

# Epicurean Disdain and the Rhetoric of Defiance: *Colonel March of Scotland Yard*

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In the 1950s and early 1960s, the lower reaches of the British film industry underwent a profound transition -- it shifted from the production of programme fillers and supporting features to making TV/Film series (called telefilm in America). This transition has yet to undergo sustained critical scrutiny principally because this emergent form falls between two, compartmentalised, areas of scholarship -- Film Studies and Television Studies. Yet these early series are deserving of our attention because, firstly, they became a staple of the domestic film production and, secondly, because they articulate a series of complex ideological engagements. One of the most important of these dialogic exchanges was with the American television market. Primarily this was because British series could not recoup their costs by supplying the fledgling indigenous television sector alone and thus had to achieve American distribution.

Far earlier than her British counterparts, the American arriviste Hannah Weinstein saw the potential for producing TV/Film series in Britain where production costs were significantly lower. She also recognised a shift in the American market from anthologies made up of discrete episodes drawing on a variety of genres and fronted by former Hollywood stars, such as the domestically-produced *Douglas Fairbanks Presents* (1953-56), to more economic series which exploited a regular cast and standard sets. To date, accounts of Weinstein's work focus on her role as head of Sapphire Films producing internationally successful swashbucklers beginning with *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955-59; see Neale, 2003: 245-257 and 2005a: 73-87). However, this article analyses the crime series *Colonel March of Scotland Yard* (1954) which, though it has attracted considerable internet interest, has not yet achieved academic respectability.

The crime genre had long been the staple of the domestic film industry, not in the least because contemporary locations, props and costumes were readily available and so reduced costs. Early British TV/Film series followed suit, typically exploiting the internationally marketable mythologies of Scotland Yard and/or the English eccentric sleuth: see, for example, *Fabian of the Yard* (a.k.a *Patrol Car* in America, 1954-56); *(The Case Histories of) Scotland Yard* (exhibited theatrically in Britain, 1953-61); *Calling Scotland Yard* (1953-54); *Stryker of the Yard* (1953-54); *Dial 999* (1958-59); *Gideon's Way* (1964) and, for the gentleman sleuth, see *Mark Saber/Saber of London* (1954-59); the reformulated *The Third Man* (1959-65) and *The Saint* (1962-69).

Plainly *Colonel March* was a harbinger of what was to follow. However, as I argue here, it was unique in that it articulates a proxy confrontation between two ideologically opposed American writers: Colonel March's creator, the right-wing American Anglophile John Dickson Carr, and the series' HUAC-blacklisted adaptors, in particular Walter Bernstein. This subtextual altercation parallels that which Jeffrey Richards has identified in contemporaneous main features, specifically swashbucklers such as *Ivanhoe* (1952), *The Black Knight* (1954)

and *The Adventures of Quentin Durward* (1955), that reflect, parody and challenge McCarthyist paranoia (Richards, 2007: 119-136). This article seeks to locate the slyly satirical *Colonel March* in the context of these contemporaneous texts. Whilst it is an erudite, witty and amusing series that "stands up" to this day, *Colonel March* is also an important cultural artifact which illuminates and comments upon the ideological concerns of the era in which it was produced.

### **The Genesis of *Colonel March***

Hannah Weinstein had worked as a publicist, journalist and campaigner for radical causes throughout the 1930s and 1940s. She left America in 1950 when the McCarthyite anti-Communist persecution was at its height. Her career as a left-wing activist had made her an intimate acquaintance of many who were of interest to the House Un-American Activities Committee; she was what was disparagingly referred to as a "fellow traveler." It was only a matter of time before she would have been called to give evidence before HUAC and required to "name names." Weinstein's means of earning a living were under threat so, like many others, she chose to leave America, first working in France and then moving to London where she formed her own company, Atlas Productions, in 1952. There is anecdotal evidence that Weinstein was bankrolled by the Hollywood branch of the American communist party (the CPUSA) then in process of disbanding because of pressure from the witch hunts (Mathews, 2006). Whatever the truth of such allegations, Weinstein certainly saw some advantage in setting up a series of temporary housings for her endeavours -- she changed the name of her fledgling company to Panda Films and then Fountain Films before settling on Sapphire Films.

