



The Zebra-Striped Hearse

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Strictly speaking, Lew Archer is only supposed to dig up the dirt on a rich man's suspicious soon-to-be son-in-law. But in no time at all Archer is following a trail of corpses from the citrus belt to Mazatlan. And then there is the zebra-striped hearse and its crew of beautiful, sunburned surfers, whose path seems to keep crossing the son-in-law's--and Archer's--in a powerful, fast-paced novel of murder on the California coast.

The Zebra-Striped Hearse Details

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Author : Ross Macdonald

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From Reader Review The Zebra-Striped Hearse for online ebook

Barksdale Penick says

This is one fine tale. I sometimes find with detective stories that the plot gets a little too twisty and since it is meant as a light read I don't want to pay full attention, but this book has a clear path along the way to resolution. And many fine turns of phrase. One of the better ones I can recall

Joe says

Let's get this out of the way from the start: "The Zebra-Striped Hearse" is a horrible name. The name 'technically' makes sense with the story but the name is just so bad that it's distracting...if that makes any sense.

Now the book itself, I found delightful. A great mystery from start to finish that had so many twists and turns that I honestly kept guessing down to the last every pages. Macdonald really put Archer through his paces in this one. I can't think of another book where Archer had to travel to so many distant locales.

I enjoyed his relationship with the femme fatale even though (or possible because) it remained so chaste I like that Macdonald ages Archer and has the book take place circa when the book was written. Too many detective series freeze during a particular era. God knows Macdonald could have left this series in the 40's where he first created it but he's allowing his character to grow just like the world around him. Given that I'm only about halfway through this series, I'm excited to see where that growth leads.

Quotable Quotes:

"Everything's under control," I said. "We were just having a yelling contest. This gentleman won."

I apologized a second time for invading her privacy, and for the unspoken fact that she was not pretty, and went upstairs.

She had the faintly anachronistic airs of a woman who had been good-looking but had found no place to use her looks except the mirror.

I was thinking that you never could tell what murderers would do. Most of them were acting out a fantasy which they couldn't explain themselves: destroying an unlamented past which seemed to bar them from the brave new world, erasing the fear of death by inflicting death, or burying an old malignant grief where it would sprout and multiply and end by destroying the destroyer.

Bill Kerwin says

The Zebra-Striped Hearse is a well-plotted novel, with a few surprising twists and turns. But, unlike most later Archers, although it is an effective mystery, it is not a superior one.

The mediocre mystery features a victim and a half-dozen suspects, each equipped with a shiny red herring. The effective mystery--like *Hearse*--features two distinct stories: one narrative about the kind of crime we think we are investigating, and one about the kind of crime we discover at story's end. In the truly exceptional mystery, the first story is almost as satisfying as the second, and the reader is surprised--and pleased--when he is compelled to exchange one set of assumptions for another.

And that is the problem with *The Zebra-Striped Hearse*. Its development is casual, almost rambling, and the provisional solution--the first story it suggests, the supposed murderer's character and motivations--is not very interesting in itself. The last third of the book, when the second story kicks in, is much better, but I found it a bit of a chore to hang on until then.

The Lew Archer character is fully formed here, however, and his detached yet compassionate voice make "The Zebra-Striped Hearse" somewhat more than merely an effective entertainment.

F.R. says

First things first, why is it called 'The Zebra-Striped Hearse'? Yes, Archer does encounter the titular vehicle, but it's hardly of crucial importance to the story, at best only tangential to the investigation.

So why name the whole book after it?

Of course the most simple and Occam's Razor answer is that once MacDonald coined the phrase he really, really liked it. But it seems lazy to just stop there, so I'm going to push further. This is noticeably a novel about the generation gap. More than once our narrator reminds us that he's a man in his forties; that the women he likes are in their forties. It's quite clear that his attitudes to life are shaped by his age. But this is a book with a lot of young people, and this man in his forties can't quite get a grip on them, they are a whole other - almost unfathomable - tribe to him. And that I think is what this zebra-striped hearse signifies. It's an old hearse which has been bought by some beach bums who use it to drive up and down the Californian coastline, lugging their surfboards and occasionally sleeping in it. And to a man in his forties there's a fundamental lack of respect in taking this vehicle which has a solemn importance, and using it for such a purpose, and even defacing it with zebra-stripes. It's a sign -- as if another sign were needed -- that the young are a breed apart, and the older heads, including Archer, are only just managing to keep the world around them together.

