



## Blue City

*Ross Macdonald*

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He was a son who hadn't known his father very well. It was a town shaken by a grisly murder--his father's murder. Johnny Weatherly was home from a war and wandering. When he found out that his father had been assassinated on a street corner and that his father's seductive young wife had inherited a fortune, he started knocking on doors. The doors came open, and Johnny stepped into a world of gamblers, whores, drug-dealers, and blackmailers, a place in which his father had once moved freely. Now Johnny Weatherly was going to solve this murder--by pitting his rage, his courage, and his lost illusions against the brutal underworld that has overtaken his hometown.

## Blue City Details

Date : Published 1974 by Bantam (first published 1947)

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Author : Ross Macdonald

Format : Paperback 214 pages

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## From Reader Review Blue City for online ebook

### George K. says

Πρ?τη ιστορ?α του Ρος Μακντ?ναλντ που διαβ?ζω στην οπο?α δεν συμμετ?χει ο ιδιωτικ?ς ντετ?κτιβ Λιου ?ρτσερ, παρ?λα αυτ? το επ?πεδο ε?ναι το ?διο υψηλ? και, μ?λιστα, παρατ?ρησα ?τι σαν ιστορ?α ε?ναι πιο μα?ρη και σκληρ? απ? αυτ?ς με τον ?ρτσερ.

Πρωταγωνιστ?ς και αφηγητ?ς ε?ναι ο νεαρ?ς Τζον Γου?δερ, ο οπο?ος επιστρ?φει στην π?λη που γενν?θηκε και μεγ?λωσε, μετ? απ? κ?ποια χρ?νια που πολ?μησε στην Ευρ?πη. Παρατηρε? ?τι η π?λη ?χει αλλ?ξει πολ? και ?τι ο πατ?ρας του, μεγ?λος επιχειρηματ?ας, που ε?χε να δει για αρκετ? χρ?νια, δολοφον?θηκε και ο δολοφ?νος του δεν βρ?θηκε ποτ?. ?τσι, ?χοντας κ?μποσο ελε?θερο χρ?νο, θα προσπαθ?σει να βρει αυτ?ν που σκ?τωσε τον πατ?ρα του. ?μως θα μπλεχτε? σε μια ιστορ?α διαφθορ?ς και σαπ?λας, στην οπο?α αστυνομ?α, επιχειρηματ?ες και δημοτικ? συμβο?λιο ε?ναι μες στην βρωμι?. Τελικ?, θα βρει ευκαιρ?α ?χι μ?νο να ανακαλ?ψει τον δολοφ?νο, αλλ? να καθαρ?σει και την μικρ? π?λη απ? τους εγκληματ?ες και τους διεφθαρμ?νους.

Η ιστορ?α ε?ναι πολ? ενδιαφ?ρουσα, με δρ?ση, αρκετ?ς σκην?ς β?ας, μυστ?ριο, ανατροπ?ς και εκπλ?ξεις και η γραφ? ε?ναι σκληρ?, με λ?γο βρισ?δι και ατ?κες που σπ?νε κ?καλα. Μ?σω της ιστορ?ας, ο Μακντ?ναλντ με γλαφυρ? τρ?πο αν?δειξε και την βρ?μικη κοινων?α μιας μικρ?ς π?λης, στην οπο?α νταβατ?ζ?δες-επιχειρηματ?ες και διεφθαρμ?νοι πολιτικ? και αστυνομικο? ?χουν το π?νω χ?ρι και κ?νουν ?,τι θ?λουν.

Πραγματικ? πολ? ωρα?ο μυθιστ?ρημα, με παλπ α?σθηση και νου?ρ ατμ?σφαιρα, που προτε?νεται ?νετα στους τους φαν του ε?δους. Το 1986 ?γινε και ταιν?α, που ?μως ε?ναι μ?λλον μ?τρια και σχετικ? ?γνωστη, ?πως βλ?πω στο IMDb.

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### leisy says

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### Leftjab says

One of my favorites of the Ross Macdonald books I've read so far - much different from a Lew Archer novel. Sure, there is a mystery at the heart of Blue City but it takes a back seat to a much more interesting tale of revenge. Very basic story - man comes home after the war to find his father's killer - but Macdonald's portrait of a post-war small unnamed city in the throes of corruption was what worked far better than any plot machinations or revelations.

