Pop Goes the Weasel Short Guide

Pop Goes the Weasel by James Patterson

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Characters

Though Pop Goes the Weasel has plenty of characters, the protagonist and antagonist, Alex Cross and Geoffrey Shafer, carry the weight of the novel. Characters like Cross's boss, George Pittman, are not developed, and the murder victims never last long enough for development. In fact, their lives are reconstructed after their deaths in typical scientific detection fashion. But because the novel is a battle between good and evil, the characterization relies on the two representatives of these opposing moral forces.

The most unusual thing about Patterson's Alex Cross novels is his choice of an African-American hero. Patterson notes to Bernard and Zaleski report that I've always found it mesmerizing, the magical appeal of somebody like Muhammad Ali. And yet so much of the society seems incapable of dealing with your average black person, other than with celebrities. Also, it struck me that a black male who does the things that Alex does—who succeeds in a couple of ways, tries to bring up his kids in a good way, who tries to continue to live in his neighborhood and who has enormous problems with evil in the world—he's a hero (1996).

Cross is often compared to a "young Muhammad Ali" though he is highly educated with a Ph.D. in psychology from Johns Hopkins University. Yet with all his good looks and intelligence, Cross is an average guy who does the best he can to live a good life. He is loyal to his family and friends, and his morality is generally irreproachable. But because he is an average guy, Cross makes serious mistakes, like his vacation in Jamaica, that expose his family to danger. That he is in love with Christine may explain why he is rather slipshod when most intelligent people would be even more alert. Also he persists to bring Shafer to trial even though he does not have adequate evidence to convict him. Few real police officers would make that mistake. Finally, after his underwater hand-to-hand combat with Shafer, he assumes the villain is dead.

He is not, but Cross makes no effort to double-check, possibly because he is emotionally and physically exhausted after his battle with evil. But these problems remain unexplained unless Patterson plans to resurrect Shafer in a later novel.

However, the author does succeed in allowing his audience to understand "the average black person," stressing Cross' goodness and his humanity. Patterson believes that most of his fans are women, which is unusual in male-dominated thriller fiction. As Bernard and Zaleski report, Patterson says that " lot of suspense, mystery, thriller fiction that's written by men is very macho in tone. I don't think my fiction is"(1996). He goes further, commenting that one of the social nightmares that afflict us is "domineering men." To counter that tendency in thriller fiction, Patterson's Cross is good looking, tough, and intelligent but also sensitive and kind, the current popular idea of the type of man women want.

Despite his good qualities, Cross is rather one-dimensional, a representative of middleclass mores in America. He does not seem to grow in this novel. In fact, intellectually he appears to decline from the earlier novels where he approached crime

with knowledge and research. Here he uses only profiling techniques and, though he actually catches Shafer, his intellect does not seem to be up to the job of convicting or removing the villain. Nevertheless, he does keep trying and, in that effort, he qualifies as an existential hero who cannot defeat Death, but who gives himself value in the attempt to do so.

The other main character is Shafer, who almost defies description. Shafer is good looking, rich, suicidal, homicidal, manicdepressive, sadistic, full of hate and anger, and competitive to the point of psychosis.

As a representation of evil, he is worse than most of the demons in classical literature though, to be fair, they are generally mental and moral tempters, while Shafer has simply run amok. His evil is physical, centering around murder, necrophilia and mutilation. He is highly intelligent, a spy, and a former soldier, so he is aware of profiling techniques and makes sure that all the bodies of his victims are stripped of clothing and all identification. Shafer's disguise is the use of blackface and an old cab with which he prowls the streets of Washington looking for victims. While the killer's use of blackface is not very believable, it does exemplify a couple of social and philosophical problems in America. Because Shafer uses blackface when committing evil deeds, Patterson may be subtly suggesting that the ruling class in America seems to assume that evil wears a black face, an idea that appears evident in the number of African-Americans in the prison population and the existence of racial profiling. That Shafer,a European, assumes an African-American identity to commit heinous crimes may be a symptom of the issues Americans have failed to address in relation to crime, imprisonment and justice, or lack thereof, in the African-American community. But Patterson also muddies the symbolic waters by having evil switch from white to black to white again. Patterson has reversed the standard Western symbols of black and white so that Cross who is black represents good while a white Shafer represents evil. But when Shafer dons blackface, the symbolic mix changes, creating a sort of irony. Patterson actually seems to be showing us that good and evil go far beyond skin color, and that our trite black and white symbolism is not adequate in the modern world.

