

2004

## Murder with Southern Hospitality: An Exhibition of Mississippi Mysteries

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### Recommended Citation

Ford, Jennifer (2004) "Murder with Southern Hospitality: An Exhibition of Mississippi Mysteries," *The Primary Source*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

DOI: 10.18785/ps.2601.02

Available at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/theprimarysource/vol26/iss1/2>

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# “Murder with Southern Hospitality: An Exhibition of Mississippi Mysteries”

by

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“Indeed murder is brutal. But there is a wonder to the human act which can only be approached through the mind, for it lies in the mind...Murder's fascination for the reader stems from wonder, and has nothing to do with what De Quincey in scorn expressed as, 'a knife, a purse, and a dark lane.'”<sup>1</sup> Eudora Welty wrote these words in an introduction to *Hanging by a Thread*, an anthology of suspense fiction. As a mystery fan herself, Welty had studied the art of suspense. To many it might be a surprise that such a gifted author enjoyed detective and suspense fiction. Indeed, popular murder mysteries have been long overlooked by the academic community, only recently enjoying a surge of scholarly interest. Authors, Ian Bell and Graham Daldry comment in their study of detective fiction that, “only a few literary critics have thought this immensely popular form worth serious attention.”<sup>2</sup>

Special collections and libraries have been equally guilty of overlooking the collection of this genre. For many years, the University of Mississippi's Department of Special Collections was no exception to the general scholarly bias against murder mysteries. Historically, the collection focus concentrated on the products of traditional literary Mississippi. The department is well-known for collections relating to Ellen Douglas, Eudora Welty, Willie Morris, Barry Hannah, Larry Brown, Beth Henley, and many others. It is perhaps best known for the “Rowan Oak Papers,” several thousand sheets of autograph and typescript drafts of poems, short stories, film scripts and novels written by William Faulkner during some of his most creative years, between 1925 and 1939.

In the process of gathering the papers of many of Mississippi's distinguished authors, Dr. Thomas Verich, then Head of Special Collections, noted a missing piece in the literary collections of the department in the early 1990s. Working with then Curator of Mississippi Collections, Debbie Lee Landi, Dr. Verich observed the burgeoning output of murder mystery fiction written by Mississippians.

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<sup>1</sup> Eudora Welty, introduction to *Hanging by a Thread: A New Treasury of Suspense Fact and Fiction*, edited by Joan Kahn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Ian A. Bell and Graham Daldry, *Watching the Detectives: Essays on Crime Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), ix.

Dr. Verich and Ms. Landi approached University of Mississippi alumnus and award winning mystery author Julie Smith. She generously donated her papers and thus began the core of a new collecting interest of the department. The papers of Nevada Barr followed and the collecting continues today with the papers of Carolyn Haines being the most recent donation.

As mystery devotees themselves, the staff of Special Collections began to formulate the idea for an exhibition devoted to this genre. In early 2003, under the leadership of Dr. Verich, the staff of the department began to work to create an exhibition highlighting the collections, acquisitions, and donations of Mississippi-related mystery authors and mysteries set in Mississippi. It was impossible to highlight all of the related works and authors in the collection, but the staff attempted to blend many of the products of established and "up and coming" authors into the display.

The exhibition covers a broad range of topics and a time period from the middle nineteenth century through the present. After consulting much of the recent scholarship of this genre, the staff noted the many sub-categories. Categories such as the "cozy mystery," "the noir and hard-boiled mystery," the "golden age of the mystery," "women detectives," "true crime fiction," and others were taken into account during the initial formulation of the exhibition. The exhibition was finally divided into twenty-one categories, featuring titles such as "Mississippi True Crime," "Neo-Noir in Mississippi," "Modern Southern Female Detectives and their Authors," "Faulkner, Welty, & Mysteries," and "Early Mississippi Mysteries," and many others.

Each category contains items of interest, such as the much sought after 1953 edition of Elliot Chaze's cult classic, *Black Wings Has My Angel*, issued only in paperback. Manuscripts, correspondence, galleys, first editions in dust-jackets, photographs and other materials from Mississippi mystery authors such as Ben Ames Williams, Benjamin Hawkins Dean, Earle Basinsky, and Charlie Wells, are significant parts of the display. It would be impossible to cover all the pieces shown, but there are several items of particular note which capture a bit of the essence of the exhibit.

