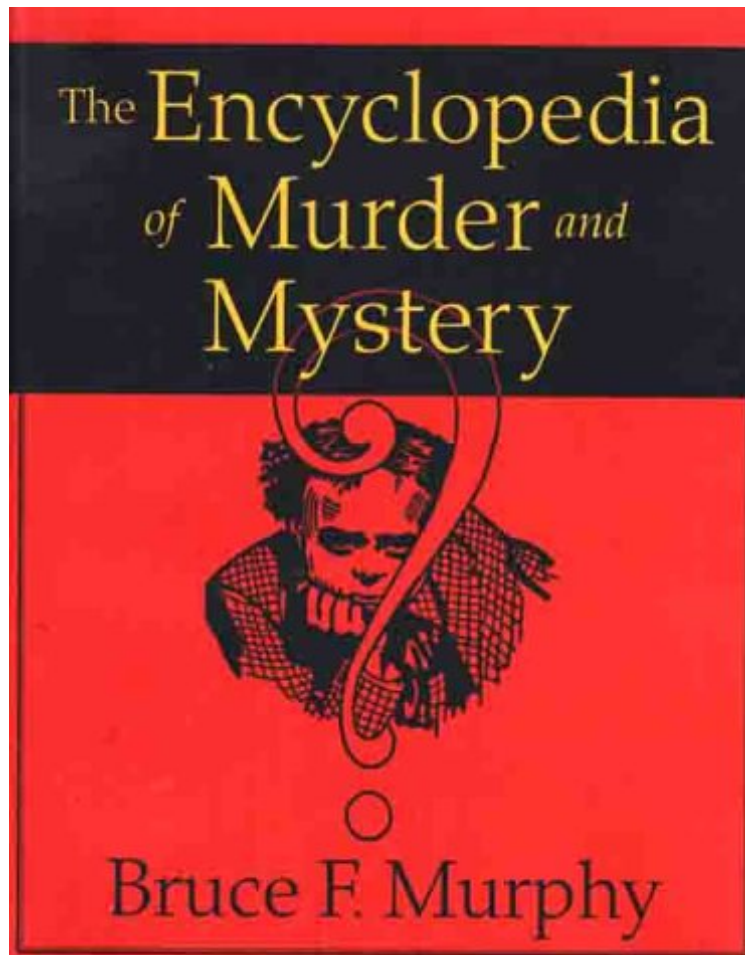


Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery

Bruce Murphy

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Bruce Murphy : Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery:

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us might anticipate an effort at objectivity in an encyclopedia. If those are your expectations, they would not be met by this work. In fact, the author appears to go out of his way to provide opinions where they might not normally be expected. For example, in the entry for Patricia Moyes, he comments, as if it is fact, that her main character Henry Tibbet "... falls into the tradition of Roderick Alleyn and Alan Grant, though he is less interesting... ". Whether Tibbet is more interesting or not clearly depends on each reader's outlook and, here, Mr. Murphy lets us know his. The author's opinions here are quite interesting, although I would anticipate that most serious mystery readers will disagree with quite a few of them. Unfortunately, his bias seems to extend to excluding a number of popular and award winning authors, e.g., Steve Martini, Kate Wilhelm, whose work is even published by the same publisher, Earlene Fowler, etc. In conclusion, this is a thick and extensive, albeit biased and exclusionary, work. Particularly, if supplemented by more inclusive mystery references this could make a useful addition to your library.

Bruce F. Murphy's *Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery* is an A-Z of whodunit and how it was done. From Edward Sidney Aarons to "Zorak," *The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery* moves beyond the names and characters every mystery fan knows by heart and expands our understanding of this most popular form of popular fiction. Murphy discusses not only classic practitioners such as Raymond Chandler, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Dashiell Hammett, but also newer talents such as Patricia Cornwell, James Ellroy, and Jonathan Valin and authors ordinarily considered outside the mystery genre: Do you remember Daniel Defoe's criminal biographies or E. L. Doctorow's mystery, *The Waterworks*? Did you know that F. Scott Fitzgerald tried to imitate Sherlock Holmes in his early fiction? Have you ever read Paul Auster's pseudonymous baseball mystery? Murphy catalogues methods, weapons, poisons, subgenres, famous devices (like the locked room or the snowbound house), movie adaptations, and great series characters like the Continental Op, Hercule Poirot, Kinsey Millhone, and Dr. Kay Scarpetta. He analyzes particular works and writers, from epoch-making originals (such as *The Big Sleep* and *Last Seen Wearing...*), to lost classics (*Wylder's Hand*), to interesting and disturbing examples of work at the fringes of the genre (*Devil Take the Blue-Tail Fly*). *The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery* is the place to turn for answers to a myriad of puzzling questions: In which P. D. James mystery did Adam Dalgleish first appear? What mysteries have been based on the careers of Lizzie Borden and Jack the Ripper? Why does the case of Oscar Slater deserve to be called the "trial of the century"? What's a "berk"? Which mysteries hinge on amnesia? Which mysteries feature golf as a theme? More than a reference book, *The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery* provides a colorful and comprehensive map of the mystery genre constructed under the gaze of Bruce F. Murphy's own critical eye, making it an indispensable and lively guide for every mystery lover.