Archer is hired by a stern old major to investigate the new boyfriend/fiancé he sees as distinctly unsuitable and unworthy for his darling daughter, in what is, to be frank quite a disappointing mystery.

Firstly, it relies on the huge coincidence of the body of a man Archer is looking for being discovered and dug up the same day as Archer starts investigating his disappearance. Obviously such an old hand as Ross MacDonald knew that coincidences are best avoided in mystery stories, so this feels particularly sloppy.

Elsewhere, well of course it's the convention in mysteries that characters don't tell the whole truth even if they're innocent, as that's how you extend the story -- but here we have a character who obscurants and ducks questions even though it would really be in his best interests to say just tell what he knows.

So bizarrely, for such a master of the genre, we have a mystery which far from a mechanical masterpiece, is instead coughing and spluttering. From that point of view it's a disappointment, but then this is a book which

goes and contains paragraphs like this:

"I went inside the club, where the late afternoon crowd were enjoying themselves. If gamblers can be said to enjoy themselves. They wheedled cards or dice like sinners prying for heaven for one small mercy. They pulled convulsively at the handles of one-armed bandits, as if the machines were computers that would answer all their questions. Am I getting old? Have I failed? Am I immature? Does she love me? Why does he hate me? Hit me jackpot, flood me with life and liberty and happiness."

And it is just so wonderful and sad and well observed and downbeat funny, that I know that even if MacDonald's mystery setting skills can occasionally let him down – and here without any doubt they let him down – I'll still keep reading and loving his work because - up there with Chandler - in MacDonald we have the crime author as astute poet.

M.L. Rudolph says

1962. The tenth Lew Archer novel, California, early sixties, pre-hippies, WWII still well-remembered, freeways under construction, roads uncrowded, the border with Mexico safe and porous, and a woman walks into Archer's office concerned about her ex. The ex, a Colonel Blackwell, arrives later, concerned about his daughter, who's fallen for a penniless painter in Mexico. Blackwell hires Archer to check out the painter whom he dislikes, distrusts, and wants out of his daughter's life. The daughter stands to inherit a bundle in about six months. She resembles her father, which means she's hard on the eyes and insecure about her looks, and her overbearing father is convinced no one would fall in love with her except for her money. But the daughter's in love, and for once she's disobeying her Dad.

Archer takes the case which moves him around the state, north, south, east, and down to an American community in Mexico where along the way the bodies pile up. And the daughter goes missing.

Archer is a great companion, not as wise-cracking as some, thankfully, but a clever commentator on his life and world. Crisp narration and twists in the tale make this a fine example of mid-century California noir, before the sixties went wild.

Ross Macdonald is a master of his genre, and though I haven't read many of his books, based on this one I'll be stocking up.

Tim Orfanos says

Το πιο ψυχογραφικό και λιγότερο hard-boiled αστυνομικό μυθιστόρημα του MacDonald (1962), το οποίο αποδει μνε?α στη 'Μικρό αδερφό?', αφο? ο 1ος φ?νος γ?νεται με παγοθρα?στη/παγοκ?φη? πως και στο βιβλ?ο του Τσ?ντλερ.