Macdonald slips in similar criticisms of the American Dream that also seemed to turn up in many of the film noirs of the same era. What I liked about Blue City was the open-eyed look at the country the veterans of WW2 faced - what had they fought and killed for? To come home and find your father murdered, the city you grew up in decaying, and your step-mother shacking up with who were definitely involved in pulling the trigger on your father? Something is amiss - Macdonald has some nice moments to illustrate the hypocrisy of

"straight" society. As our hero starts to see that the corruption in the town knows no limits, he goes on the run from the mobsters and the corrupt police, hiding out in a public library after hours where he stumbles upon the books removed from circulation, his prose dripping with irony and sarcasm: "It was somehow comforting to know that the good people of the town that supported Kerch were protected against the lubricity of Rabelais, the immorality of Flaubert, the viciousness of Hemingway, and the degradation of Faulkner."

Added to asides like that a tender love story between a broken man with nothing to lose and a hooker (ish) with a heart of gold and one of the best dream sequences I've read in a while, you have yourself a stellar small crime novel. (There's supposed to be a crappy film version of Blue City - I would love to see another attempt, though doing period 40s would be tricky.)

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### **Dave says**

"Blue City" is MacDonald's 1947 stand-alone novel about John Weather's return to his hometown (which I don't think is ever named in the 247-page book). The name Weather is appropriate because this book is as dark, shadowy, and hardboiled as any book could be. Just as in Gil Brewer's 1957 book "The Angry Dream," which obviously followed MacDonald's "Blue City" by a decade, the story is about a young man who returns to his hometown after many years to find his father dead, to find that his father was hated by everyone in town, and to find that the town has turned dark and corrupt and nasty. But, while Brewer set his young man in a small-town in the country, MacDonald sets John Weather in a dark city.

John Weather has not seen his father since age twelve when his parents split up. He always held it against his father and, after his mother died, Weather drifted from town to town and signed up for the European theater in World War II, spending years shooting enemies and haunted by the memories. Weather has now come back to his hometown, to perhaps make amends with his father and to perhaps find work. Within hours after his return, he finds from an old man in a saloon, that his father died two years earlier, that his father brought crime, gambling, and corruption to the city, that his father had married a sextuplet of a young lady closer to Weather's own age and who inherited everything, and that the town is as corrupt as they come with every cop on the take and every citizen scared to speak out. Alone in this town, with almost every hand raised against him, Weather starts poking around and determines that his mission is to find out who killed his father and root out the corruption at its heart.

Weather is an unusual hero in that he is angry and cynical and has few moments of charm. In fact, what is amazing about the book is how dark and squalid and foreboding every page is. I can't recall even one minute of sunshine in the book. It is not just hardboiled, it is extra-hardboiled. If I were to criticize one thing about this book, it would be that it is perpetually dark and sinister. The cynicism begins on the first page with Weather, who narrates in the first-person, talking about how when you've been away from a town where you lived as a kid, you think about it and talk about it as if the air there "were sweeter in the nostrils than any other air." But, the City started sooner than he expected it to and had "crawled out along the highway." The truckdriver Weather caught a ride with and is asked if he likes the town and Weather is told that "It's all right if you don't know any better places."

Weather is itching for a fight and he finds one around just about every corner. This book is filled with action and Weather is pushing ahead on each and every page with almost no let up in the action. Weather is angry that no one seems to have investigated his father's murder and he is getting up in everyone's face about it, throwing out accusations of cover ups.

Weather's new stepmother is something else entirely. "She had her legs, and the way she moved her body. In her dark silk dress she moved with the free, shining fullness and flow of a seal in water." "Her live, stirring body in that still room was like a snake in a sealed tomb, fed by unhealthy meat." Weather thinks about how her body "seemed lost in a dream of its own power and beauty" and how he could "have reached out and taken it" "like a ripe fruit from a tree. But then she was my stepmother," he explained, "and that would be incestuous. Besides, I hated her guts."

This book is as hardboiled as it gets. It is well written. The prose is unbelievable and it may be among the best of MacDonald's work. The story takes the reader through nightclubs, poolhalls, barroom brawls, shootouts, and crime and corruption. The only possible ray of light in the whole deal is a whore with a heart of gold.

The whole story takes place over the course of a day or two and within the confines of the Blue City. Even when Weather is dumped at the outskirts and told to start walking toward Chicago, he has to head back in and finish this deal. This is good writing. It is raw and powerful. And it is hardboiled fiction the way it was really meant to be. Highly recommended.

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### **Charoula Koinoyokan says**

pretty interesting

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### **Kumari De Silva says**

I read a paperback edition published by Time Warner that clocked in at 214 pages. It has a different cover but I did not see it as one of the 17 choices of editions to choose. The vast array of publications might give you an idea of how successful and popular Kenneth Millar aka "Ross MacDonald" is. In the style of Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler Millar writes about tough guys and dames. He has a \*\*\*\*\*spoiler alert\*\*\*\*\* hooker with a heart of gold, but I forgave him this - because the book is legitimately old (from the 40s.) The device did not seem tired, yet.

