

# Criminals at Large

By ANTHONY BOUCHER

**A** CRIMINAL case, responsibly researched and written, can cast an extraordinarily searching light upon character and upon society, and its treatment can become a creative work of art—truths which a few of us have for some years been crying in the wilderness. For new converts (and old devotees), I shall list the fact-crime books that I found particularly rewarding during the last year. Among book-length treatments of single murders, I relished Harry Golden's "A Little Girl Is Dead" (World, \$5) (Golden is as unexpected a fact-crime writer as Truman Capote is in the forthcoming "In Cold Blood"; but who is better suited to treat the great Leo Frank case—Atlanta, 1913—which centers on the position of Jews in the South?) and Carolyn Anspacher's "The Trial of Dr. de Kaplany" (Fell, \$5). To show that murder is not the only crime that can illuminate an era and a culture, there are Ludovic Kennedy's "The Trial of Stephen Ward" (Simon & Schuster, \$4.95) on the Profumo sexual scandal, and Bernard Grebanier's "The Great Shakespeare Forgery" (Norton, \$5) on the rare literary comedy of William Ireland's impostures. Among books covering several cases, notice "Fatal Fascination" by Nigel Balchin and others (Little, Brown, \$4.95) on ambivalent political killings, and Miriam Allen deFord's "Murderers Sane & Mad" (Abelard-Schuman, \$5) the finest corpus of American crime essays in many years, if not decades.

The apparently limitless versatility of Robert L. Fish is evidenced in two novels appearing almost simultaneously. **BRAZILIAN SLEIGH RIDE** (Simon & Schuster, \$3.50) is another lively adventure for Captain José Da Silva, of the Brazilian police and Interpol, who is driven to the frozen wilds of Manhattan in quest of an embezzler. As always, a clever plot, amusing and exciting action, and lovely interplay between Da Silva and his less flamboyant sidekick, Wilson of the C.I.A. **TRIALS OF O'BRIEN** (Signet,

50 cents) is that highly improbable article: a readable suspense novel adapted from a television series. The stench of the conference room inevitably lingers, especially in characterization ("I tell you, baby, suppose this bum's mother-in-law comes from Philadelphia—get it?"), but is easily overlooked for the ingenious plot, a spirited courtroom scene, and a happy amount of genuine humor in dialogue and description.

Peter Nichols has a strange story to tell in **PATCHWORK OF DEATH** (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$3.95) and tells it well. A German spy defected in 1942 and has lived for over 20 years as an inconspicuous middle-class Englishman. Now some avenging force is out to destroy him, and he flees to the Argentine, where even more powerful forces await him. It's a quietly eery and haunting book, in which nothing is quite what it seems—suggestive of Kafka-but-with-an-ultimate-answer.

Michael Underwood poses a pretty legal problem in **THE ANXIOUS CONSPIRATOR** (Doubleday, \$3.50): the police have accidentally arrested their own informant in a raid, and he insists on being tried—a fate preferable to being killed if it becomes known that he split. Young lawyer Roger Elwyn brings about a solution surprising both to the police and to his client. Quietly neat and satisfactory story.

**HORROR DEPT.:** Two of the all-time classics of terror-suspense are available in new editions: Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein," with an intelligent afterword by Harold Bloom (Signet, 50 cents), and Bram Stoker's "Dracula," with an effective jacket by Zagorski (Signet, 60 cents). Since everybody "knows" these books and very few have read them within recent memory, now is a fine time to discover or rediscover how exceedingly good they really are. And add a smaller horror-classic, Robert W. Chambers's "The King in Yellow" (Ace, 45 cents), one of the most influential (and chilling) volumes of American supernatural stories since Poe, and long one of the rarest.

The New York Times

Published: January 2, 1966

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