Η ιστορ?α τοποθετε?ται στις αρχ?ς στις δεκαετ?ες του '60, και ?να μεγ?λο μ?ρος της κουλτο?ρας εκε?νης της εποχ?ς διαφα?νεται σχεδ?ν σε ?λο το μυθιστόρημα μ?σω αναφορ?ν στη νοοτροπ?α του surfing, στις ελε?θερες κοινωνικ?ς και ερωτικ?ς σχ?σεις, στην αντ?δραση στο συμβατικ? τρ?πο

ζω?ς, και στην ?νοδο των τεχν?ν και του καλλιτεχνικ? πνε?ματος, το οπο?ο, πλ?ον, αποτελο?σε σημαντικ? κομμ?τι της καθημεριν?τητας των Αμερικαν?ν. Επ?σης, προβληματ?ζει το γεγον?ς ?τι ο ντετ?κτιβ Λιο? ?ρτσερ ?πρεπε να εμβολιαστε? για να π?ει σε μια χ?ρα ?πως το Μεξικ?, το οπο?ο, προφαν?ς, τ?τε, κατακλυζ?ταν απ? αρρ?στειες λ?γω δ?σκολων συνθηκ?ν διαβ?ωσης, εν? εκε? μπορο?σε κ?ποιος να πιει, μ?νο, εμφιαλωμ?νο νερ?.

Στα σημε?α των καιρ?ν αξ?ζει να αναφερθο?ν η ανησυχ?α για την ενδεχ?μενη χρ?ση της ατομικ?ς β?μβας, η υψηλ? φορολογ?α του εισοδ?ματος, οι τραυματικ?ς αναμν?σεις Αμερικαν?ν μεταναστ?ν απ? τα γερμανικ? στρατ?πεδα συγκεντρωσης, και το ενδιαφ?ρον των Αμερικαν?ν, πλ?ον, για την υψηλ? αισθητικ? και την αρχιτεκτονικ? των σπιτι?ν και, γενικ?, των χ?ρων.

Στο 1ο μισ?, ο MacDonald προσφ?ρει στιγμ?ς ?ντονου μυστηρ?ου που θυμ?ζουν ?γκαθα Κρ?στι ? Φ. Ντ. Τζ?ιμς, ακολουθ?ντας τα ?χνη του δολοφ?νου απ? την Καλιφ?ρνια και το Λος ?ντζελες μ?χρι το Μεξικ? και τη λ?μνη Τ?χο.

Το 2ο μισ? περι?χει στοχευμ?νες περιγραφ?ς της ψυχοσ?νθεσης των ηρ?ων και των εσωτερικ?ν συγκρο?σε?ν τους, ?σο και αρκετα απρ?βλεπτα δραματικ? γεγον?τα που οδηγο?ν, στο τ?λος, σε ?να κρεσ?ντο συνεχ?ν ανατροπ?ν.

Σ?μφωνα με το 'The New Yorker', 'Θεωρε?ται ?να υπ?δειγμα της αριστοτεχνικ?ς δουλει?ς του συγγραφ?α... το βιβλ?ο ?χει ?φος, χαρακτ?ρα και πολλ? πρ?γματα να πει'.

Βαθμολογ?α: 4,2/5.

Υ.Γ.: Η ?κδοση ε?ναι αρκετ? προσεγμ?νη κα? ως μετ?φραση κα? αισθητικ? (η γραμματοσειρ? και η δομ? των κεφαλα?ων). Υπ?ρχουν σχετικ? λ?γα λ?θη στην εκτ?πωση και στη μετ?φραση.

Mike says

When trying to fill out my detective fiction reading with a broad spectrum spread across more than two decades I stumbled across the names Russ Macdonald and Lew Archer. While The Underground Man seems to be most frequently cited as Macdonald's best work to feature PI Lew Archer (along with The Chill) I was unable to acquire a copy and instead "settled" for the Edgar Award Winning The Zebra Striped Hearse. While it lacks the incisive social commentary frequently attributed to The Underground Man it is still a taught, thrilling, mystery that keeps you guessing until the end; and then some.

The Zebra Striped Hearse, in true detective story and noirish fashion, opens with a damsel in distress. An impassioned plea from an attractive woman lands Lew Archer at something of an impasse potentially working towards a woman's desire to see her step-daughter happy and working towards a father's desire to protect his daughter from harm. Lew Archer is a PI cut from the same vein as Marlowe. Though where Marlowe's knight-errant nature tends to shine through his cynical approach to life Archer never let's his own emotions get in the way of his case. That isn't to say that Archer doesn't discuss or acknowledge his own reactions to the people and situations he finds himself in only that his empathy and sympathetic nature is put to the side in favor of getting the job done. Archer is dogged in his determination to get the job done to the point of sacrificing even potential emotional entanglements. It doesn't really win him any friends. Here it means often straining his relationship with his employer to the breaking point.