In the same year she entered into negotiations for the rights to the adventures of a minor personality in the pantheon of detectives created by John Dickson Carr (writing as Carter Dickson). Though originally published in a variety of magazines, the "Colonel March" stories were substantially located in a collection, *The Department of Queer Complaints* (1940), the paperback "combat" edition of which is a sought-after collectors' item to this day. According to Carr's biographer, Weinstein procured a highly advantageous deal: "a total payment of two thousand pounds, a surprisingly small sum, as Carr's American agent complained ... Carr ... was unaware that the stories had been filmed" (Greene, 1995: 375).

Production of the mostly studio-bound series took place at Southall Studios in the winter of 1952-53. Once under way, British directors took the helm, Bernard Knowles and Arthur Crabtree directing seventeen of the series' twenty-six half-hour episodes between them. Both had been celebrated cinematographers before the war, becoming directors after demobilisation for Gainsborough Pictures, but in the hostile climate of a declining film industry, they now found themselves in need of regular, if less prestigious employment. Strictly speaking, the series must be regarded as dual purpose, i.e. whilst primarily intended for television exhibition, a compilation film, *Colonel March Investigates*, actually the first three half-hour pilot episodes of the series, was exhibited theatrically in Britain (in 1952). Later however, the series became one of the first to be broadcast on ITV London, the new British commercial channel (*TV Times* records that the first episode, "Passage at Arms," was broadcast on Saturday 24 September, 1955 at 19:45). It was repeated on various ITV franchises in the late Fifties and early Sixties.

A key ingredient was the star, the peripatetic Boris Karloff, who fitted in the project before jetting off to "Italy for three films, back to Hollywood for another, and then New York

because [he] had agreed to play opposite Julie Harris in *The Lark*" (Lindsay, 1995: 161). Despite Karloff's substantial presence, the initial reviews of *Colonel March Investigates* were not encouraging. *Kinematograph Weekly* found the film neither "particularly exciting or thrilling, but ... [suitable] for cheap industrial and provincial situations" (*Kinematograph Weekly*, 1953) whilst *The Monthly Film Bulletin* scathingly referred to "these three gimmicky little stories [that] have the appearance of being aimed as much at television as the cinema market" (*The Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1953). It hardly mattered. Official Films had secured sponsorship arrangements for the series' twenty-six half-hour episodes, which ensured exhibition via a number of American television syndicates. It was this strategy, known as pre-selling, that American producers brought to Britain. In the main, British producers had to wait until ITC's Lew Grade bought his way into American television distribution in the late 1950s.

Weinstein was involved in every facet of production, assisted by the experienced Sidney Cole, who had worked at Stoll Productions and British International Pictures, as well as a ten-year stint at Ealing Studios, 1942-52. Unlike their American peers, the Danziger brothers, both Weinstein and Cole were hands-on producers and were "staunch supporters of union principles" (Marks, 1990: 8-9). Furthermore, Weinstein provided a shelter for American creative personnel blacklisted by HUAC. These included the director Cy Enfield, who had directed two impressive films noirs, *The Sound of Fury* and *The Underworld Story* (both 1950), the latter a sharp satire on the witch hunts. Enfield directed the first three pilot episodes of the series and later went on to make *Hell Drivers* (1957) and *Zulu* (1962) in Britain.

More important, however, was Weinstein's use of blacklisted writers. Such writers typically employed "fronts" -- individuals who were willing to put their names to the work of blacklisted writers and so enable them to circumvent the ban -- though Weinstein did not care what name anybody used (Bernstein, 2000: 246). American writers' wages were "three or four times higher than those paid to [British writers]" because "they were paid fully in accordance with Writers' Guild of America's US rates and cheques were issued from an American bank made payable to the writers' agents" (Marks, 1990: 8-9). However, they were experienced in the discipline of writing this kind of series format.

Her chief writers on *Colonel March*, both blacklisted, were Walter Bernstein and Abraham Polonsky who operated from New York, as Hollywood was too exposed to scrutiny. Together with another blacklisted writer, Arnold Manoff, they allotted work on the basis of need and availability. Furthermore, Karloff, a noted Hollywood liberal and founding member of and negotiator for the Screen Actors Guild, was a lynchpin in the series' development. Weinstein stayed at his house in Paris, where, together with Polonsky, she negotiated a deal and discussed the series' format (Neale, 2004: 246). Bernstein who, unlike Polonsky, did not have a passport and could therefore could not travel abroad, later met Karloff in his New York apartment in the Dakota Building to discuss how to make the endings "more active" (Bernstein, 2000: 248).

Bernstein asserts in his biography that he and Polonsky worked on the scripts for *Colonel March* without Manoff who was preoccupied with another project. The group had used one front repeatedly, simply referred to as "Leslie" by Bernstein in his autobiography. A "Leslie Slote" is credited as scripting fourteen *Colonel March* episodes. Elsewhere Bernstein asserted that "Leslie" ceased to front for the group after Bernstein had scripted an adaptation of Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* for the anthology series, *The DuPont Show of the Month*

(1957) (Ibid: 239). The International Movie Database (IMDb) cites "Leslie Slote" as the writer of the adaptation. It is therefore safe to assume that the *Colonel March* episodes accredited to "Leslie Slote" were in fact written by Bernstein and Polonsky.

Another front, "Leo Davis," was also used (Ibid: 214) and, indeed, is credited as a writer of two episodes of *Colonel March*. Steve Neale (2005b: 93) specifically attributes the moniker "Leslie Slote" as a front for Bernstein and "Leo Davis" as a front for Polonsky. There may be still more subterfuges. Paul Monash, then a prolific film series writer, acted as one of Bernstein's fronts on *Danger* but felt he could only front "this one time... [as] he could not seem prolific to the point of suspicion" (Ibid: 168-9). Nonetheless Monash is credited with writing three episodes of *Colonel March*.

However, in considering *Colonel March* we also need to discuss John Dickson Carr in more detail as it is puzzling, even paradoxical, that an author was chosen whose ideological position was the antithesis of that of the socialist activist Weinstein and her writers.

### **John Dickson Carr**

John Dickson Carr was an American who was so disgusted with the New Deal politics of the pre-war era that he turned towards an idealised perception of English conservatism for succour. He had settled in England in 1933 and stuck by his adopted country throughout the war years, being "bombed out" three times. But he left in 1948, finding the Welfare State agenda of the Labour government intolerable, and only returned again in 1953 when the Tories had reestablished themselves.

Carr had consolidated his success in Britain during the war years when he wrote radio serials for the BBC whilst covertly dabbling in black propaganda. He also wrote single radio plays -- dour pronouncements on the follies of buying on the black market and ignoring the blackout and, notoriously, a portrayal of women aircraft spotters entitled *Women on the Guns* (1942) which made great issue of the fact that, mercifully, women did not actually fire the guns (Greene, 1981: 295). His main contribution however was the series *Appointment with Fear* (first broadcast in 1943) featuring the voice of "The Man in Black," Valentine Dyll. True to form, the series rarely referred to the war at all. Carr's stories were either set in a version of pre-war England uncontaminated by social strife or class enmity (*The Man Who Would Not Shudder* [1940]), or in a contemporary version of England in which hostilities hardly impinged at all (*The Case of the Constant Suicides*, 1941), or else by using the war as a convenient ploy with which to dispose of unwanted characters (*The Man Who Would Not Shudder* and *She Died a Lady* [1942], cited in Joshi, 1990: 94). Douglas Greene observes that: "One of Carr's purposes in writing mystery and historical dramas for the BBC was to relieve the horrors of war by presenting cosier and, with the solutions at the end of each play, more manageable horrors" (Greene, 1981: 295). A contemporary review of *The Department of Queer Complaints* endorsed Carr's approach asserting that:

There is much to be said for keeping detective stories to dates of peace. Even if crime can be made exciting enough to retain some significance against the background of war, the swiftest rattle of the typewriter or monotype machine cannot bring a novel to the reader whilst it is still up to date. (Anon., 1940: 545)

Carr became an early member of the London Detection Club and wrote a series of theoretical tracts defending his and its position (see, for example, Carr, 1944 and 1950a & b). The Detection Club's onerous pledge was, in essence, a commitment on the part of the inductee to "play fair" with the reader and not make "use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo-Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence or the Act of God." Implicitly the oath also resulted in writers demarcating their specific areas of interest as well as unofficially patenting their ideas:

Forasmuch as we are hungry and that there may be no unseemly wrangling amongst us... I hold you to the solemn promise which you have given as touching the theft or revelation of plots and secrets. (Sayers, 1928)

Carr had only a perfunctory interest in characterization. His stories are more "howdunits" than whodunits. They overtly disdain psychological motivation, harking back instead to the stylistic prerequisites of the classic French *conte cruel* in which the beautiful is juxtaposed with the horrific. Typically his protagonists were members of the upper classes who implicitly reflected his anti-liberal, anti-socialist stance -- "two novels are actually based in part upon the supposed invisibility of servants" (Joshi, 1990: 92).

Ultimately Carr's approach to crime fiction can be traced back to Thomas de Quincey's epicurean fancies as expressed in his 1827 essay "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts." Therein de Quincey envisaged a "Society of Connoisseurs in Murder" who criticise "every fresh atrocity of that class [of murder] ... as they would a picture, statue, or other work of art" (de Quincey, 1827). In his novel *The Murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey* (1936), Carr interrupts the narrative with "an Interlude for Connoisseurs in Murder" in which he reviews the story so far and offers alternative solutions to the murders committed which the reader is invited to consider. Carr disdained realism and even argued that "literature should not portray the world as sordid and that there was nothing to admire in a character who does not talk courteously" (Greene, 1995: 108).

Carr's main preoccupation was with the impossible crime, particularly the locked room mystery. He did make extravagant use of the supernatural, however -- albeit only to expose its failings as an agency for murder. He borrowed the accoutrements of the gothic and horror novel only to disparage them; they are typically represented as a cover or diversion for more basic, all too human, motives. Similarly, just like his villains, Carr typically indulges in narratological "sleight-of-hand." He asserted that "the art of murder ... is the same as the art of the magician. And the art of the magician ... consists simply in directing your attention to the wrong place" (Carr, 1930, cited in Greene, 1995: 70). A number of his stories were built around tricks performed by famous stage illusionists such as Maskelyne or Houdini. Carr openly acknowledged the latter's influence (Ibid: 293). He frequently builds a plot around a specific trick. One such example occurs in *The New Invisible Man* (in Carr, 1981) where a witness sees the murder of a man who is apparently shot by a pair of disembodied white-gloved hands. Furthermore, the theatricality of Carr's detectives, their grandiose posturing and revelatory function, is reminiscent of a stage magician.

On numerous occasions, Carr makes good use of his ability to "misdirect" the reader in the style of the stage illusionist, whereby the reader's attention, like that of the story's stooge witness, is focussed upon an ever narrowing hub of action. The opening sequence of *The Silver Curtain* (Ibid.) borrows directly from the sleight-of-hand typical of "close magic," whilst a later sequence -- a murder in a three-sided, walled square similarly draws the reader

into a narrow circle of the action. Carr uses the same device in relating the murder in *Error at Daybreak* (Ibid.). Like his great hero, the stage magician Maskelyne, Carr retained a lifelong fascination with the hocus pocus associated with spiritualism and delighted in exposing fake spiritualists.

Carr's Colonel March was one of a number of physically obese and intellectually gargantuan sleuths that the author spawned willy-nilly without apparent regard for their narratological interchangeability. Like his fictional peers, March was "well served by his vast fund of good-for-nothing information and his absorption in any kind of puzzle from a jigsaw up" (Ibid: 2). All these colossi solved impossible crimes, exposed the villain's sleight-of-hand, and most found some occasion to debunk spiritualism. In the first March story, the aforementioned *The New Invisible Man*, a constable directs the narrator and the reader to the Colonel and his office, commonly referred to as "The Department of Queer Complaints":

The door he indicated bore only the words, D-3, COLONEL MARCH, but many stories lay behind it. It is, in fact, the home of queer tales and exists solely for receiving them. To the Metropolitan Police come strangers with complaints which do not seem to bear the light of day or reason. But... such matters have to be investigated; and Department D-3 is their clearing house. (Ibid: 1-2).

Weinstein's attitude to Carr's original stories was pragmatic, not to say ruthless. Although she considered them to be "thin and more cerebral than dramatic," this was not crucial as the "stories could easily be rewritten, or new stories created" (Bernstein, 2000: 246). However, her writers' adaptations retain many elements from Carr's stories because he was a highly popular author with a wide audience and the basic ingredients of the murder mystery and the eccentric sleuth were proven successes. But, as will be argued in detail, the adaptations also demonstrate an often covert ideological agenda that was quite different from Carr's.

### ***Colonel March of Scotland Yard: Format and Characterisation***

Each episode of *Colonel March* begins with Edwin Astley's jocular yet martial theme music and a sequence in which Colonel March paws over a file before putting on his hat and coat, relishing the prospect of solving another difficult case. A still of an item which figures significantly in the story -- a grotesque rubber mask, a stiletto knife, a skull -- then appears beneath the title credit. The first episode, "Hot Money," sets up the format of the series, with March clearly delineating his department's function -- "If [a] fellow rubbed a magic lamp which disappeared in a puff of smoke that would be my department."

As portrayed by Karloff, March is a diminutive and yet surprisingly agile character considering that the dapper Karloff was in his mid-sixties when he played the role. The character has now acquired a blind eye, decorously hidden by a raffish eye-patch. From various episodes we learn that March is "a doctor of law and Divinity"; that he was in Army Intelligence during the war; and that he is an expert on traditional Javanese dance, Tibetan magic, early medieval manuscripts, fencing, interplanetary communication, Himalayan mountaineering, mesmerism, cacti, monastic tonsures, parapsychology and philately as well as being a devotee of "the religious and health-giving rights of an ancient Neolithic cult." This daunting list rivals that of Sherlock Holmes or his brother Mycroft. In the adaptation of Carr's *Error at Daybreak*, we first meet March engrossed in a tome entitled *The Psychology*

of *Crustaceans* which was an obvious and playful skit on Carr's many negative pronouncements on the use of psychology in detective fiction.

In the adaptations, March is imbued with a gently subversive personality. He readily confesses to a friendship with an international jewel thief -- he used to drink with him "in the days before there were laws against that sort of thing" ("The Deadly Gift"). Paradoxically, he chides the brother of a murder victim bent on revenge to stay his hand, insisting that the killer should receive a judicial death -- "legally it's his right you know" ("The Invisible Knife").

In the original stories, March was typically accompanied by his amanuensis Inspector Roberts. In the series Roberts is replaced by another March regular, Inspector Ames (excellently played by Ewan Roberts). Ames was significantly redrawn and now appeared as March's less imaginative, though amusing, fellow officer from a neighbouring department in the Yard. March's relationship with Ames is explicated in a neat piece of dialogue at the end of "Hot Money." When March solves the puzzle, Ames, like his avatar Dr Watson, is bemused:

Ames: "Why didn't I think of that?"

March: "My dear Ames, please don't embarrass us both by forcing me to answer that question."

Another minor character in the March stories, M. Goron, prefect of police in the resort town of La Bandelette, was redrawn as Inspector Goron of the Paris Sûreté, played with gusto by Eric Pohlmann. Despite some changes, Pohlmann perfectly fits the basic image Carr created for Goron. In the adaptation of Carr's *The Silver Curtain*, he is indeed drawn as "a comfortable man, a round, cat-like amiable sort of man, famous for his manners" whom we meet just as Carr had it, "in his office at the town hall examining his fingernails and creaking back and forth in squeaky swivel chair (Carr, 1981: 118). Like Carr, Goron's approach towards criminological problems is epicurean. In "The Silent Vow," he asserts that "the French police are not interested in fingerprints but the prints the heart leaves at the scene of every crime." In "Passage of Arms," he dismisses the possibility that a French suspect is guilty, observing "the way the crime was committed -- it lacked delicacy -- it seems more Anglo-Saxon."

Both Ames and Goron may be termed "nominal detective[s]" -- characters who are "supposed to be doing the investigating but who cannot arrive at the full solution without [in this case, March's] assistance" (Panek, 1979: 159). Ames and Goron therefore operate in the traditional manner as comic foils, like *The Saint's* Inspector Teal.

### **Unaltered Elements: Crime Puzzles, Magic Tricks and Bogus Spirits**

Whilst Weinstein and her associates treated Carr's work with little intellectual or ideological respect, nonetheless residual components were pragmatically retained. The predominantly studio-based series only engaged with contemporary actuality in the most perfunctory of fashions and so implicitly at least, affirmed Carr's disdain for "sordid" reality. Likewise Carr's contempt for psychological motivation was shared by Bernstein though for different reasons. Bernstein objected to the vogue for bland and apolitical psychological explanations that were then current:

Psychology was in, social criticism was out (unless it was criticism of communism) ... People were bad because they were bad. Occasionally they were bad because their parents had not loved them enough, although they could turn rotten if their parents had loved them too much ... It was easier to blame it on Mom and Dad than on some kind of system. (Bernstein, 2000: 177)

Building upon Carr's original tales, the stories are a collection of crime puzzles which include a number of "locked room" mysteries. A representative example is "The Case of the Misguided Missal." An Oxford professor invites March to view a valuable prayer book printed by "Lucas of Nottingham" in 1403 -- the first use of movable type in Britain. (Actually Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1436 and Caxton established his printing press in 1476, so the "Lucas Missal" would have been quite a find). The book was discovered in a Danish monastery and the monks claimed that Lucas, who "had practised the Black Arts," could transport himself vast distances. The professor claims the book repeatedly removes itself from the safe and reappears in his room. March proves that this is a subterfuge intended to mask a fraud. To demonstrate the basis of the trick, Ames sets up a demonstration with the then newly famous illusionist and self-styled "pseudomentalist" Chan Canasta (a.k.a. Chananel Mifelew) "the man who killed the conjuror's rabbit." Canasta had enjoyed national success when he had appeared on BBC television the year before. He became the first of his ilk to explore the new medium -- as well as close up magic tricks, he had "succeed[ed] in making convincing a series of seemingly impossible acts of thought-reading and memory control" (Gifford, 1999).

There are other allusions to magic tricks. In the adaptation of Carr's *The New Invisible Man*, as well as the reworking of Stodare's "Sphinx" illusion, we find a version of "the Chinese Box Trick." Likewise, there is an allusion to mesmerism in "The Devil Sells his Soul," an Agatha Christie-style whodunit in which the cast are assembled and the villain exposed. However it is March's method which is innovative. He hypnotises the assembled suspects and has them reenact the night of the crime. He plays the part of the victim himself while a posse of officers is individually assigned to observe their actions advising that "there's no need to whisper ... they can neither see nor hear you." (Why he failed to adopt this approach with all his cases is not explained.)

The theme of substitution, of sleight of hand, is also prevalent. In "The Silent Vow" (by Peter Green) the famous French liqueur, Garcazon, made by the monks of San Sebastian to a secret formula, has been substituted for an inferior concoction topped up with glycerol. In "Death in a Dressing Room," the body of the dancer Francine grows cold whilst her maid takes her part, performing "her Javanese dance in a blue spotlight, and her face done into such a grotesque mask of paint that nobody could recognize it" (Carr, 1981: 104). Likewise, in "Death and the Other Monkey," a laboratory assistant insists that one his monkeys has been substituted. March discovers that all the monkeys except one, "not a common but a very distinguished monkey," had come from India. It was a trained monkey which had been taught to carry out an assassination by gaining entrance to a locked room and turning on the gas. The story is a homage to one of the earliest locked-room mysteries, Edgar Alan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), featuring his cerebral detective August Dupin in which an ape was the agent for murder.

Similarly, following on from Carr's example, there are a number of episodes devoted to the debunking of spiritualism. In "The Talking Head," a young boy is gulled into believing that



the voice of his dead father, goading him to murder, is speaking to him through a marble bust on the mantelpiece. In "Present Tense," a widow asserts that since her husband's death -- "his thoughts come to me stronger than ever ... of course I don't see him -- he's not in our world." He claims to be lonely and has asked her to "join him" in the beyond. The widow, driven by guilt as she had asked for a divorce shortly before his "death" so that she could marry her lover, is close to meeting his request. As a storm rages, she is visited by her "deceased husband." He's enjoying a cigarette thus disabusing her of a long-held belief that he had given up smoking.

The most amusing of the spiritualist stories is "The Case of the Lively Ghost." The medium Madame Richter has a rich client, Lady Fortesque, "in the parlance of the trade, an ideal sucker," who wishes to communicate with her dead son, Henry. Unfortunately, to Madame Richter's horror, his "real" ghost had turned up at the séance. Madame Richter has the most modern equipment -- "phonograph, remote control tape recorder." Her technique is a model of obscurantism. She gets the circle to write their questions on velum (on a table top beneath on which carbon copies are made without their knowing). "They then burn the question in the flame of the oil of joy, drop it into the mystic brazier ... I read the questions from the ashes." March is unconvinced from the outset, ironically remarking that "The real nobility are born with ghosts in their walls."

### **New Elements: Topical Allusions, the Debunking of the "Expert" and Resourceful Women**

In contrast to their retention of Carr's crime puzzle elements, Bernstein and Polonsky introduced a number of thematic threads that were absent from Carr's original stories. As well as being an exemplar of the fake mediums inspired by Carr's distaste for the profession, Madame Richter in "The Case of the Lively Ghost" is also an illustration of the "experts found wanting" paradigm that is introduced in the adaptations. "The Talking Head," for example, is focused upon some typical hokum -- a professor claims to have in his possession the earliest postage stamp "issued in Etruria, approximate date 764 B.C. -- 300 years before the Romans conquered the Etruscans." In "The Sorcerer," a psychoanalyst is murdered by his young "apprentice." He is found in his consulting room, poised above his notebook, having "maintained the classical attitude of the psychoanalyst to the very end."

In both "Death in the Dressing Room" and "The Second Mona Lisa," experts in their field, outwitted by March's superior knowledge, enter into duplicitous enterprises for financial gain and so lose their reputations. "Death in Inner Space" is a delightful piece of bunkum. March is addressing the Society of Interplanetary Communication: "somewhere in the infinite reaches there is life" and so forth, when Professor Hodek invites him to see his latest work at his laboratory. He has been hoodwinked into believing that he has achieved telepathic communication with Mars and though Mars has apparently replied, he is having difficulty in deciphering its response.

This paradigmatic undermining of the discourse of "expertise" is sometimes linked with famous controversies of the period. In "The Deadly Gift," barmaid Rosie (Sandra Dorne) is bequeathed the priceless diamond dubbed the "Maharaja's Token" which is imbued with a violent provenance. The allusion is to the Kohinoor Diamond, considered to carry a curse, and once more in the spotlight as it had recently featured prominently as an integral part of the Crown jewels displayed in the Coronation of Elizabeth II.

In "The Abominable Snowman," members of the Himalayan Mountaineering Club believe they have been visited by the Snowman -- sets of enormous footprints having been found close to their respective homes. The Snowman had recently become a headline topic courtesy of the First Everest Reconnaissance Expedition, which, when traversing a glacier in 1951 had stumbled across giant footprints in the snow measuring thirteen by eighteen inches. Despite protestations that tracks tended to enlarge when exposed to the sun, photographs of the prints had been front-page news across the globe.

Similarly, in "The Missing Link," a young couple attempts to steal the skull of "Damascus Man," famous as the missing link in human evolution, from a private museum -- a collection of stuffed primates and anthropoid skulls. With March's help they prove the skull is a fake. Like *Eoanthropus Dawsoni*, better known as Piltdown Man, which had finally been exposed as a hoax in 1953, "Damascus Man" is shown to be a composite of a human cranium and an orangutan mandible.

Finally, another important recurring motif is the celebration of professional and resourceful women. The series boasts no less than three murderesses including Mrs Sergeant in "The Headless Hat," an Englishwoman who having served with the French resistance during the war disingenuously claims to miss "British probity and forthrightness," and is transmogrified into the murderous criminal known only as "Z." There were more respectable examples however, such as the plucky female undercover insurance investigator in "The Case of the Kidnapped Poodle" and Helen Rune in "The Strange Event at Roman Falls," who, in order to circumvent male prejudice and get her internationally popular travel books published, adopts a pseudonymous male persona. The most powerful example is Mary Gray in "The Abominable Snowman." March first meets her in the lobby of the Himalayan Mountaineering Club: "never before in our sacred halls have I encountered a female of the species ... How long have these bores kept you waiting?" Whilst March's remarks demonstrate a typically male astonishment equal to that of explorers' encounters with the Yeti, Bernstein and Polonsky's script underscores its satirical bent by having him concede that "our masculine exclusiveness is as formidable as Everest itself." Mary Gray is the director of the documentary film, *Evidence Pertaining to the Abominable Snowman*. Her character is probably an affectionate skit on Weinstein herself. At the end of the episode, she is ceremoniously admitted to the "club."

## Overview

Both the screen adaptations and Carr's original stories indulge in sleight-of-hand, misdirecting the audience in the style of the stage illusionist with shoals of red herrings, substitutions and magic tricks. They eschewed psychological motivation and a *direct* engagement with social actuality. However, Carr's rarefied, epicurean, ahistorical approach is in contrast with Bernstein and Polonsky's satirical take on fashionable ideas, their constant references to contemporary scandals and their furtherance of a proto-feminism. Furthermore Carr's lauding of the principle of "fairplay" is in opposition to Bernstein and Polonsky's joyous employment of "Mumbo-Jumbo" and "Jiggery-Pokery" as the Detection Club oath had it -- bogus discourses designed to divert and delude. Whilst Carr celebrated the prowess of the super sleuth whose knowledge was "omniscient," Bernstein and Polonsky, on the other hand, promoted the "experts found wanting" paradigm.