Shafer is British, an employee of the British embassy in Washington, and the idea that Shafer is European may subtly suggest an underlying xenophobia that afflicts Americans. Despite the fact that America is a nation of immigrants, modern Americans are often not enthusiastic about current immigrants and the Immigration and Naturalization Service's rigid rules reflect this distaste for new arrivals.

In addition, Europe has a history of producing serial killers, so Patterson may be reminding us that this problem is not unique to America. It is equally possible that Patterson merely wishes to complain about diplomatic immunity since in the first chapter, Shafer drives his Jaguar XJ12 counter to oncoming traffic and generally creates highway chaos, yet he is protected from prosecution by diplomatic immunity. Generally an embassy employee who acts so irresponsibly is sent home, but Shafer's position is safeguarded by the political clout of his father-in-law.

Shafer's father-in-law is the reason he has his embassy position, and the fact that his wife actually has the money in the family gives us one rather weak motive for Shafer's activities. While he is apparently manic depressive and takes enormous numbers of tranquilizers to try to control his manic periods, he actually enjoys his manic side, and we rarely see him in a depressed state. It is much more likely that he is psychotic since manic depressives usually tend to hurt themselves rather than others.

However, it is hard to diagnose Shafer.

Patterson gives so many possible reasons for his insanity that it is difficult to pin down what drives him to commit multiple murders. So the real problem with Shafer's character is lack of a believable motive, or at least, a believable reason for his insanity.

Shafer's anger results in terrible violence even against his own family, but he does not take moral responsibility for his acts.

He has completely isolated himself from others, an isolation that exacerbates his megalomania and allows him to kill people without feeling guilt. As a serial killer, he is very frightening because of the randomness of his choice of victims and his slavish devotion to the Four Horseman game. Yet, perhaps because of the intercession of James Whitehead, who is War in the Four Horsemen game, he does not kill Christine, even though he can easily do so. Instead she is held captive for a year, only to be released in the denouement of the novel. This turn of events is inexplicable given Shafer's history, unless Patterson saves Christine so that her baby can symbolize new beginnings after Shafer's apocalyptic activities.

The key symbolic act, however, is Shafer's murder of this wife and children in an English supermarket. Since he is the rider of the pale horse, death symbolically triumphs, and the Apocalypse continues despite the best efforts of the forces of good.

The battle between Cross, whose very name symbolizes Christian morality, and Shafer, the essence of evil, is likely to continue into the future.

As in most thriller novels, none of the characters, except possibly Cross, are round characters who show growth and change, but a couple of other characters deserve mention. Nana Cross is the epitome of the African-American matriarch. She is strong, supportive and has definite opinions. She is somewhat racist in that she does not trust or particularly like white people, but readers will like her honesty, strength and wisdom. While Patterson claims to be aware of his female readers, he offers us Patsy Hampton, the ambitious career woman whose scheming self-confidence results in her demise. And Shafer's psychologist, Boo Cassady, who has a continuing sexual relationship with the killer, is highly unethical, so some of Patterson's female characters are not appealing. He counters these women with Nana and Christine, but it is a bit disturbing that their roles are domestic even though Christine is a teacher. Teachers are often nurturers, so it appears that the women who are acceptable to Cross are women who nurture, while those who exhibit male characteristics are deserving of death.

Social Concerns

In a Publishers Weekly interview with Andre Bernard and Jeff Zaleski, James Patterson said, "The Cross books are about nightmares that I have—not literal nightmares but nightmares that I have about the world" (1996). One of these nightmares in America is racism. Alex Cross, an African-American who grew up on the mean streets of the Southeast area of Washington, D.C., must confront racism in many guises as he works as a police detective. In fact, his boss, George Pittman, is described as "a bully, bigot, racist and careerist." Apparently, according to Patterson, cut-throat careerism is as bad as racism. But the real social problems in the novel center around Southeast, a slum area, where Geoffrey Shafer, the villain, dumps the bodies of his victims. When Shafer kills two young girls in the area, a cousin of one of the victims tells Cross, "The police won't do nothin'. You never come back here again after today. Never happen. You don't care about us. We're nothing to nobody." Cross agrees that this is a "horrifying and absolutely true statement." As in so many cities, the D.C. police overlook crimes in lower class neighborhoods, and Cross's boss, George Pittman, refuses to believe that a serial killer is at work in that area because, as Cross explains, "he didn't want to shift dozens of detectives to Southeast and begin an extensive investigation on the basis of my instincts and gut feelings. I had heard Pittman joke that Southeast wasn't part of his city."

In the late twentieth century, racism in police departments was exposed via such incidents as the beating death of Rodney King among others, and Patterson makes it clear that such behavior is morally unacceptable. The lives of the people in Southeast are as valuable as the lives of more affluent people, and attitudes toward the relative value of people based on income or educational levels are wrong. We are morally corrupt if we do not try to help the less fortunate as Cross does with his various charities, and we cannot allow moral laxity in public officials if we expect to receive fair treatment ourselves.

Another social concern explored in the novel is single parenthood and the question of what constitutes a nuclear family. Cross is a widower with two young children. He adores his children and does a good job of raising them, but he needs the help of his grandmother, Nana. She is the homemaker in the Cross family, despite her advanced age. We see various generations of the family interact lovingly despite their differences from the model of the perfect American family. Though Cross is busy, he makes time for his kids and Nana. In this book, Cross becomes engaged to Christine, a teacher, and ultimately becomes a father again when she has a baby. The new baby is a metaphorical new beginning for the family after being attacked by Shafer, but the final chapter, where Shafer kills his own wife and children, reminds us that many families are far from the ideal.

An additional concern is Geoffrey Shafer's role playing game, the Four Horsemen. The characters assume the identities of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse—the Conqueror on a white horse, War on a red horse, Famine on a black horse, and Death on a pale horse. The game is played on the Internet, and the "object was to create the

most delicious or unusual fantasy or adventure." For the villainous Shafer, "the object was to create the evening's most startling fantasy, to get a rise out of the other players." Of course, Shafer actually lives his fantasies and, since his character is Death, his fantasies involve killing. Role playing games are very popular among young people, and they are, indeed, played on the Internet. However, sometimes the line between fantasy and reality becomes blurred in the player's mind, creating concern about such games. For example, some years ago, the game Dungeons and Dragons caused concern exactly because some players tended to blur the lines between fantasy and reality. At least one cautionary movie was made to show the dangers of the game. Patterson seems to think that fantasy games may be dangerous, particularly when a player is in a delicate mental state. Also there is the problem of the Internet, which has become integral to so many lives. While the Internet is the greatest information carrier in history, we do not always like the information it carries. It may be one of those great social goods that can become evil in the wrong hands.

Of course, the main social concern of the novel is the phenomenon of the serial killer.

Reports of serial murders have become almost routine in cities across America and Europe. And while serial killers may exist in other societies as well, the more progressive cultures are simply more likely to catch and convict the criminals. Nonetheless, there seems to be an increased number of serial killers at work in the latter twentieth century. The question is why these men turn to violence. What makes them tick? Many theories have been proposed, ranging from sexual maladjustment to religious mania to the simple will to power, but few of the theories fit all the serial killers. And, above all, we cannot identify the men who are likely to become serial killers before they kill.

