

The Godwulf Manuscript Short Guide

The Godwulf Manuscript by Robert B. Parker

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

The Godwulf Manuscript Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Characters.....	3
Social Concerns/Themes.....	4
Techniques.....	5
Adaptations.....	6
Key Questions.....	7
Literary Precedents.....	8
Copyright Information.....	10



Characters

Joe Broz, the Boston Godfather of *The Godwulf Manuscript* is the first of a series and introduces Parker's series protagonist, Spenser, so in this novel he is not yet the fully-drawn character of the later books. Spenser is a single, emotionally unattached character, who likes to cook and has already developed a self-deprecating sense of himself, but he is without either a Susan Silverman or a Hawk, who both will figure prominently in the later stories. He is more like the lonely P.I. of Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe mysteries, the recognizably tough, wise-cracking nemesis of crime from the traditions of the detective novel. And this early Spenser drinks more, is more casually sexual, and philosophizes less than he will in the forthcoming adventures.

In *The Godwulf Manuscript* Parker also introduces a number of continuing character types, Lieutenant Martin Quirk, the best-dressed of Boston's finest, and his sidekick, the rumpled, ever-hungry Belson. Quirk's relationship with the P.I. is more antagonistic here, although it will change over the series, and Belson is already more accepting of Spenser and his methods.

crime, retains much the same relationship with Spenser in the later novels as he does in this one.

Brenda Loring, the secretary to the university President Bradford W. Forbes, is Spenser's love interest in *The Godwulf Manuscript* and serves as an early version of Susan, but is seen only fleetingly. Although she appears again in the series, she is really a minor figure. President Forbes of the university is presented as a stuffy, self-important figure of power, a character type Parker will use again in other contexts.

Carl Tower, the head of campus security, is a knowledgeable professional policeman with whom Spenser can more readily work, and he shares the same mild disdain for his boss which mirrors Spenser's own feelings. Terry Orchard is the daughter of a wealthy Boston family and is involved with the radical student organization suspected of stealing the manuscript for political purposes.

Like many other wealthy families in Parker's novels, the Orchards reflect the sins and waste of people with too much money and too little character.

Terry represents another Parker character type, this time the young woman in trouble whom Spenser is called upon to rescue. Marion, her mother, is sexually repressed and bored; her father is weak and ineffectual. They both hide behind their wealth and social position, and they represent social types Parker will pillory again and again.



Social Concerns/Themes

As with all fiction *The Godwulf Manuscript* is a novel of its time and reflects the background of its author. It is no wonder that his first published novel is set on a college campus. Parker obviously is drawing on the fact that he spent the previous decade teaching. But in *The Godwulf Manuscript* he casts a jaundiced eye on both the university world and the social world of student radicals and various other hangers-on of the campus community both inside and outside of the collegiate environment.

Hired by the security chief of a local university to search for a rare manuscript which has been stolen from the campus library, Spenser spends a good portion of the novel in and around the university environs, during which he meets up with various academic administrators and radicals, both student and faculty. Spenser's exposure to these political types allows Parker to level his protagonist's wit at both the self-important officials and their unruly charges. The academic administrators, especially the university's president, come off as a bunch of pompous asses bent more on developing and protecting their privilege and power than on educating students and running an institution of higher learning.

Parker does not spare the campus radicals either as they are portrayed as posturing charlatans. Both are more concerned with image than substance and neither seems to display much conscience about the ethics of their behavior.

As he would do with the rest of the series, Parker also satirizes the local professional criminals when the story extends beyond the confines of the campus into the underworld that is supplying drugs to students and faculty alike. Of course, the difference is that their being the bad guys we expect them to behave improperly and to exploit people for their own gain, and the hoods do not make any pretense of behaving otherwise. Spenser operates as he always does to puncture the pretense of the pompous, whoever they may be, and to expose the nasty realities which lie below the normality of everyday life.

Like all detective fiction, *The Godwulf Manuscript* is a search novel, one in which the detective pursues a lost object, in this case a valuable illuminated manuscript, and in the process uncovers the sordid and uncomfortable truths lying beneath the tensions of the modern academic world.



Techniques

One of the hallmarks of Parker's fiction is its smooth and effortless prose style. And although he has perfected his writing skills through the series, *The Godwulf Manuscript* does not read like a beginner's novel. From his very first book, Parker displays his easy mastery of plot, characterization, and exposition. His handling of the first-person narrative is sure and convincing. His evocation of place is done economically. One of the achievements of Parker's series has been its exploration of Boston and its environs, putting that city into the crime lexicon just as Dashiell Hammett or Ross Macdonald did for San Francisco and Southern California. Parker creates his Boston without cluttering the narrative with unnecessary and confusing detail. In all ways, this first Spenser novel provides a masterful beginning to his long-running series; it is an exceptional inaugural effort.

Adaptations

Although none of the Spenser novels has been adapted to the large screen, his stories have become widely used on television, both in a series "Spenser: For Hire," and in a number of made-for-television movies. They all have starred Robert Urich in the title role and even though there have been several actresses playing Susan Silverman, Avery Brooks has appeared regularly as Hawk.