Written in the sixties The Zebra Striped Hearse walks a fine line between the wanton violence of I, the Jury and the more directed approach of Raymond Chandler. While the reader gets glimpses of several corpses and sees a fair amount of gore towards the end of the novel it lacks the chaotic feel of Spillane's work even though it might exceed the bounds of what Chandler deemed necessary. Perhaps more fascinating is novel's juxtaposition of Lew's lack of sexual entanglement with the depravity of the villain that is revealed late in the novel. Macdonald manages to deftly skate around tackling the topic head on while putting forth a rather poignant and tragic portrayal of the consequences. These narrative acrobatics manage to detract nothing from the horror that these revelations engender while at the same time avoiding any potential fallout a more explicit discussion might result in.

What I find fascinating here as well, and not evident in the works from Spillane and Chandler, is the amount of actual detecting that Archer does. Where Mike Hammer seemed to barrel his way through problems, and Marlowe seemed to effortlessly gravitate towards the right people, neither seemed to put in the legwork. Archer on the other hand bounces around from a variety of locations along the California coast, Nevada, and Mexico ask actual questions from people who don't always turn out to be involved, at least directly, with the case he is working. While each manages to help piece together a complete picture the effect is gradual and can be followed by the reader with little, if any, need for large intuitive leaps. There is more reliance on the hermeneutic code in Lew's actions and in Macdonald's prose a fact that lends a certain participatory air to act of reading the novel that contrasts the almost fly on the wall experience I had while reading both The Long Goodbye and I, the Jury.

As stated above The Zebra Striped Hearse is an entertaining mystery that keeps the reader, along with Archer, guessing right up until the end. While it lacks the broad scope of Marlowe's commentary in The Long Goodbye, or the moral ambiguity of Mike Hammer it manages to produce a rather deft and delicate look at the consequence of actions that wouldn't be misplace on an episode of Law and Order: SVU. Which is perhaps a depressing fact for a novel written almost a half a century ago. If you are a mystery fan and have yet to give Russ Macdonald and Lew Archer a try The Zebra Striped Hearse is a good place to start.

Leslie says

Pretty good P.I. mystery but the solution became clear to me about 80% through (which I view as a negative in a mystery book).

Evgeny says

A wealthy guy hired Lew Archer to check on a background of his potential son-in-law. He is suspicious of the latter and would love to find some dirt on him. It also seems that he is the only one who does not like the guy; him and the readers as I did not see the soon groom-to-be as a nice person. Archer began digging only to uncover seemingly unrelated pile of dead bodies instead of any incriminating evidence.

The book was published in early sixties. I was curious and a little afraid to check how the genre of noir translated into this historical period; after all the common association of this genre is with late twenties and thirties (Philip Marlowe really does not feel like himself in forties). Just to refresh the memory of those who remember this and give some idea to those who were not born yet, this was the time associated with sunshine and surfing:

The hippies were about to make a first appearance.

The time changed and so did life, but some things remained the same and noir while changing a little survived the transition. This might not be the best of the series, but it is still quite good and well worth reading. My rating is **4 very solid stars**.

Carla Remy says

Ross Macdonald's mysteries are always so satisfying I'm tempted to call him the best. This one is from 1961.

Karin says

3.5

If you want to know what the story is about besides that it is a classic, hardboiled detective novel that dates from 1962--so expect women to be written pretty much the way they were in these sorts of novels back then--nothing contemporary about it, read the blurb ;).

This is the first Lew Archer book that I can remember reading (quite possible I've read him before and forgotten), and I liked it better than I thought I would. Truth be told, I read it for the Z, because it was shortish and it was hard to find a book starting with Z I could easily get that I felt like reading this summer. I like it better than the Philip Marlowe books and I didn't even listen to an audiobook, although before I got engrossed in the book I did imagine a hardboiled detective voice in my head to get me in the mood. I almost want to give it 4 stars, but I have a feeling that I read it at just the right time so I'm playing it safe as suspect that at another time it would have been closer to 3 stars, and certainly there were parts that weren't my style of writing.

Clearly, Ross Mcdonald knew how to spin this sort of tale, which isn't generally my cup of tea.

Timothy Maples says

An excellent detective novel. Macdonald was one of the best modern American writers.

Greg says

BOOK 3: Mid-20th Century Crime Readathon

Here, I move from McBain's 1954 "Cut Me In" to 1962.

HOOK=2 stars: A mother and father (Colonel Blackwell) argue about their daughter's (Harriet) choice for a

husband. This age-old trope simply isn't original.

PACE=3: Solid and steady.

PLOT=4: It appears that a man named 'Burke Damis' has killed and taken on the identity of the dead 'Quincy Ralph Simpson', who was killed with an ice pick through the heart. Did Davis do it? If so, why? And why was the body buried at a certain, specific place, and where does Harriet fit in? And why does Davis have a toilet kit with the initials of "B.C." Does the B.C. in anyway relate to Colonel Blakwell? Or does said kit really belong to a Bruce Campion? Or is it owned by Bruce Campbell? And when we learn several of these characters served in WW2, we want to know if something that happened on the war front has surfaced again. And all this is within the first 100 pages. This is a beautifully done plot, with red herrings and twists and turns all over the place. Dame Agatha Christie would be proud: she used initials often as plot clues/red herrings.

CHARACTERS=4: Harriet has reached adulthood per her age, but is still a child. Harriet's mom sees herself as the Queen of All Things. MacDonald goes deep into numerous mental issues including an artist suffering from PTSD.

PLACE=4: The morning haze burning off the beaches of Malibu. Sleazy dives in Mexico where anyone from anywhere in the world can walk in and do anything, be anyone. Lake Tahoe melting into spring. These are a few of my favorite things (honest).

SUMMARY: It's true that Lew Archer, our detective, simmers on a back-burner while Hammett's Spade and Chandler's Marlowe take the front burners. But Archer outwits both. And how can one NOT pull a book entitled "The Zebra-Striped Hearse" off a library or store bookshelf? (Yes, there is indeed such a hearse in this book, and it leads to the denouement.) But this book, at 115,920 words, surely tested the limits of any crime/noir editor as it reaches the limit for this genre. Still, MacDonald holds it all together beautifully without a word wasted, without a slur in sight, while still loving, but respecting, the ladies. My average from the above five factors is 3.4. But I gotta give this one an extra star for a sensational creative title (integrated beautifully into the plot), for the author's ability to hold this one in the air almost to the maximum limit (125K) for the genre, and for the unusual psychological depth of the characters, for a 4.4 rating, or 4 stars here on goodreads.

Bob says

In 2008 I wrote this: "I think this is the best detective novel ever written. That takes some qualification and explanation, but I mean as a detective novel, with the emphasis more on 'detective' than 'novel'. I think the wrap-up is perfect. I've read the story maybe four times in the last twenty five years, and just finished it again yesterday. Besides the marvelous plot, there is marvelous development of character, marvelous witty observations, and the beginnings of the deeper psychological themes that were to come in his later books, culminating in the masterpiece, *Sleeping Beauty*."

I just read it again. I'll expand that review.

All of the Lew Archer mysteries by Ross Macdonald are very good, and all but two or three are excellent. This one is in the top three of four, which means it is one of the best mystery novels ever written, and beyond that, it is an excellent novel, period.

It is the tenth of eighteen, from 1962.

MacDonald started out imitating Raymond Chandler, and he was quite good at that. But as the years passed, the most overtly film-noir and hard-boiled aspects faded, as did the violence (though there was never very

much of that by modern standards). Through his very strong middle period he combined elements of the hard-boiled with sharp clever writing and a wonderful ability to perceive and reveal people. Here, in this book, we have one of his strongest and most successful books.

It is very complex, and the reader would be rewarded by keeping a note pad and jotting down the first time and place a character is mentioned, and other key points. I've added a list below. But beyond the mystery story aspects, no other mystery novelist that I am aware of has so many clever descriptions, insightful observations, compelling similes, and such deep observations on the human condition. He is simply the best writer of all mystery writers.

Like most of the Lew Archer novels, the young people of today are haunted by the actions of their elders. That is not emphasized quite so much in this one as others. Recurring theme: art and artists.

It's a great loss to the world that MacDonald developed Alzheimer's at a rather young age. I would love to read a nineteenth Lew Archer novel.

The story begins, like many in the Lew Archer canon, with trouble in a wealthy family. Ex-colonel Mark Blackwell, a strait-laced army man, comes to Archer's office to say that his only child, 24 year old Harriet, is about to run off with a penniless nobody who calls himself an artist, named Burke Damis. Blackwell is furious that Harriet would defy him and "ruin her life" in that way. He thinks Damis knows that when she turns 25, Harriet will inherit a lot of money. Isobel Blackwell, his second wife of a year or so, is more sympathetic to Harriet.

Archer takes a disliking to Mark Blackwell but agrees to investigate Damis to discover his background. Thanks to Harriet, Damis has been living in the Blackwell beach house at Malibu where he can paint. Archer finds him there and stakes out the house, sipping coffee at a small diner overlooking it. A group of teenage surfers driving a zebra-striped hearse come in.

When Damis and Harriet drive off, Archer follows them to Blackwell's mansion in exclusive Bel Air, where an ugly confrontation occurs. Harriet and Damis drive off. Blackwell wants Archer to track them down. He begins by returning to the beach house. A thorough search turns up one odd item: an airline ticket stub from Guadalajara Mexico to LA in the name of Quincy Ralph Simpson. It is now dark and Archer notices the same group of teenagers he saw before now camped on the beach below the house. One of the girls is wearing a dirty but good quality Harris Tweed overcoat.

Archer flies to Mexico where coincidentally(?) Blackwell's first wife has been living in Ajijic (a real place) for ten years with her second husband, a retired dentist named Keith Hatchen. As Archer follows the trail in Ajijic we meet a wonderful collection of colorful, well delineated characters. This is perhaps the best part of the book. It turns out that Damis and Harriet met there about a month earlier.

I won't attempt to summarize the plot much more, except to say that it is wonderfully complex but not bewilderingly so. Archer discovers that "Burke Damis" is an alias; his real name is Bruce Campion, and he was suspected of murdering his wife Dolly about six months earlier in San Mateo County, which is just south of San Francisco. A few months before that Dolly and Quincy Ralph Simpson both worked near Lake Tahoe where, surprise, surprise, Blackwell has another vacation home. Dolly grew up in the little town of Citrus Junction (fictional), which is apparently in the orange belt about fifty miles east of LA.

So we have a hexagon of key locations: Malibu, LA, Ajijic, Citrus Junction, Tahoe, and San Mateo County.

The characters:

Mark Blackwell, ex army Colonel, the ramrod type.

Isobel Blackwell, his second wife, married a year or so.

Harriet, daughter of Mark Blackwell and his first wife, Pauline.

Some teenage surfers at Malibu who drive an old hearse they painted with zebra stripes, and sometimes pick up interesting things in the surf.

Pauline (Blackwell) Hatchen, mother of Harriet, ex-wife of Mark.

Keith Hatchen, retired dentist.

Burke Damis. Rumor in Ajijic is that he murdered his wife Dolly.

Q. R. Simpson Quincy Ralph. Just an alias of Damis? No; in fact he was murdered not long before.

Vicky, wife of Q. R. Simpson.

Chauncey Reynolds, owner of a bar in Ajijic.

Claude Stacy, manager of a posada.

Helen Wilkinson, aging ex-actress, retired to Ajijic.