Thus, we are all at risk, the possible victims of random violence committed by total strangers. Given this situation, Patterson seems to say, fear should be our primary emotion and those of us who are not afraid may be living in a fool's paradise. That idea brings us to the final social concern in the novel—terror.

Terror has been used as a weapon by many political groups and is hardly a new tactic. But the use of fear on a random, individual basis is relatively new, possibly a result of massive urbanization and a loss of the security of knowing one's neighbors that was the hallmark of rural America.

Alienation from others may also be one of the reasons young men become criminals.

They are lost and alone among a crowd of people, and they may think they have to turn to crime to be noticed at all. Whether this theory is true or not, it is clear that urban centers have spawned most of the serial killers of record. Ed Gein, the source for Thomas Harris' Jame Gumb in The Silence of the Lambs, is a rural aberration. A majority of serial killers live in and commit their crimes in urban areas. The key social problem is how to prevent a serial killer from starting to kill in the first place. A lot of lives depend on the solution to this problem, and we do not seem to be making much headway. Meanwhile, city dwellers have multiple locks on their doors, expensive alarm

systems, and even bars on their windows because life in the city is often life lived in fear. Patterson's point is that fear can attack us at any time, and terror can be a weapon that the most craven weakling can wield if he has a car, a gun, or even a fist. The malaise of the modern city is not only alienation and isolation, but the fear that the ordinary citizen feels after dark.

Techniques

Pop Goes the Weasel, like most serial killer novels, is an amalgam of the classical mystery story and thriller. In serial killer novels, it is necessary for the reader to know the killer, so Patterson uses two narratives, one about Shafer and one by Cross, switching between Shafer's narrative and Cross' narrative as they match wits in the novel.

Shafer's narrative is written from thirdperson omniscient point of view so that we know his thoughts, but we do not sympathize with him. Cross' narrative is written in first person as if he is telling us his story personally, engendering trust and sympathy in the reader. Knowing the motives, or lack thereof, of the serial killer departs from the classical mystery which concentrates on discovering the killer's identity. In serial killer novels, once again, the question is why the killer kills. Patterson tries to explain Shafer's rather nebulous motives throughout the novel with an emphasis on Shafer's manic phases when he kills people as part of the Four Horsemen game. Interspersed through Shafer's narrative is Cross' narrative, wherein Cross discusses his home life, his problems at work, and his theories about the killer. This method is similar to dramatic irony where the audience knows information that the hero does not. Thus, the reader can see when Cross makes mistakes. This technique increases the fear and dread that the reader feels as Cross repeatedly underestimates his adversary.

Also, the components of the thriller are used to increase tension and horror. Historically, the standard thriller is a spy novel, and, indeed, Shafer is a spy for MI-6 and a former soldier, who has been trained in techniques of assassination and stealth. This training makes him a more formidable enemy for Cross. He is very careful not to establish a pattern in his crimes because he is familiar with criminal profiling, a technique developed by the FBI which is used to identify actual serial killers. Shafer is similar to the super-heroes we see in thrillers by Tom Clancy and other techno-thriller writers of the second half of the twentieth century. He is highly trained, physically capable, devious, solitary, and intelligent.

Cross, on the other hand, is an ordinary guy who has a family he loves and a job he takes seriously. He is also highly intelligent and brave, but he has emotional, professional and familial ties that prevent him from acting alone in his search for the killer, a departure from the standard thriller where the hero is not only dashing but deadly and is allowed to face the enemy alone, depending only on his own fortitude and skills.

One of the more interesting technical aspects of the novel is the idea of story.

Shafer tells stories about his killings to his gaming comrades while Cross tells us the story of his attempts to catch Shafer, and Patterson tells us the stories of both characters. So we have stories within stories, a layered process that culminates in the story readers picture in their mind as they read.