.com The world of mystery and crime fiction has been the subject of a numerous recent reference tomes, from Willetta Heising's excellent *Detecting Women and Detecting Men* to *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing*. The former books are notable for their comprehensive cataloging of contemporary writers, and the latter succeeds by its reliance on a diverse range of authorities. But Bruce Murphy's *The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery* is much more a reader's book. Murphy is himself a bibliophile to be reckoned with, as editor of *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia* and writer for *Critical Inquiry* and the *Paris Review*. What he brings to his reference work, however, is not just the requisite expertise but also a sense of his audience, an attention to prose style, and a passion for mystery as a genre. He writes in his introduction: "The crime story is about consequences. In the mystery novel, infidelity leads to murder; in the 'serious' novel, more often than not it leads merely to divorce and the opportunities for characters to feel sorry for themselves." Throughout, Murphy throws himself into controversy and immerses himself in the minutiae that has always drawn the attention of true mystery fans. Where else might one find, for example, a description of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple tales as requiring "willing suspension of disbelief, because St. Mary Meade seems to have a crime rate to rival Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles. They are also oozing with charm and can be a bit treacly." The book does fall short in a few areas. Most notably, there are no illustrations, even where a photograph or an etching might be appropriate--especially in relation to film. Also, given that the book is all the product of a single author, some areas are given less weight than might be expected (e.g., Batman, who warranted a major feature in *Encyclopedia Mysteriosa*, is omitted). Further, the book's great strength--its critical bent--might be seen as a drawback to some fans. For example, the entry on "cozy" treats the subgenre with some disdain, especially dismissing cat mysteries where "realism is not so much ignored as belligerently violated." This criticism, however, points again to why this volume is such a pleasure to read. Murphy chooses to embrace the difficult subjects and let his reader know what he thinks. You will learn from his vast research and--like him or hate him--you will find him entertaining. --Patrick O'Kelley

From *Library Journal* Murphy, editor of the fourth edition of *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia*, has now written an engaging and informative encyclopedia about mysteries. Arranged alphabetically, this volume contains entries on authors, characters, book titles, and subgenres of the mystery genre, as well as themes in mysteries, famous criminal cases, and murder techniques. Entries on characters in series, such as P.D. James's detective Adam Dalgleish, conclude with short (and, unfortunately, incomplete) bibliographies of the novels in which they appear. Entries on specific novels (of which there are many) provide plot synopses. Entries on themes and subgenres provide names of authors writing in

that style or known for using that theme. But the volume contains some analysis as well; often Murphy explains what he sees as each author's strengths and weaknesses and places writers within a literary context. There is no index, but there are useful cross references indicated by small caps in the text of the entry. Recommended for public libraries.-
Cynthia A. Johnson, Barnard Coll. Lib., New York Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From
Booklist There have been few attempts since Otto Penzler and Chris Steinbrunner's landmark *Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection* (now almost 25 years old and out-of-print) to provide a comprehensive encyclopedia of the genre. In his introduction, Murphy states that this new book is an attempt "to show the genre's depth as well as breadth while singling out the superlative for attention." He presents entries for authors, titles, and characters; famous criminal cases (Boston Strangler, Jack the Ripper); slang and specialized terminology; plot devices (Alcoholism, Amnesia, Trains); subgenres (Had-I-but-known, Historical mystery); and poisons and other murder techniques (Arsenic, Blunt instrument, Ice pick). Entries are arranged alphabetically and vary in length. Cross-references are printed in capital letters. A selected bibliography is provided at the end of each character entry. There is a good mix of traditional and contemporary writers, although some may object that a favorite author has been omitted. Murphy is selective in his coverage of currently popular writers but includes a number, such as E. L. Doctorow and Ernest Hemingway, who are not generally known for their mysteries. One interesting entry is *Finishers*, which lists writers who have completed unfinished manuscripts of deceased, established authors; in some cases, they have even continued the series. With a few exceptions (e.g., entries on Alfred Hitchcock and Fritz Lang, mention of the BBC television adaptation of Colin Dexter's *Inspector Morse* series), media other than print are not included but are well covered in William DeAndrea's *Encyclopedia Mysteriosa: A Comprehensive Guide to the Art of Detection in Print, Film, Radio, and Television* [RBB F 15 95]. Fans of the genre will find this book both entertaining and informative. The author has brought together a plethora of classic and contemporary writers in hopes of introducing readers to new works. Librarians will find the book helpful not only as a ready-reference source but also as a readers' advisory aid. Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved