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WHEN THE CAMPUS NOVEL MEETS THE DETECTIVE NOVEL: AMANDA CROSS

Abstract**:** *The paper presents Amanda Cross's work, which combines the detective novel and the campus novel in an interesting way. Amanda Cross is the pseudonym of university professor Carolyn Gold Heilbrun, recognized for her contribution to feminist studies. In her late 30's, finding no detective fiction that she enjoyed reading, she started creating it herself. The result is represented by several detective novels whose action takes place in the academic world. The detectives that solve the murders are Kate Fansler, professor of Victorian literature, and her friend, then husband Reed Amhearst, assistant district attorney of New York County. After presenting Amanda Cross's scientific and literary work in general, I focused on one of her novels,* ***The James Joyce Murder****, trying to show in what way it can be interesting for philologists.*

Key-words: *campus novel, detective novel, reality, fiction*

As it is generally known, a detective novel focuses on the solving of a crime often by a brilliant detective, and usually employs the elements of mystery and suspense. A campus novel is often satirical and presents the academic environment, with its various aspects: the life of teachers and students, the atmosphere at lectures and seminars, or the problems implied by getting a tenure, researching and publishing, etc. When the two types of narrative meet in the same literary work, the result is twice as interesting because the search for the criminal leads to and is intermingled with a presentation of various universities and of the life of the academe. This is what happens in the novels written by Amanda Cross, or, better said, Carolyn Gold Heilbrun, as she is known in the academic world.

Carolyn Heilbrun was born in New Jersey in 1926, graduated from Wellesley College in 1947, and earned her PhD in English literature at Columbia University in 1959. After teaching for a year at Brooklyn College, she moved to Columbia University, where she was instructor, then assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor since 1972 to her early retirement in 1992. Over the years she was visiting lecturer, member of the American Association of University Professors, of the Modern Language Association of America, of the Crime Writers Association, member of the editorial boards of *Columbia Forum* and *Twentieth Century Literature*. Her scholarly works include *The Garnett Family* (1961), *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973), *Reinventing Womanhood* (1979), and deal with feminist issues. Heilbrun died in 2003, apparently having committed suicide.

As for her decision to turn to writing detective novels, she herself comments: "I began writing the Amanda Cross novels in 1963 because I could not find and detective fiction that I enjoyed reading. (…) What was it I wanted in detective fiction and could no longer find? First of all, conversation, and an ambiance in which violence was unexpected and shocking. (…) Second of all, I like literary mysteries, not necessarily with a quotation at the head of every chapter, though I don't mind that, but with a cast of characters comprising those who may not now know much literature only because they have forgotten it. Also, I like fiction in which women figure as more than decoration and appendages,

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domestic machinery, or sex objects. In short, I like the women in my novels to be people (…)." She seems aware of the flaws of her novels: "My sort of detective fiction will always be accused of snobbery. This, I have decided, is inevitable. I myself am that apparently rare anomaly, an individual who likes courtesy and intelligence, but would like to see the end of reaction, stereotyped sex-roles, and convention that arises from the fear of change, and the anxiety change brings. I loathe violence, and do not consider sex a spectator sport. I like humour, but fear unkindness, and the cruelty of power. One day Kate Fansler, therefore, sprang from my brain to counter these things I loathe, to talk all the time, occasionally with wit, and to offer to those who like it the company of people I consider civilized, and a plot, feeble, perhaps, but reflecting a moral universe"[1]. Indeed, critics have reproached Cross's novels with amateurism in matters of plot and theme, simplemindedness, and naïvity, a disregard of the play of appearance and illusion that is the key technical characteristic of a detective story (since the bad characters stay bad and the good characters stay good throughout the novels)[2], or with the supercivilized dialogue of the characters, and the dull and pretentious style in which the novels were written, a not so good imitation of Wilde's and Shaw's[3].

The name "Amanda Cross" was chosen for no particular reason, and Heilbrun successfully concealed her identity for six years, that is until she got tenure, fearing that her faculty colleagues might regard mystery writing as a frivolous activity for a serious scholar and that they might even conspire to deny her tenure if they discovered it.

The first novel she published as Amanda Cross was *In the Last Analysis*, followed by many others, like the *James Joyce Murder*, *Poetic Justice*, *The Theban Mysteries*, *The Question of Max*, *Death in a Tenured Position*, *A Trap for Fools*, etc. As a consequence of the fact that they are both detective and campus novels, in some of them there are two "detectives", two professionals, one belonging to the literary life, the other being familiar with investigations and the criminal mind. The former is Kate Fansler, professor of Victorian literature, beautiful, independent, and financially secure, the latter is Reed Amhearst, assistant district attorney of New York County. Reed is Kate's friend, and then he becomes her husband. He helps her in some of the novels, but in others she manages to find the murderer by herself. "While she made Fansler as independent as any man, Heilbrun felt she could not risk making a male sleuth her protagonist. 'Abandoning one's womanhood fictionally meant exposing oneself to terrible accusations and suspicions, far too risky for one working as hard as I was to maintain a proper wife, mother, role-playing mask,' she wrote in *Writing a Woman's Life*"[4].