Bill Wilkinson, husband of Helen.

Anne Castle, artist and weaver, owns a craft store in Ajijic. serviceable.

Bruce Campion, aspiring artist.

Dolly Stone Campion.

Hank Sholto, Lake Tahoe, Nevada side; looks after houses.

Fawn King, friend of QRS in Tahoe.

Edmund B. Damis, art professor at Berkeley.

Evelyn Jurgenson, sister of Bruce Campion.

Mr. and Mrs. Stone, Dolly's parents, live in Citrus Junction.

Mr. and Mrs. Jaimet, former owners of the house across the street from the Stone's. Mr. Jaimet, deceased, was a respected high school principal. Mrs. Jaimet, well, I'll say no more about her.

Several sheriffs and policemen.

This is a superb story, superbly written as only Ross MacDonald could. It doesn't get any better than this folks.

Examples of what I call good writing:

She jumped as though lightning had struck her, not for the first time.

I bumped my head on a low hanging fruit which was probably a mango. Above the trees the stars hung in the freshly cleared sky like clusters of some smaller, brighter fruit too high to reach.

The sky had cleared, and a few sunbathers were lying around in the sand like bodies after a catastrophe. Beyond the surf line six surfers waited in prayerful attitudes on their boards.

Kirk says

I had to pull a momentary rip cord on my Ross Macdonald Chronological Reading Society of One and bail out of *The Doomsters* for this one. I'll go back and finish it, *The Galton Case*, and *The Wycherly Woman* before moving on to *The Chill*. But it's summer, and the upcoming meeting of my Surf Noir Summer Supper Club/Alliteration Protection Society called. I stripped my responsibilities to their skivvies and took the plunge.

First, what's sorta fun about this book is the extratextual history: set in July, published on November 15, 1962 (exactly two years before I was hatched), it captures the burgeoning surfing movement right as it was breaking nationally: exactly one week later, the Surfin Safari LP entered the charts at #114 ... maybe not the most impressive number considering the No. 17 album that week was *The Stripper and Other Fun Songs for the Family*, but one with wider cultural implications [unless you're a stripper]. At any rate, *Zebra* is an interesting generational novel, born partially out of Millar's grief over his daughter Laura's emotional problems. When Lew Archer has to hit the road looking for the runaway Harriet Blackwell, it's hard not to recall Millar's own odyssey in 1959 as he searched for his own runaway daughter in the skeezetopia of Reno. As Michael Kreyling notes in his wonderful study on Macdonald, *Zebra* can be read as a prescient foreshadowing of the moral collapse of Golden State youth culture. In her petulant contempt/dependency upon a disapproving daddy, Harriet Blackwell would later morph into Patty Hearst (or Leslie van Houten, the "spoiled little princess" whose surrogate pops was one Charlie Manson). Consider, too, that *Zebra* was Warren Zevon's favorite Macdonald bc he identified with the snotty surfer who owns the titular vehicle, and you begin to see why so many b-boomers, wondering why paradise rotted under the concrete jungles of their deviated septums, identify with this one.

OK, it's got a few faults. As far-flung as Archer has to go to solve the disappearance, we readers ought to get gold miles. And the dead-bodies pile up more neatly than shirts on a Gap display table. Then there's the big MacGuffin, a trenchcoat whose peculiar button is a major clue, which feels a little too convenient when it shows up in an abandoned baby's hand. That said, there's a sexual perversity here that hints at the fixation with youth and innocence that would soon become a generational (and cultural) Achilles heel. Doll imagery abounds as much here as in Djuna Barnes, and that's a freaky cool thing.

The surfers are really only in a couple of scenes, but they loom over the book like an ominous strain of sociopath disaffection. They're also closely connected to the bratty bohemian painter who oozes generational disdain like it's pimple puss. In this sense, *Zebra* makes a nice starting point for a study of surf noir, sort of the serious inverse of the absurdist (and go-nowhere while going everywhere) *Inherent Vice*. I have a feeling it's gonna be my favorite Macdonald.
