup>2</sup>Kienzle, page 204.



and themselves and their goal for meditation is to reach Nirvana or a state of altered consciousness. In contrast Western missionaries left their rich countries to preach in impoverished ones in an effort to reach souls and their approach to meditation is to reach an altered state of consciousness as a means to an end. Western mystics who meditate "never forget that what they've achieved is not an end in itself, but an effective and beautiful means toward prayer."<sup>3</sup>

In order to present his attack on big business as social criticism, Kienzle concentrates the plot of Kill and Tell around the life of Frank Hoffman, a vice-president at The Company, a major Detroit automotive firm, and the people who surround him. These are his independently rich wife Emma, his mistress Jacqueline Le Blanc, his superior and rival for top post at The Company, Charles Chase, his sister Cindy whom he financially supports and her actor - husband Angie Mercury who is frequently out of a job and thus forced to depend on Hoffman's generosity. Last Kienzle presents Bishop Mike Rattigan, a good friend of Hoffman's and of Father Koesler, with whom he is living at the moment, while awaiting his permanent appointment.

All of these people in one way or another are victims of Hoffman's unscrupulous practices and egocentric ambition

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<sup>3</sup>Kienzle, page 217.

for success. For examples, he uses both his wife and his mistress while being faithful to neither. In addition he discredits Chase with the Chairman of the Board by conning him, with the help of two of his trusted advisers into making a terribly wrong assessment and presentation at a very important Board meeting. As a result, Chase's future with The Company is in jeopardy. He abuses Angie Mercury, his brother-in-law, who is financially dependent on Hoffman in order to maintain his high standard of living, Hoffman makes him almost grovel for money. In an apology when he believes himself to be near death, Hoffman tells Mercury, "I've forced you to eat humble pie not only when I gave money but at every moment of our relationship. I've insisted that you admit your dependence on my money. I've insulted your profession...and that's not all. I cheated on a pretty regular basis."<sup>4</sup>

It is in the personality of Hoffman's sister, Cindy, that Kienzle presents his biggest criticism. She is another of those victim/villain characters that have appeared often in Kienzle's fiction, people that are caught in circumstances that they cannot control and are often not of their own making. Cindy's dilemma is made clear to Father Koesler, when, in a confession, she admits that because of Angie's need to put up a front, she cannot make ends meet

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<sup>4</sup>Kienzle, page 206.

even with her brother's help. It becomes even clearer what stress she is under, when at a catered dinner party at the Mercury's home, Emma, her sister-in-law, expresses her disgust over her husband's dole to the Mercurys and her intention to try to stop it. This is more than Cindy can bear and her personality cracks. In similar circumstances other people have taken to the bottle, pills, or like Nora in Ibsen's The Doll House, have left the scene of their misery. Kienzle's solution for Cindy is to have her personality split into two parts with different names, voices and even mannerisms. Her alter ego is named Audrey, a very tough dame. It is under the influence of the Audrey personality that Cindy plans and executes Emma's murder. Splitting Cindy's personality serves another purpose, that of vindicating the psychological psychiatric profession which until now had been depicted rather shabbily through the figure of Dr. Fritz Heinsohn. It will be a psychologist, Dr. Scholl, who will accompany Father Koesler and the cops to interrogate and confront Cindy. At the end, every indication is given that with proper psychiatric help, Cindy will fully recover.

Hoffman's personality also undergoes a drastic change when he believes himself in danger of dying. Several things reinforce this belief. One, he was almost killed in an industrial accident that could have been sabotage. Next, Emma dies from a poisoned drink intended for him. Last, he

receives a death threat note several days after Emma's death. After confessing to Father Koesler all his misdeeds, he then sets about to correct them. He apologizes to Mercury and promises to help him get a job. He offers his mistress Jackie matrimony. He apologizes to Bishop Rattigan for using him for his own purposes, and apologizes and makes amends to Charles Chase by writing a full confession to the Chairman of the Board explaining his own part and that of his subordinates in the plot to discredit Chase. But Kienzle cannot help making a skeptical commentary on the lasting effects of such "death-bed" conversions. When it is clear to Frank that he was not the intended victim, he tries to go back on all his promises. Frank does suffer some punishment since he is kicked out of his job and cannot find another in the automotive industry. Kienzle, tongue-in-cheek, raises the possibility that the postmaster job he finally obtains will be Frank's stepping-stone into politics.