In Amanda Cross's novels, the presentation of the literary and university life is far more interesting than the search for the murderer. Philology students and teachers, publishers and writers, but also ordinary people, are equally involved in plots of hatred, fear or revenge that end in death. In order to solve the mysteries, Kate has to spend some time in celebrated universities, like Harvard where the members of the English department, who are all male, drive to suicide their only female colleague (in *Death in a Tenured Position*).

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[1] Cleveland, Carol, *Amanda Cross*, in Reilly, J.M., ed., *Twentieth-Century Crime and Mystery Writers*, Redwood Burn Limited, Trowbridge & Esher, 1980, pp. 399-400.
[2] Purcell, J.M, The 'Amanda Cross' Case: Sociologizing the US Academic Mystery, 1980, in Stine, J. C., ed., Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 25, Gale, Detroit, 1983, pp. 255-256.
[3] Newgate Callendar, *Criminals at Large: 'The Question of Max'*, 1976, in Stine, J. C., ed., *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 25, Gale, Detroit, 1983, p. 254.
[4] Graham, Judith, ed., *Current Biography Yearbook 1993*, The H.W. Wilson Company, New York, 1993, pp. 237.

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Or she takes a trip to Oxford, where wives are expected to do only the housework and the life of the more educated ones who cannot spend their life doing only this is very sad and with no satisfactions (in *The Question of Max*). Such details, whether fictitious or not, are by far more fascinating than the detective plot. I shall illustrate this with *The James Joyce Murder*. "*The James Joyce Murder* is a very intriguing book. It is a superior mystery and at the same time manages to say interesting things about the literary mentality. It is, furthermore, a tribute to the importance of Joyce study (…) and deserves a position among a select list of Joyce criticism – despite its fictional nature."[5]

When I first saw the novel, I wondered what James Joyce had to do with a murder. As far as I knew, he was neither a murderer, nor the victim of a murder. The summary on the cover of the book confirmed this. However, after reading the book, I came to the conclusion that, in this novel, Joyce appeared as both victim and murderer, but only indirect ones.

The novel shows Kate Fansler in the house of the late Samuel Lingerwell, a famous publisher whose papers Kate is trying to arrange. She is accompanied by her nephew, Leo, and two graduate students: William Lenehan, who is tutoring Leo, and Emmet Crawford, who helps Kate with the papers. This group is joined by Reed Amhearst and by two lady professors: Grace Knole and Eveline Chisana, the latter being William's girlfriend.

Early in the morning, Leo and William practice shooting, with an empty rifle. They aim at Mrs. Mary Bradford, their very irritating and gossipy neighbour. The result of this "game" is that one day she is killed by William, who shots her seemingly without knowing that the rifle has a bullet in it. But, as Kate and Reed's investigation reveals, William really intended to kill Mrs. Bradford.

The connection with James Joyce's work is established from the very beginning. Once I opened the book, I came across the contents. Curiousity made me read the titles of the chapters, which, surprisingly, were not unfamiliar. The *Prologue* and the *Epilogue* can be found in any book, but the others … *The Boarding House*, *An Encounter*, *Counterparts*, *Grace*, *Araby*, *The Dead*, *Two Gallants*, *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*, *Clay*, *Eveline*, *The Sisters*, *After the Race*, *A Mother*, *A Little Cloud*, *A Painful Case* are also the titles of the stories in Joyce's *Dubliners*.

The first words of the *Prologue* mention that the action of *Ulysses* takes place on June 16, 1904. Exactly 62 years later, on June 16, 1966, Kate Fansler participates in a meeting of the James Joyce Society, where there are all kinds of people, all hoping to discover some secret in Joyce's work, a secret that would make their academic fortunes. This is not what Kate needs. "When I pick a graduate student to help me with the Lingerwell papers", she thinks, "he will have to be most unJoycean, unLaurentian, unModern altogether. Someone who will not be searching for his own fortune among dear Sam's literary remains. On the whole, a Jane Austen devotee. (…) Someone who calls her 'Jane'."[6]

Emmet Crawford appears to be the perfect choice. He goes together with the others at Sam Lingerwell's house, "the boarding house", situated in a village called, not surprisingly, Araby.