One might begin the category devoted to the works of William Faulkner's great-grandfather, W.C. Falkner, and the works of Joseph Holt Ingraham and his son Prentiss. This case offers access into the history of nineteenth century mystery writers and also a glimpse into the history of Mississippi. "Faulkner and Mysteries" contains an in-depth analysis of William Faulkner's relationship with the genre. True crime is a category which provides the onlooker with an overview of several journalistic accounts of Mississippi's violent past. A closer examination of the "female detectives" category highlights the department's first mystery collection, the papers of Julie Smith. A much debated addition to the exhibition was the work of reclusive author Thomas Harris. Although his work is usually placed within the realm of horror, we found his expert blending of the contemporary focus on psychological suspense and the earlier concept of the "weird tale" compelling and simply too good to resist.

#### *Early Mississippi Mystery Authors: W.C. Falkner, Joseph Holt Ingraham, and Colonel Prentiss Ingraham*

The controversial yet dashing life of Colonel W.C. Falkner haunted his Nobel Prize winning great-grandson, William Cuthbert Faulkner. Scholar Joseph Blotner illustrated this effect perfectly when he cited the story of a young William's response to his third grade teacher's question, "what do you want to be when you grow up?" According to a former classmate, the young Faulkner would always respond, "I want to be a writer like my great-granddaddy."<sup>3</sup>

Attorney, Confederate Colonel, duelist, railroad entrepreneur, and best selling novelist are all terms which apply to the life of W.C. Falkner. His life was the stuff of North Mississippi legend. As a young man he was part of a posse which captured Andrew J. McCannon, a man accused of the brutal ax-murder of a Pontotoc County family in 1845. Upon capture, McCannon avoided immediate hanging by agreeing to tell his life story and give an account of his grisly act. W.C. Falkner wrote the

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography*, Volume I (New York: Random House, 1974), 105.

details of McCannon's life and had a pamphlet printed which he distributed at the execution, showing remarkable if not slightly morbid business acumen.

W.C. would later be taken to trial twice for murder. He was acquitted in both cases by juries who cited self defense. He fought in the Mexican War under Jefferson Davis, later writing a poem about his experiences. During the Civil War he fought as a Colonel of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mississippi Regiment and fought in the battle of First Manassas, displaying extreme bravery while taking tremendous risks. His men later voted him out of his rank, due in part to charges of "recklessness" during the battle and his reputation as a tough disciplinarian.<sup>4</sup>

*The White Rose of Memphis*, released initially as a serial in the *Ripley Advertiser*, appeared in hardback in 1881. During the next forty years, the work went through thirty five editions and was still being reprinted well into the 1950s. Long considered a gothic tale of romance, the work also displays all the elements of a mystery and thriller. The melodrama is full of scenes involving concealed identities, murder, and life in the Reconstruction South.

Elected to the Mississippi legislature on November 5, 1889, W.C. Falkner was fatally shot in Ripley that same evening by an angry former business partner. Included in the display is an original telegram sent from Ripley to W.C. Falkner's son, J.W.T. Falkner, who lived in Oxford. The telegram urged J.W.T. to come to Ripley immediately as his father was "this evening badly shot." The exhibition also features a first edition of Falkner's *White Rose of Memphis*.

Maine native and later Mississippi churchman, Joseph Holt Ingraham, wrote over eighty novels between 1843 and 1847. During his early writing career he wrote lurid mysteries involving pirates and beautiful girls in jeopardy. The works were cheaply printed paperbound pamphlets called "story papers." Due to their fragility Ingraham's early works are tremendously difficult to collect in good condition. The exhibition features one of the most noteworthy, *The Beautiful Cigar Girl*.

Ingraham later became an Episcopal minister in Mississippi and turned his literary efforts to biblical themes. Reportedly, he attempted to destroy many of his earlier works, presumably due to their "scandalous" subject matter. He was accidentally killed in 1860 due to a self inflicted gunshot, sustained while cleaning his gun in the vestry of his church, Christ Church in Holly Springs, Mississippi.

Joseph Holt Ingraham's son, Prentiss, continued his father's tradition of publication by penning an astonishing number of publications, well over one thousand. Over two hundred of these titles were devoted to the legendary hero of the American West, Buffalo Bill Cody and featured Cody as a detective and fighter of evil. Ingraham became involved with Buffalo Bill's Wild West show in the late nineteenth century and was for a brief amount of time involved in its publicity and inner workings.