In the figure of Angie Mercury, Kienzle makes a mild criticism of the entertainment industry as one in which false values reign. Mercury is likeable and his devotion to Cindy is unquestionable, since he is one of those rarities in show business, a faithful husband. But he is also largely to blame for Cindy's breakup, for he pursues his egocentric lifestyle without ever worrying about what the lack of financial security was doing to Cindy.

Although growth of his character's personalities and depth in their personal lives has been a constant feature in all of Kienzle's detective stories, in Kill and Tell he has eliminated or severely curtailed the appearance of most of his regular characters. One exception is Inspector Koznicki who makes a brief appearance since after all he is chief of homicide. We do learn a little more about Father Koesler and his personal habits. We learn that he is a stickler for punctuality, that his parents are dead and that he shares some poignant memories of both their funerals.

Unlike the others, humor in Kill and Tell, is not overbearingly clerical since many of the jokes are told by several of the non-priestly characters. In this case it is often Angie Mercury who happens to be the storyteller and they are closely woven into the plot. One example is the self-deprecating story told by an amused Angie to his upset agent about the decidedly second rate play which he is rehearsing at the moment. When the sound effects call for horses and gunshots off stage, instead come "Chug-a chug-a chug-wooh wooh!," the unmistakable sound of a train. Another example is a Mercury joke told to Hoffman about a man who would not stop working in a circus washing the elephants even though occasionally accidents occurred and he came off smelling terrible because then he would have to quit show business!! This joke is related to the plot since

Hoffman had been belittling show business and had more or less asked Angie to quit and find a better line of work.

The humorous priestly anecdotes for which Kienzle books are so delightful also abound in Kill and Tell but for the most part they too are closely related to the plot. Given the importance of confession to the story line, it is appropriate that there are several anecdotes that deal with confession. One is about a little girl who peers into the confessional and announces to one and all in a loud voice "Mommie, ! There's a man in here sitting in the pottie!"<sup>5</sup> Another concerns a priest's reluctance to ask too many questions when faced with a sin he is not familiar with. Happily jokes like this are one innovation that Kienzle has not done away with. Of the humorous anecdotes in his stories, Kienzle explains that early on in his seminary days he learned he had a knack for gathering and telling anecdotes and he still considers it his biggest talent. When he started to write detective stories he found "he would be helpless against the urge to write into the plot, somehow, the funny little...stories...One reviewer complained that he thought the anecdotes were getting in the way of the plot. (His) reaction was that the plot was

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<sup>5</sup>Kienzle, page 55.

getting in the way of the anecdotes."<sup>6</sup>

The innovative ending in Kill and Tell centers on two somewhat controversial points: hypnosis and a personality split or demonic possession, (both possibilities are considered). In the end, strong evidence suggests that even though Cindy, under her Audrey personality believes herself to be the devil, this is only part of her illness and general delusion, and this possibility is discarded.

Hypnosis comes under consideration when Father Koesler remembers that both Angie and Cindy, in their early days in show business included hypnosis in their act. From there, it is obvious that Cindy has the biggest motive to kill Emma. She also has had the opportunity early on in the evening of the party to put Emma under a hypnotic trance with the order to drink Frank's drink when Cindy said the words "Frank, here is your drink." Cindy also hypnotized a young waiter in order to have him pour the poison in the glass. Koesler points out that the plot was carefully planned so as not to throw suspicion on Frank as his wife's murderer, since it was well known that he and Emma were having marital troubles. When confronted with Father Koesler's carefully elaborated hypothesis, Cindy breaks down and her Audrey personality comes out before the eyes of the

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<sup>6</sup> Evory, Ann, Metzger, Linda. Eds. Contemporary Authors, Autobiography Series Vol. I, Gale Research Company, Detroit, 1984, page 240.

police, psychologist and the priest. The combination of hypnosis and personality split forms a somewhat innovative and unusual ending to this sixth book in the Father Koesler series.