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[5] Friedman, M. J, *Book Reviews: 'The James Joyce Murder'*, 1967, in Stine, J. C., ed., *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol. 25, Gale, Detroit, 1983, p. 252.
[6] Cross, Amanda, *The James Joyce Murder*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1990, p. 2.

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Samuel Lingerwell had been one of the best men of publishing. He had started the Calypso Press and had published James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence and lots of other great writers. The name of the publishing house is connected to the *Odyssey*. Calypso is the nymph who kept Ulysses on her island for seven years. In the same way in which she cast a spell on the Greek hero, the publishing house lured its clients, who made it famous. Its owner's name is also symbolic. Somebody who lingers is somebody who stays because he does not want to leave, or who remains in existence although becoming weaker. Though dead, Samuel Lingerwell is still very much present in the memory of those who knew him, and will still influence their lives. He had lots of papers, including his correspondence with the writers whose works he had published. After his death, his daughter, a nun, not knowing what to do with the papers, asked Kate, her friend, to determine exactly what was in the papers so that they might be best disposed of. In fact, that is what Emmet tries to do.

But Mary Bradford is killed and all of them have to interrupt their work for the interrogation. Emmet mentions James Joyce and Mr. Stratton, the policeman, expresses the wish to read something by this author. Emmet gives him *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*, of which Mr. Stratton understands, of course, nothing, so he asks the three lady professors to explain James Joyce to him. They do this and, in a memorable scene, Joyce is killed and revived. The policeman tells them that he is puzzled because nothing happens in the story, to which Kate answers that that is the whole point. Nothing is happening in Ireland because everyone there is dead, "except perhaps the dead"[7]. The three lady professors start discussing Joyce, and Grace Knole even recommends some bibliography to Mr. Stratton and offers to give him a copy of a book about the Irish writer. At one point, Kate states that "in *Ivy Day in the Committee Room*, the most important thing that happens is a bottle goes 'Pop'."[8]

The fact is of "utmost importance" in Amanda Cross's novel as well because, as a conscientious "student", Stratton keeps it in mind and mentions it to Mr. Mulligan, another neighbour. The latter becomes suspect in Reed's and Kate's eyes because he does not know about anything going "Pop" in Joyce's work, although he has written several books on modern fiction and is a full professor. Kate, Grace Knole and Eveline Chisana start reading his books and find out that they are made up of clichés and do not contain anything original. Then how comes that they have been published by the famous Calypso Press? Because Mr. Mulligan writes under pseudonym the Frank Held books, some popular novels that are best sellers, he has made the Calypso Press publish also his "academic" books, which have assured him a fast promotion in the academic world. So much about the publishing houses and their ways.

Last, but not least, the motive of the murder has very much to do with James Joyce. Emmet finds a letter from Joyce to Lingerwell, hinting at a 16th story written for *Dubliners*. The story is missing, although it was sent by Joyce as a present for his editor. Starting from the statement of a critic, Emmet supposes that the story is the first form of *Ulysses* and searches for it, but cannot find it. It is William who finds, steals and hides it in a bale of hay, made by Mr. Bradford's baler. He plans to return to Araby after the others' departure, to take the story and to make it public, thus covering himself with glory. But Mrs. Bradford sees him hiding the story and blackmails him. She seduces him, which is more than he can bear, so he kills her.

[7] Cross, Amanda, *The James Joyce Murder*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1990, p. 98.
[8] Cross, Amanda, *The James Joyce Murder*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1990, p. 97.

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On hearing that such an important piece of literature is in a bale of hay, Kate purchases all Mr. Bradford's hay and tries to find it.

The novel ends, symmetrically, with a meeting of the James Joyce Society. The chairman invites Emmet Crawford to tell them how he has discovered "a sixteenth story originally intended for *Dubliners*"[9] (Cross 1990: 196). Emmet Crawford's speech is as memorable as the interrogation scene: "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. We all share, I am certain, the same excitement. But, alas, neither I nor any of us has a new manuscript by James Joyce. What we have at the moment, ladies and gentlemen, is four thousand – no, let me be accurate, as Joyce would have approved – three thousand, two hundred and thirteen bales of hay!"[10]

So the story was not found. It is normal, because it existed only for the characters in this novel. But James Joyce was a real person. Mixing reality and fiction about the literary world, Amanda Cross's novels made me think that the popular literature may be interesting and instructive, even for philologists.

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[9] Cross, Amanda, *The James Joyce Murder*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1990, p. 196

[10] Cross, Amanda, *The James Joyce Murder*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1990, pp. 196-197

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