Ingraham was born in Adams County, Mississippi in 1843. After serving as an officer in the Civil War he became a mercenary, participating in the Mexican Revolution against Maximilian, the Austro-Prussian War, and several conflicts in Egypt, among others.

On exhibit is a 1902 reprint by *The New York Dime Library* of Ingraham's story entitled "Darkie Dan, the Colored Detective; or, The Mississippi Mystery." Originally published in 1881 by the famous "penny dreadful" publisher Beadle & Adams, this story features one of the earliest African-American main characters of the mystery genre. Although the story employs racial stereotypes and exhibits the many of the author's prejudices, it is historically important, as the character of Dan exhibits both agency and power in the work. This is highly unusual for nineteenth century work featuring African-American characters, even more so when one considers the history of its author.

#### *"Faulkner & Mysteries"*

In 1946, William Faulkner submitted a short story entitled, "An Error in Chemistry," to a short story contest sponsored by the *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*. Faulkner's story won second prize. It is astonishing to think that only a few years after this event William Faulkner stood on the podium in Stockholm to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,24.

Even though he did not place first in the contest, Faulkner did not give up on this story. It later appeared in his 1949 collection of detective short stories, *Knight's Gambit*. There were other instances of Faulkner employing some of the elements of detective fiction into his work. He revealed in an interview that *Intruder in the Dust* was originally intended to be a detective novel. Upon being asked what precipitated the writing of this work Faulkner replied, "there was a tremendous flux of detective stories going about at that time and my children were always buying them and bringing them home...And I thought of an idea for one would be a man in jail just about to be hung would have to be his own detective, he couldn't get anybody to help him. Then the next thought was, the man for that would be a Negro. Then the character of Lucas--Lucas Beauchamp came along. And the book came out of that. It was the notion of a man in jail who couldn't hire a detective, couldn't hire one of these tough guys that slapped women around, took a drink every time he couldn't think of what to say next. But once I thought of Beauchamp, then he took charge of the story and the story was a good deal different from the idea that---of the detective story that I had started with."<sup>5</sup>

Faulkner's work in Hollywood also involved him with the mystery genre. He worked on the adaptation of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* a film featuring the combination of actors Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. Faulkner also worked on a film adaptation of the Irina Karlova mystery novel, *Dreadful Hollow*, although it was never released.

Along with copies of works mentioned above, the exhibition features several of Faulkner's own worn copies of his favorite mysteries. These are on loan to Special Collections from Faulkner's home, Rowan Oak.

#### *Mississippi True Crime:*

A thin line separates truth from fiction between the lurid covers of true crime works. Phillip Rawlings, a scholar of the genre, defines true crime as "usually concerned with a particular crime or criminal and the process of detection. It is aimed at a non-specialist market, is cheap, easily available and easy to read."<sup>6</sup> Journalistic techniques are common. In fact, many former reporters become authors of true crime, but to create a spell-binding narrative, they also utilize fiction techniques.

Although the phenomenon of true crime has taken on new life since the early 1990s, its historical roots are much older. By the 1500's in England, accounts of dying speeches by condemned prisoners appeared on printed broadsides. In 1684, in order to quell the inaccuracies of these publications (and to share in some of the profits) the warden of Newgate Prison began to print coverage of trials, executions, and short biographies of prisoners in a widely popular series entitled *Accounts*. These accounts developed into sensational reports and finally evolved into the novel format that captured the twentieth-century American audience by storm. Considered one step above tabloid journalism, true crime began to skim the surface of respectability with Truman Capote's chilling 1966 work *In Cold Blood*.

Mississippi's past and present has provided many authors of this genre with a blood-red backdrop for accounts of sensational crimes. The 1869 printing of the trial of E.M. Yerger is a perfect example of early Mississippi forays into this genre after the Civil War.<sup>7</sup> Printed by the Clarion Book and Printing Establishment, this small pamphlet tells the tale of a trial which took place in the midst of the transition from Presidential to Congressional Reconstruction policies. Yerger, who had fallen behind on his taxes, a fact he disputed, was to have his piano sold by the then Mayor of Jackson and military officer,

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick Gwynn and Joseph Blotner, eds., *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), 142.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Newburn and Joan Bagg, eds., *The British Criminology Conferences: Selected Proceedings. Volume I: Emerging Themes in Criminology* (Loughborough University, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> W. S. M. Wilkinson, *Trial of E.M. Yerger, before a military commission for the killing of Bv't Col. Joseph G. Crane, at Jackson, Miss., June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1869. Including testimony of all the witnesses, arguments...Reported for the Clarion* (Jackson, MS: Clarion Book and Printing Establishment, 1869).

Colonel Joseph G. Crane. Crane attempted to seize the piano prompting Yerger to respond aggressively when the two eventually met to settle the problem. Yerger stabbed Crane to death. Tried in a military court, the Yerger case never reached a conclusion, as it was prolonged until Reconstruction ended. Inlaid into the pamphlet is a 1926 article from the *Clarion-Ledger*. The author asserts an interpretation of Reconstruction generally ascribed to former Confederates by declaring that eventually "the south reverted to the hands of its own people" thereby ensuring "justice" for Yerger. Accounts of post-Reconstruction Mississippi tell an even more tragic story of murder and racism. In the summer of 1955 Emmett Till, an African-American teenager from Chicago visiting relatives in Money, Mississippi, was viciously murdered. Although Till was known as a quiet, shy young man with a stutter, he was accused of making sexual advances to a white female. After a jury acquitted two white men of the brutal slaying, one of the accused bragged of his involvement to the national media. Featured in the exhibition are works published around the time of the crime which all feature aspects of true crime narrative. Of particular note is the piece entitled *Complete Photo Story of Till Murder Case* published by Ernest Withers, an African-American photographer from Memphis.<sup>8</sup> Offering graphic photographs and unprecedented access to Till family, Withers begins the work with the question "why such a pamphlet as this?" Withers answers his own question with the hope that his pamphlet would "serve to help our nation dedicate itself to seeing that such incidents need not occur again."

### *No longer just a "Belle": Modern Southern Female Detectives and their Authors*

Historians generally date the first mystery novel written by an American woman to the year 1866. *The Dead Letter* by Mrs. Metta Victoria Fuller Victor features the character Richard Redfield and a mysterious letter found in the New York dead letter office. The letter leads Redfield into the world of policemen and hired assassins and ends with Redfield exposing the murderer and rescuing his ladylove. From these distinctly melodramatic beginnings the history of women mystery authors in America evolved. By the 1970s women detective novels had established a hold on the genre in earnest with the mass success of authors such as Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton. Other subgenres of the mystery market: the police procedurals, the thriller, the "cozy" all became fair game for women authors. Julie Smith, Nevada Barr, and Carolyn Haines all trace their heritage from the early days of American female mystery writers.

Julie Smith, a native of Savannah Georgia, attended the University of Mississippi majoring in journalism. After college Smith worked as a journalist at the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and soon after moved to San Francisco and the *Chronicle*. The author of a successful San Francisco based "Rebecca Schwartz" mystery series, Smith began publishing the New Orleans Skip Langdon series in 1989 beginning with her Edgar winning work, *New Orleans Mourning*. Skip, a physically powerful New Orleans cop outnumbered in a world of male policemen and estranged from her socially prominent New Orleans family, embodies the classical ideal of alienation. In a June 2001 interview for the online journal *Writers Write*, Julie Smith described how this alienation sprang from her own life "when I was young I always heard that Southern writers always write about the South-eventually. However, I never thought that applied to me because I never understood my hometown and never fit in. So how was I going to write about it...one day it came in a blinding flash—I could work with a character who was as alienated as I was. And thus was Skip Langdon born!"

On display from the Julie Smith Collection, are early drafts of *New Orleans Mourning*, police press passes for journalist Julie Smith, foreign editions of her works, and several first editions.

Nevada Barr clearly attributes a portion of her success to the earlier efforts of women authors and their female detectives. In an online interview for Doubleday's website "The Mystery Guild," she

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<sup>8</sup> Ernest C. Withers, *Complete Story of Till Murder Case* (Memphis, TN: Withers Photographers, 1955).

said, "I think that Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky laid the groundwork and started a golden age for women sleuths and by sheer dumb luck, I walked into the middle of it." Barr's character, Anna Pigeon, builds upon the traditions of those who have gone before adding to these a new emphasis on landscape and environment. Pigeon, a National Park Ranger, favors straight talk and action tempered with thoughtful decision making. Barr's plots revolve around Anna's work in various national parks and the powerful combinations of the beauty and wildness of their landscapes superimposed with human frailty, emotion, and murder. Her first mystery, the 1993 novel *Track of the Cat*, received the coveted Agatha Award sponsored by Malice Domestic, Ltd. and the Bouchercon World Mystery Convention's Anthony Award for best first mystery novel. Since that time her works have won numerous other awards and captured a loyal following of readers. Although not a native Mississippian, Barr has lived and worked within the state since her transfer as a Park Ranger to the Natchez Trace Parkway. Barr uses this location as a setting for two of her most recent works (*Deep South* and *Hunting Season*); marking the first time the author has set two mysteries in the same place. She reiterates that this does not mean Anna is settling down

Barr donated her collection to the University of Mississippi in the middle 1990s. The collection contains correspondence, ephemera, galleys, cover artwork, and manuscript drafts. Of particular note are her notebooks containing handwritten drafts of several of her works. On display is one such notebook for the 2000 work, *Deep South*.

Born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi on May 12, 1953, Carolyn Haines graduated from high school in George County. She received a B.S. from the University of Southern Mississippi in Journalism and a M.A. in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing in 1985 from the University of Southern Alabama. Carolyn Haines first published novel, *Summer of Fear* appeared in 1993 with *Summer of the Redeemers* appearing in 1994. Her popular detective series featuring the feisty Southern belle detective, Sarah Booth, began in 1999 with the publication of *Them Bones*. *Buried Bones*, *Splintered Bones*, and *Crossed Bones* followed.

The southern land bound quality of Haines' work is evident through her *Bones* series. When asked about this connection for this exhibition, the author replied "growing up in Mississippi has shaped my character, and it constantly shapes the character of my characters. I think 'place' is one of the strongest elements in fiction. It grounds the reader and gives characters a source. I may have had the last golden childhood, growing up in Lucedale, Mississippi. We played without fear, and we were surrounded by country and woods. It was a paradise. I grew to love the outdoors, the plants, the animals, and the people of my world. I was fortunate in that I met quite a few characters during my journalism days, which has helped me create my fictitious world. I have been truly blessed to live in a place which hasn't yet been homogenized to look and sound just like everywhere else. Mississippi is a writer's dream."

On display from Haines' collection is an annotated typewritten first page from *The Bones*, an advance reading copy of *Crossed Bones*, and several first editions of her works. In their work on the southern detective, J.K. Van Dover and John F. Webb elegantly described the connection between place and family for Southern mystery authors, "Southerners know the history of their family as well as of their place and of the relationships between the two histories. Such knowledge is both a comfort and a burden."<sup>9</sup> This sentiment applies well to the characters from the Tunica, Mississippi-raised mystery author Charlaine Harris. For Harris has created several series dominated by Southern women who feel deep ambivalence towards their family, history, and community. In her delightfully light Aurora Teagarden series, the main character is a feisty librarian "Roe" who finds herself in the most untenable situations; bodies falling from the sky into her yard and the like.

The intriguing yet darker character of Lily Bard appears in the "Shakespeare's" series. Lily, the victim of a brutal rape and torture, has abandoned her connections with her life in Memphis,

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<sup>9</sup> J.K. Van Dover and John F. Webb, *Isn't Justice Always Unfair? The Detective in Southern Literature* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996).

Tennessee and moved to the small town of Shakespeare, Arkansas. Determined to cut her self off mentally from the world, Lily focuses on martial arts and bodybuilding while cleaning the homes of specifically chosen clients. Although wanting to live on the fringes of society, Lily is continually drawn into the life of Shakespeare through foul play. As the series progresses her attachment to the quirky characters and eccentric lifestyle of the town only increases.

*Modern "Weird Tales": Psychological Horror and Thomas Harris*

What is a modern "weird tale"? The traditional definition includes what cult writer H.P. Lovecraft described as "a suspension of natural law" where the scientific method and order of society is inverted by the inexplicable. Author of *The Modern Weird Tale*, S.T. Joshi, describes the possibility of a modern weird tale, one devoid of the supernatural elements so prevalent in the earlier genre, "recently coined terms such as 'dark suspense' and 'dark mystery' suggest the fusion of the horror tale with the mystery or suspense tale as an entirely new type of writing."<sup>10</sup> In a vain attempt to place distinctions between the subtle categories of mystery, suspense, detective novels, and horror, this seems to be the closest approximation of the work of Thomas Harris. His novels combine all of these categories and fuse them into a masterful tour de force of terror, sex, intellect, beauty and extreme ugliness.

Born in Tennessee, as a young child Harris moved with his family to the small Delta town of Rich, Mississippi. The state of Mississippi, according to Harris, directly affected at least one of his works, *Red Dragon*. During its composition, Harris had to travel home to Rich and spent hours working on the manuscript in a shotgun house in the middle of a cotton field. In his introduction to *The Hannibal Lecter Omnibus*, Harris recounted, "I want to tell you the circumstances in which I first encountered Hannibal Lecter, M.D. In the fall of 1979, owing to an illness in my family, I returned home to the Mississippi Delta and remained there eighteen months, I was working on *Red Dragon*. My neighbor in the village of Rich kindly gave me the use of a shotgun house in the center of a vast cotton field, and there I worked, often at night...Sometimes at night I would leave the lights on in my little house and walk across the flat fields. When I looked back from a distance, the house looked like a boat at sea, and all around me the vast Delta night."<sup>11</sup>

"The vast Delta night" served as the conduit for Harris' first meeting with Dr. Hannibal Lecter and the creation of one of the best known characters in modern fiction. Author Tony Magistrale captured the essence of Lecter's appeal when he described the doctor as an "angel with horns."<sup>12</sup>

Through research and interviews, the staff of the Department of Archives and Special Collections gained a greater appreciation for the influence the history of detection had for the young Harris. According to a childhood friend from Cleveland, Mississippi, one of Thomas Harris' early essays for their high school English teacher, Miss Effie Glasgow, concerned the human ear. Reportedly, Harris' thesis purported that personalities of individuals could be determined based on the shape of the ear. It is likely that by this time, Harris was familiar with the works of noted criminologist Alphonse Bertillon.

Considered one of the first modern scientific criminologists, Alphonse Bertillon became Paris' Chief of the Department of Judicial Identity in 1880. He standardized a method of measurement of the features of criminals and of crime scenes into a formulaic theory called "anthropometry" or the Bertillon system. Anthropometry was based on the classification of skeletal and other body measurements and statistics. Bertillon was also noted for his detailed photographs of crime scenes and mug shots. By 1888 France had adopted the system but it later became obsolete due to the

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<sup>10</sup> S.T. Joshi, *The Modern Weird Tale* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Harris, *The Hannibal Lecter Omnibus* (New York: BCA, 2000), vii-viii.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Magistrale and Michael A. Morrison, eds., *A Dark Night's Dreaming: Contemporary American Horror Fiction* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 33.



much more precise science of fingerprinting. Harris would later use Bertillon's quote "One can only see what one observes, and one observes only things which are already in the mind" as the first epigram in *Red Dragon*.

On display in the exhibition are several first editions of his works, signed editions, photographs from Bertillon's examination of the human ear of criminals, and a rare in-person signed advance paperback of *Red Dragon*.

#### *Conclusion:*

Mississippi's traditional literary history is well known, its authors well documented and continuously collected by libraries and departments of special collections all over the country and the world. The collection of the manuscripts of these authors has understandably been an important part of the mission of the University of Mississippi's Department of Archives & Special Collections since the late 1970s. Through thoughtful acquisition, University support, and the wonderful generosity of donors, the Department built a strong collection of literary Mississippiana. It is vital to continue this tradition while also looking for other important new forms of Mississippi's literary culture.

It is important to note that several other departments throughout the state have also collected the work of particular mystery authors, such as the wonderful collection of the John Grisham papers at Mississippi State University, or the John Armistead Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi, to name a few.

It is our hope that this exhibition "Murder with Southern Hospitality" will bring attention to a previously unexplored aspect of our literary collections. We welcome visitors and appreciate comments and suggestions. The exhibition will remain up through the late spring of 2005. Our hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. through 5 p.m., except for University holidays. If you have any questions, please contact Jennifer Ford at 662-915-7639 or through email at [jwford@olemiss.edu](mailto:jwford@olemiss.edu)