*Colonel March of Scotland Yard* may in part be considered as pithy, if veiled satire. In his autobiography, Bernstein pours scorn upon the self-appointed "experts" on communism who

had ruined the careers of so many of his colleagues. He singled out the self-appointed American Business Consultants, for example, who had offered a service to the radio and television networks by vetting prospective employees for communist associations. As those accused could, for a fee, clear themselves and so remain employable, ABC was in effect, a "protection racket." Others soon followed suit and a veritable industry ensued. Then there was the columnist Victor Reisel who threatened to expose individuals in the Hearst press unless they named names and Harvey Matusow, a former Communist Party member, who habitually lied about individuals' political affiliations for financial gain (Bernstein, 2000: 152 & 153-4). Atop this unsavory rabble stood the demagogue Senator Joseph McCarthy, one of the first television stars, indiscriminately denouncing, greedily devouring union officials, government and service employees -- anyone, everyone, just to keep his ratings up. He was successful -- the hearings attracted one of the biggest audiences to date. (Red Hearings, 1953)

Plainly we see the shadows of these "abominable" zealots threatening the likes of the paranoid and perfidious members of Himalayan Mountaineering Club; or tracking down "ghosts" armed with the era's most innovative technology, like so many Madame Richters; or infiltrating the naïve though sincere idealists of the Society of Interplanetary Communication whilst secretly bent on their own venal agenda. The latent analogies with the activities of HUAC, SISS (the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee responsible for investigating the supposed Communist infiltration of the radio and television industries), the FBI and the self-appointed witch finders are ripe. Even March may be posited as an, albeit jocular, agent of reactionary zeal -- witness the surreptitious scrutinising of every professional transaction or personal transgression of the mesmerised cast of "The Devil Sells His Soul."

## **Conclusion**

The importance of Hannah Weinstein extends beyond the specificities of *Colonel March of Scotland Yard*. Building on the precedent set by Douglas Fairbanks, Weinstein successfully introduced American-style production strategies into the fledgling British TV/Film sector. She was the first to base her production strategy around the work of writers experienced in this format who also had a shrewd appreciation of American market requirements. The precedence given to writers whose role was to establish and maintain the series' format would eventually be adopted successfully by others as would her use of a serial character taken from the work of an internationally successful author. With an astute pragmatism, she exploited the mythology and iconography associated with Scotland Yard and the eccentric English detective in order to differentiate a British series from its American rivals. Other series followed suit.

In many respects then, Weinstein's early career in Britain mirrored that of her predecessor John Dickson Carr, who had earlier brought innovation to BBC radio. In engineering the adaptation of Carr's work however, she and her writers were able to conduct an amusing and gently subversive campaign, albeit solely rhetorical in form, that challenged the American Right. In the process, the British cultural landscape, particularly the domestic generic tradition, became the site of ideological struggle.

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## **Filmography**

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*Ivanhoe*. 1952. Dir. Richard Thorpe.

*Zulu*. 1962. Dir. Cy Endfield.

Colonel March of The Department of Queer Complaints investigates unusual cases, locked-room murders, and mysteries concerning the supernatural. Share this Rating. Title: Colonel March of Scotland Yard (1954-1956). 7,3/10. Want to share IMDb's rating on your own site? Detective March is on the case to solve murder mysteries that baffle Scotland Yard and the British police. The legendary Boris Karloff ("Frankenstein", "The Mummy") solves the X-Files of Scotland Yard in this classic mystery series thick with thieves, spies and menaces. Based on John Dickson Carr's book The Department of Queer Complaints featuring the fictional detective Colonel March. Detective March is on the case to solve murder mysteries that baffle Scotland Yard and the British police. The legendary Boris Karloff ("Frankenstein", "The Mummy") solves the X-Files of Scotland Yard in this classic mystery series thick with thieves, spies and menaces. Starring. Boris Karloff, Ewan Roberts, Eric Pohlmann. Scotland Yard keeps extensive files on all known criminals in the United Kingdom. It also has a special branch of police who guard visiting dignitaries, royalty, and statesmen. Finally, Scotland Yard is responsible for maintaining links between British law-enforcement agencies and Interpol. Although Scotland Yard's responsibility is limited to metropolitan London, its assistance is often sought by police in other parts of England, particularly with regard to difficult cases. The Yard also assists in the training of police personnel in the countries of the Commonwealth.

Task 5. Answer the following questions.

late hit  
tackling or running into an opponent after the ball has been whistled dead, an infraction resulting in a 15-yard penalty.  
lateral a pass thrown underhanded or overhanded in a backwards or sideways direction.  
leg whip to intentionally use one's legs after falling to trip up an opponent.  
linebackers the defensive players positioned just behind the line who back up the defensive linemen.  
line judge the official who keeps time and watches for encroachment, offsides, and illegal motion at the line of scrimmage.  
lineman a player positioned on the line of scrimmage.  
line of scrimmage the