One interesting thing about this book is that it takes place continuously over what can't be more than a day and a half. When you see a sequence like that in print you get a real sense of how time flies that is lost when books are translated into movies. Our hero, John Weather, is on the go go go from the moment he steps into the Blue City, a suburb of Chicago. Due to the pacing I end up reading this book in 2 and a half days, lol. I'll say this, the pacing sustains. There are no slow spots.

The prose is awesome. Without any spoilers I'll quote "... he walked like a sack of rags." Or "I looked at Mr. Dundee's wig-brown hair, carefully parted in the exact center of his egg-shaped skull." I appreciate how books written in this time period are comparatively more expressive when describing characters - not like modern books with toss off phrases like 'he looked like a movie star.' It seems descriptive phrases disappears with the advent of major motion pictures.

Anyway - - I recommend this book to anyone who likes Bogart movies, tough guys and likes plot twists. There's violence, but not too many ghoulish descriptions.

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## Alonzo Church says

And here is the promising author's very bad book; the one where he shows an occasional hint of future greatness. But it's very occasional, an unexpected graceful phrase, an odd moment where some unexpected Marxism falls into the narrative. Mostly, this is bloody but uninspired pulp fiction, where all the corrupt characters act illogically, the hero gets lucky and gets beat up in equal measure, and many of the plot points are the result of the hero overhearing just the right private conversations. The one oddly interesting thing — the plot is pure Pulp Western, slightly modified, right down to the villains stealing our hero's rightful inheritance, and him having to use a six gun to get it all back.

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## ΠανωςK says

Αντ? το ωρα?ο, παλιομοδ?τικο σκληροπυρηνικ? νου?ρ, το χαρντμπ?ιλντ ντε. Εντ?ξει, ?χει κ?μποσες απ' τις κλισεδι?ς του ε?δους, αλλ? τουλ?χιστον ε?ναι απ' τα ?ργα και τους συγγραφε?ς που καθι?ρωσαν αυτ?ς τις κλισεδι?ς. Εν?οτε ε?ναι και κ?πως αφελ?ς στην πλοκ? του, αλλ? και π?λι συγχωρε?ται λ?γω στιλ και ατμ?σφαιρας. Σαν ασπρ?μαυρη ταιν?α με τον Κ?γκνε? ?να πρ?μα. Γυρν?ει ο μοναχικ?ς ?σωτος υι?ς ως εκδικητ?ς στην διεφθαρμ?νη π?λη και γ?νεται ?να λουτρ? α?ματος, παναγ?α μ', τι καλ?.

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## Mike says

"Blue City" is not a Lew Archer novel, nor does he make even a cameo appearance. Despite that, the copy I read has "A Lew Archer Novel" boldly printed underneath "Blue City" on the title page. It's also listed that way within the BPL's catalog system. So, forewarned is fore-armed, as they say.

"Blue City" was copyrighted in 1947 under the author's birth name, Kenneth Millar. It may be his first novel length work (I have not checked). During the same period he had written at least one Lew Archer short story, but it may not have been clear that Archer was to be a commercial hit with readers. Or, Millar may have been trying to develop his range.

This is a very fast-paced, frenetic story. In the space of about 48 hours a man returns to the city of his youth and father, learns of his father's unsolved murder 2 years before and several other unwelcome truths. There's little of the reflection and character psychology of the later Archer novels. Instead it's straight ahead, full speed, action almost from the first sentence. Because the protagonist is a recently mustered-out Army sergeant, one couldn't call him "hard-boiled", but his raw instinct to head immediately at the next obstacle no matter how dangerous is classic "tough guy" scripting.

One of the traits that this book shares will all of the author's longer fiction, no matter when it was written, is a very convoluted plot with a web of character connections. There's plenty of material for an eager and stubborn "hero" to uncover while trying to find out who killed his estranged father. Rather than give away any of the details, I'll only say that all of the loose ends are resolved one way or another.

Since I thought this book was a Lew Archer novel, I put it aside until I finished the run of three I have recently reviewed. Normally I would have read it first (oldest date of publication) to see how the man and his writing evolved. It was a bit of a jolt going from the very polished, but still fast-paced novels of the mid-

sixties to this one written two decades earlier. If you like the rawness of what might have been a "pulp" fiction story and don't mind the often brutal violence, this is not a bad book. Just don't pick it up thinking "Lew Archer". Otherwise it's an interesting enough story even if a bit formulaic in parts.