Kill and Tell, in my opinion, is one of the two best Kienzle detective stories, the other being Mind Over Murder. Although the plots of these two are very dissimilar, they do share several characteristics: They both concentrate on the personalities of one or two characters instead of having seven or eight murder victims. The religious and social criticism in both books, although an important piece of the plot, is for the most part nicely integrated into it. It is also limited to a few themes instead of the "shotgun" approach used in other Kienzle books. In addition, Kill and Tell seems a more disciplined detective story, with the clues and motive presented in an orderly sequence from the beginning. It is a real "whodunit" in the best sense of the word. In addition, humor, Kienzle's particular trademark as a detective writer, strengthens the plot, rather than becoming a distraction as in the previous Shadow of Death. With his return to Detroit, a city where Kienzle has lived for most of his life, as the locale for his book, all the street scenes carry an aura of realism. The elimination of police procedural and newspaper elements has also worked for the improvement of the plot as a whole. For his future books, one hopes that Kienzle will follow this successful pattern.



## CONCLUSION

William Kienzle's experience as a Catholic priest for twenty years left him acutely aware of the problems that had divided and polarized the Church, both religious and laity alike, in the years following Vatican II. That same experience also left him concerned and troubled by the injustices and abuses of power he had observed in his everyday life and by the sufferings of the underdogs, the people who can't cope and get caught in the middle. In addition Kienzle is a man with a lively sense of humor who loves to hear and recount jokes and amusing anecdotes for the entertainment of friends and colleagues, a trait he calls "what I do best". It is not unusual then, that out of all these interests, concerns and talents, came the body of detective fiction in which Father Koesler stars.

Although there have been other detective stories which feature priests as amateur detectives, Kienzle's work is quite distinctive for several innovative reasons. First of all, even though it is based on the classical detective tradition, it includes elements of police procedural, hard-boiled detective fiction and even newspaper reporting. Second, breaking with several rules of the classical tradition, it includes both religious and social criticism. Next, he, more than other detective writers, develops the personalities and personal lives of his major characters.

His major innovation so far, is the inclusion of considerable humor in his detective fiction, directly in the form of jokes and anecdotes, and even in the descriptions and narratives.

In addition to all these innovations, Kienzle also manages to use old stand-bys in a new and surprising way, such as, the use of the confessional secret in The Rosary Murders and Kill and Tell, or the many uses the finding of a diary has in Mind Over Murder. Kienzle is also adept at introducing and using controversial subjects considered taboo in classical detective fiction. He has discussed incest, abortion, drugs, voodoo, insanity, a lecherous priest and other subjects in the course of narrating his tales of suspense and murder.

A whole paper could be written on the many victim/villain characters who appear in Kienzle's books. The best examples are Robert Jamison in The Rosary Murders, Cindy Mercury in Kill and Tell, Monsignor Thompson and Lee Brand in Mind Over Murder and Ramon Toussaint who has the distinction of changing roles from hero/villain in Death Wears a Red Hat, to hero-victim in Shadow of Death.

At his best, Kienzle's novels, besides being amusing and suspenseful, also provide food for thought, a mixture of a sermon and an exposé. His plot and sometimes his controversial endings, leave ideas in the mind to be

analysed and pondered. When his innovative mixture does not work, he becomes didactic and repetitious and at times actually boring, but happily these are quite rare occurrences.

Kienzle belongs with that new group of writers who use detective fiction as a way of expressing their experiences and philosophy of life. All these writers base their stories loosely on their own lives and therefore reach a higher degree of personal emotion than was before thought possible. In general their characters are much more realistic. The books almost always leave the reader with a message. Because of this variation on what was known as classical detective fiction, Kienzle and the other new writers are helping to turn detective fiction into "serious literature".

Kienzle has a new book coming out in April 1985 titled Sudden Death, and is working on another book due to come out in 1986. Already he has started to make some changes in his last two books, sometimes successful, sometimes not. In view of these changes it is hard to foretell what his future format will be. He will almost surely continue with some religious and social criticism but might perhaps eliminate or considerably diminish the police procedural, hard-boiled detective and newspaper elements, as he has done in the last two books. Humor is one element we can be sure will be included, since Kienzle has stated several times how much he

enjoys his jokes and anecdotes. He may in the future rely less on series characters, introducing new characters with each story like he did in Kill and Tell. But this is only speculation. One reviewer has said that Kienzle has broken every rule in detective fiction. That may be an exaggeration, but Kienzle has broken enough rules with success to deserve his title of innovator in detective fiction.

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