Patterson understands the value of story in assessing social concerns and other problems that plague us. Our lives are, in fact, stories that we construct, so we are not as different from fictional characters as we might like to think.

Finally, critics have remarked upon Patterson's very short chapters. Patterson, the former head of a national advertising agency, may be influenced by television commercials. Bernard and Zaleski report that he believes that people have very short attention spans (1996), so his novels offer chapters that average about three to four pages. This technique, influenced by television methodologies, may be very effective for busy people and may presage future literary techniques.

Themes

In the prologue to one of Patterson's previous novels, Jack & Jill, a killer preparing to assassinate Senator Daniel Fitzpatrick neatly sums up the major themes of Patterson's novels: "Horror stories and games are popular for a good reason . . .

Not the comfortable sit-around-the-campfire horror tales and games we used to cherish as kids, but the real live horror stories that are everywhere around us these days." The killer goes even further, saying that he "believed only in the validity of the game of chance." Horror, the idea that life is a game, and the idea that bad things happen by chance are integral themes in James Patterson's Alex Cross novels, but the ultimate effect is terror because of the irrationality and brutality of serial murders, especially in light of the national paranoia that has been engendered by the horror of such murders in the recent past.

Writers of serial killer novels use tactics perfected by terrorists, which typically began with the cult of the assassins in the medieval Middle East. These tactics include surprise, extreme violence, and the creation of fear and anxiety, among others. From one point of view, serial killers are terrorists, killing not for political reasons, but for personal reasons that are often seemingly insane, their deeds creating new definitions for the word "macabre." The sheer irrationality of their acts is terrifying, especially since they often appear to be perfectly normal men. Here the hoary literary theme of appearance versus reality crops up. That John Wayne Gacy played the part of a clown to entertain children at the same time that he was killing and burying young men under his house is unsettling. That the cleancut Ted Bundy could kill so many young women, apparently choosing them by how they parted their hair, is baffling. Few people can adequately explain good-looking Jeffrey Dahmer's freezer full of souvenir body parts. And many of the people who knew these killers did not guess that monsters lay behind their normal, average-guy miens. Horror centers around the unknown, and the idea that the nice man next door may have a collection of human body parts or the cast-off clothes of his victims is very, very frightening, particularly in a nation where people do not know each other very well, and urban alienation is a fact of life.

Terror lies in our fear of the irrationality exhibited by serial killers, who are so insane that they commit acts that are almost, but not quite, beyond imagination.

For Patterson's killer, a warped rationality lies in the game of chance, especially because chance is the way he chooses his victims. Shafer is the ultimate game player.

He uses dice to decide whether to kill or spare his victims. The lack of any sort of logic in his "game" inspires horror in the reader because it is a short step to imagine oneself the victim of an irrational serial killer. One of the most frightening crimes Shafer commits is the murder of Franklin Odenkirk, who just happens to get into Shafer's cab when the dice came up with the wrong number for him. What is so frightening is that his murder is totally random with no clear logical cause and effect except that it is part of Shafer's insanity. Shafer does not necessarily prefer to kill women or homosexuals, the usual

targets of serial killers. He will slaughter anyone who happens to cross his path when he is playing his game. The overarching theme is that life itself is a game with very high stakes; the loser dies. Since we all ultimately lose this particular game, Patterson moves the readers into the realm of existentialism, a hallmark of which is the hatred of death. While the reader rationally realizes the inevitability of death, he or she emotionally hates the very idea, especially if one's death is achieved through fear, horror and degradation. The latter is important in the fear of serial killers who may torture victims before killing them or mutilate the body after death to retrieve grisly souvenirs.

Patterson's methodology verges on that of literary naturalism wherein nature itself is a predator and characters think they have free will but do not. They are always being stalked by a nature "red in tooth and claw," as Tennyson said. Thus, the serial killers are metaphors for violent nature, always stalking, always killing, in some cosmic game of which we do not know the rules, and we always lose.