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## **Daniel says**

3.5 to 4 stars. This is the earliest Ross Macdonald currently in print to the best of my knowledge, though his third published. Better than a lot of late 40's noir I've read, but not yet Macdonald at his best.

Narrated in the first person by WWII vet John Weather returning to his hometown in 1946 to visit his father, who he's not spoken to since he was twelve. When he arrives, he finds strangers apparently in control of his father's businesses, and sets out immediately (in the middle of the night) get to the bottom of things.

The novel plays out over a fairly short period of time. Less than 48 hours I think, with the narrator proceeding pretty much directly from one encounter to the next. I'm not the type of reader who makes any effort to try and "solve" the mystery before the detective, but in my opinion Macdonald did a good job of keeping my suspicions shifting around.

The narrator seems a little verbally aggressive, and many of his quips seem a bit random, but overall certainly enjoyable. I wouldn't recommend this as a starting place for readers new to Macdonald though, leave it for the completist.

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## **Lukasz Pruski says**

*"[...] I could see the vigorous movements of his right arm and shoulder up and down, back and forth, as he worked on it with the knife. When I got back to my car a quarter of a mile away, I could still hear her screams - or thought I could."*

Ross Macdonald - the pen name of Kenneth Millar - is mainly known for the famous series of novels featuring the wise and humane PI, Lew Archer. I have recently finished re-reading and reviewing on *Goodreads* the entire extraordinary series, with its last entry, *The Blue Hammer*. Yet Mr. Millar also wrote stand-alone novels, and *Blue City* (1947), one of his earliest works, originally published under Millar's own name, does not feature Lew Archer. Instead, it is a thriller set in a fictional Midwest town in 1946.

The narrator, John Weather, freshly discharged from the army, comes back to the town of his youth after a ten-year absence. His father had been the mayor of the town before he was murdered two years ago. The first thing John does when he arrives in town is to help an old man who had his money stolen by two hoodlums. John handily beats them up which instantaneously sets the tone of the story: we have a truly hard-boiled hero not averse to use physical force. It becomes clear that John has come back mainly to find his father's killers and avenge his death. Soon he finds out that the town is controlled by a criminal machine, driven by greed, extortion, and blackmail, and he has to - virtually single-handedly - defeat the criminal enterprise.

The plot is firmly grounded in pulp literature clichés. Seventy years after the book was written they read awkward and often ridiculous. The contrast between this story and Macdonald's much later superb writing,

such as in *The Underground Man* or *The Chill* is absolutely staggering. It is almost as if one were to believe the same author wrote *Ulysses* and the plots for reality shows. Well hidden in this heap of stereotypical drivel are occasional glimpses into Mr. Millar's true potential and his literary interests:

"[...] the good people of the town [...] were protected against the lubricity of Rabelais, the immorality of Flaubert, the viciousness of Hemingway, and the degradation of Faulkner."

Yet the absolute majority of the novel is suitable only for adolescent boys: beatings, shootings, blood, and torture, with guns being the main device of human communication.

The "romantic" thread is not well written and contains pearls of prose worthy of Jackie Collins Writing School graduate:

The streams of our desire rose, met, mingled, and subsided. I felt empty, dazed, and spent."

Ouch! Macdonald's favorite cheap plot device - accidentally overhearing peoples' conversations - is used three times. Many dialogues are dated and sound like lines from bad James Cagney movies. In one totally implausible passage, 22-year-old John talks with the cynical wisdom of a 60-year-old. There is a curious passage about Mr. Kaufman and his Marx and Engels' books, Red threat, and C.I.O. agitators. On the positive side, I have learned one new word, 'hoydenish'.

A bad novel by a great writer.

One and a half stars.

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### **John Culuris says**

Review to come.

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### **Bill Kerwin says**

Ross Macdonald's third novel *Blue City* is better than his first two, principally because Macdonald has finally discovered how to create a narrator who doesn't sound like an English teacher. The style is almost classic Macdonald: spare, restrained, earnest and sad, with the metaphors--still literary--well prepared for and adapted to the individual speaker.

This is not a Lew Archer novel, but it is a real mystery nevertheless. Johnny Weathers returns from combat in WWII to find that his estranged father J.D., the political boss of *Blue City*--a town which resembles the author's home of Kitchener, Ontario--was murdered two years ago. To unearth his father's murderer, Johnny must dig up the rest of the dirt of the town, and--as you may have guessed--there are piles and piles of it.

I found this novel interesting because, set as it is in a small, corrupt city, it reminded me more of Hammet's *Red Harvest* than of anything by Chandler, and it was instructive to see the old man's influence dominate for a change. It is also interesting because here, for the first time, Macdonald is grappling with serious social,

psychological and economic issues which are marring the cities of America--similar to the way he incorporated environmental themes in his last novels.

No, it is not Lew Archer. But it is pretty close.

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### **Jake says**

(3.5) An early effort from my favorite mystery writer. The talent is there, even if the plot is ridiculous and the dialogue too expository. Macdonald wanted the book to be a send up of his corrupt Canadian hometown and the reader can easily see through the veiled references to “how things were run” in that area.

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### **Tim Orfanos says**

Πρ?κειται, ?σως, για το πιο 'νου?ρ' μυθιστ?ρημα του ΜακΝτ?ναλντ με 'pulp' και 'hardcore' πινελι?ς, το οπο?ο αποδ?δει (ε?κολα) φ?ρο τιμ?ς στην αστυνομικ? λογοτεχν?α της δεκαε?ας του '20 και του '30, αφο? κ?λλιστα θα μπορο?σε να ?χει γραφτε? απ? τον Χ?μετ ? τον Τσ?ντλερ - θυμ?ζει ?ντονα την παρακμιακ? και διεφθαρμ?νη 'ατμ?σφαιρα' του 'Κ?κκινου Θερισμο?' του Χ?μετ (1929).

Το βιβλ?ο γρ?φτηκε το 1947 και αντικατοπτρ?ζει ε?στοχα την μεταπολεμικ? Αμερικ?, η οπο?α ε?ναι βυθισμ?νη στα ?νοχα μυστικ?, τις θεωρ?ες συνωμοσ?ας και την δ?ψα για το ε?κολο χρ?μα και την εφ?μερη διασκ?δαση. ?πως κα? στους 'Κυνηγο?ς' του Brown (1947), ο πρωταγωνιστ?ς προσπαθε? απεγνωσμ?να να βρει το δολοφ?νο του πατ?ρα του (σημαντικ? παρ?γοντα της π?λης) αφο? γυρ?ζει, μετ? τον π?λεμο, στη γεν?τειρ? του μπερδεμ?νος και αποπροσανατολισμ?νος. Για να καταφ?ρει να βρει την ?κρη του ν?ματος θα παλ?ψει με τους προσωπικ?ς του εφι?λτες και θα αντιμετωπ?σει επ?πονες εσωτερικ?ς συγκρο?σεις.

Οι αναγ?στες, στην αρχ? του βιβλ?ου, θα ?χουν, ενδεχομ?νως, την α?σθηση ?τι ο ΜακΝτ?ναλντ της 2ης περι?δου (απ? το 1949 και μετ?), κατ? την οπο?α δημιο?ργησε τον ευρηματικ? ντιτ?κτιβ Λου ?ρτσερ δεν ?χει καμ?α σχ?ση με τον ΜακΝτ?ναλντ της 1ης περι?δου, γιατ?, απλο?στατα, η γλ?σσα που χρησιμοποιε? εδ? ε?ναι σκληρ?, με αρκετ?ς στιγμ?ς αθυροστομ?ας και κυνισμο? που δε?χνουν ?ντονο θυμ? και τ?ση καταγγελ?ας απ? τη πλευρ? του συγγραφ?α.

Π?ρα απ? αυτ?, η 'ατμ?σφαιρα' της ιστορ?ας ε?ναι αρκετ? καταδιωκτικ? με ?ντονα στοιχε?α ψυχολογικο? θρ?λερ, εν? η δομ? της πλοκ?ς δεν ε?ναι γραμμικ? ?πως σε ?λλα βιβλ?α του συγγραφ?α. Προσωπικ?, θεωρ? ?τι ε?ναι απ? τα σημαντικ?τερα δε?γματα γραφ?ς του, αφο? καταφ?ρνει να εντυπωσι?σει με την ειλικρ?νεια και τη π?λη του ?ρωα με τον εαυτ? του μ?σα στο κλ?μα απειλ?ς και καχυποψ?ας της γεν?τειρ?ς του, η οπο?α στρ?φεται εναντ?ον του για να τον συντρ?ψει. Μοναδικ? μειον?κτημα, ?σως, για κ?ποιους θα ε?ναι μια α?σθηση προβλεψιμ?τητας κοντ? στην ολοκλ?ρωση του βιβλ?ου.

Το συστ?νω ανεπιφ?λακτα στου λ?τρεις της 'νου?ρ' αστυνομικ?ς λογοτεχν?ας!

Υ.Γ.: Ε?ναι αρκετ? σπ?νιο πλ?ον και καλ? θα ?ταν να επανεκδοθε?.

Βαθμολογ?α: 4,4/5 ? 8,8/10.