Key Questions

Parker's Spenser novels are engaged in dealing with contemporary problems and should lend themselves to stimulating lively discussion, especially of social and political issues. The *Godwulf Manuscript*, for example, deals with the tag-end of the counterculture of the early 1970s and explores the bogus as well as the real issues raised by social protest and political action. Although Parker does not bludgeon his readers with his views about such issues, he nevertheless features them prominently in his novels, often raising interesting points of view and conflicting values.

1. Crime fiction has often been used as a vehicle for dealing with broad social issues. In what ways does *The Godwulf Manuscript* do so?
2. Social activism raised some disquieting notions about justice and fairness in American society. What sorts of issues are foregrounded in this novel by the student protesters?
3. If the group knows the subsequent books in the Spenser series, it might be interesting to compare this first one with the later volumes. One might ask what sorts of changes Parker made in his characters and how do these changes effect our perception of them?
4. In what ways is Spenser an inheritor of the traditions of the hard-boiled detective novel? How does Parker transcend and transform these traditions?
5. In this novel what does Parker have to say about issues of power and wealth and position in contemporary American society?
6. Although Spenser questions the tactics of the student protesters, how much does he seem to emulate them in his investigation of the theft of the manuscript?
7. Why would Parker have the novel's plot turn on the theft of a medieval manuscript? Why not something else?

How does the specific item work in the story?

8. In what ways does the humor work in the fiction? Other than for purely entertainment value, why is Spenser such a comedian?
9. Compare Spenser to some other fictional private eyes you may be familiar with, such as Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade, Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer, Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, or any number of other contemporary heroes of crime novels.
10. Both men and women seem to enjoy reading the Robert Parker Spenser novels. What are the traits which make Spenser such a likable character to both sexes?

Literary Precedents

Robert Parker's thesis for his Ph.D.

was a study of the detective fiction of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Ross Macdonald, and his fiction reveals his debt to all three. Spenser as a character is probably most like Philip Marlowe, even down to the fact that both figures bear the name of a famous English writer. Like Marlowe, Spenser is wise-cracking and irreverent, not given to following the rules, especially if they impede his investigation. He is not a loner, however, and the novels often do include his cooperating with the official police force. Spenser is also violent, more so than is Marlowe, and in this way he is like Hammett's Sam Spade, with his wolfish grin and tough-guy persona. Ross Macdonald's Lew Archer spends most of his time nosing around in the past of the wealthy and prominent, uncovering old crimes and exposing family skeletons.

There is much of this in the Spenser series as well.

But Parker's books are not just pastiches of past crime fiction. His voice is unique and his series has done much to decenter the crime novel from its location in New York and California. More than any other contemporary mystery writer, Parker has helped to open up new settings for the private-eye novel and to pave the way for Sara Paretsky's Chicago, Carl Hiaasens's Florida, Tony Hillerman's Navajo country, and the many Southern crime books of such writers as Joan Hess, Sharyn McCrumb, and Carolyn Hart. In addition, Spenser presents a new, more human figure, sensitive and self-aware in ways much different from the usual series characters of the hard-boiled tradition.

As with all series, the Spenser novels have evolved through the years until they now have created a world of their own, peopled with continuing characters, exploiting a recognizable locale, and exploring in a dependable style a set of themes and social concerns recognizably Parker's own.

The academic crime novel has a long and distinguished pedigree in both British and American literature. Dorothy Sayers, who was an academic herself, used a mythical Oxford woman's college for the setting of her mystery featuring Peter Wimsey's future wife, Harriet Vane, in *Gaudy Night*. Several series featuring settings in Oxford followed, including the books by J. I. M. Stewart, who was himself also an Oxford don, which he wrote under the pen name of Michael Innis and featured Sir John Appleby; the crime books by Edmund Crispin with Oxford Professor of English Gervase Fen; and probably the most famous, the Morse series by Colin Dexter, which have been widely publicized as a television show. British novelists Margery Ailingham, P. D. James, V. C. Clinton-Baddeley, Andrew Appiah, Robert Barnard, Michelle Spring, and Robert Robinson, among others, have contributed to the tradition as well. Andrew Taylor even used a medieval manuscript in his contemporary book *Caroline Minuscule* (1983). British

academic crime fiction has tended to rely on settings in the colleges of Cambridge and Oxford and used the traditions of these ancient institutions to great effect.

The American academic mystery novel is probably best known through the Kate Fansler series written by Amanda Cross, a.k.a. Carolyn Heilbrun, once Professor of English at Columbia. Others have included Jane Langdon's Homer Kelly books, which have used settings at Harvard, and the adventures of Jane Haddam's former F.B.I. agent, Gregor Demarkian's. There also have been numerous individual novels which have used a university background including Carolyn Hart's *A Little Class on Murder* (1989) and Patricia Houck Sprinkle's first novel *Murder at Markham* (1988).

The academic environment with its often tight-knit social structure and isolated physical surroundings and frequently contentious intellectual tensions provides a perfect locale for murder. Parker manipulates all of these elements to great effect in *The Godwulf Manuscript*.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994