In the battle between good and evil, Alex Cross is particularly well suited to hunt down predators because he represents "Everyman" despite his Ph.D. in psychology and his physical skills. The fact that he is African-American only underscores the idea that race, religion and class really make no difference in the cosmic game. Cross is a rational human being in an irrational world, and he makes mistakes that threaten his own survival and that of his loved ones. He is the force for good in these books, but he is pathetically weak against the evil forces in our culture. He cannot prevent murder; he can only try to find and punish the murderers. He cannot stop death, but he can counter it with love, and that is another existential theme. Love gives us value in a chaotic world. In fact, it may be the only redeeming value in chaos.

Because they represent evil, the serial killers in Patterson's books usually do not feel guilt. They realize they are involved in a game and, from their point of view, they play it well, and they play to win. Patterson's killers rarely have a strong reason for their evil doings. Shafer has an inferiority complex because his brothers are both millionaires, and Patterson also suggests that he is manic depressive. In reality, he is an irrational force, a metaphor for the forces of irrationality in the universe, forces that affect all of us in the form of accidents, disease and death. For existentialists, death is the most irrational aspect of life. It is the absurd because it seems utterly ridiculous that we spend our lives working and suffering only to die and lose everything. The French existentialists tried to discover how to give our lives value in the face of death and concluded that value lies in simply living and trying to make the best of our lives despite our knowledge of certain defeat. Cross, then, is something of an existential hero in that he keeps trying to make things better and, on occasion, succeeds in defeating the Shafers of the world, only to face another personification of death in the form of another serial killer. In this book, Cross fails to kill Shafer. Death simply moves to Europe. Patterson seems to be saying that death cannot be defeated. When it is quashed in one place, it rises again in another place. We cannot win this game.

Adaptations

Pop Goes the Weasel is available as an abridged audio book read by Keith David and Roger Rees from Time Warner Audio books, in an unabridged version read by Michael Kramer, also available from Time Warner Audio Books, in a large print edition from G. K. Hall, and as an audio download read by Keith David and Roger Rees from Audible.com.

Key Questions

The popularity of books about serial killers and FBI profiling techniques that help catch them suggests a strong general interest in scientific detective methods, abnormal psychology and the philosophical problems we encounter today. Patterson examines these and other problems in Pop Goes the Weasel.

1. The titles of Patterson's Alex Cross series follows Agatha Christie's lead in being snippets of nursery rhymes. Many authors and even movies have used nursery rhymes, children's toys and children's books to create a sense of horror. How does the use of names and objects associated with children engender horror? What does this practice say about our society?

2. Is Shafer evil? Is he just psychotic? How would you define pure evil? Does homicidal psychosis constitute evil?

3. Shafer is brought to trial but is allowed to go free. How does Patterson critique the court system in the United States?

4. Shafer is characterized as having an inferiority complex as well as being manic depressive and psychotic. Is it possible that most serial killers feel inferior to others? If so, why do they and not others who also feel inferior, turn to killing?

5. Alex Cross mentions that it is unusual to find an African-American serial killer.

Though they do exist, they are quite rare. In fact, the majority of such criminals in America and Europe are white men. Why do you think white men are more likely to be serial killers?

6. There has been much criticism of roleplaying games, and Shafer's crimes are committed as part of such a game. Are these games dangerous? Why? What metaphor for life in general could be determined from Shafer's role-playing game?

7. The serial killer novel seems to be a variant of literary naturalism where people think they are in control of their lives but are actually at the mercy of natural forces such as environment, heredity, chance, instinct, or inner forces like psychological disturbances. Despite claims that the novels depict humans overcoming difficulties, these novels are usually pessimistic. How does Shafer fit this mold? Does Cross fit the mold also?

8. If, as literary naturalists claim, one's social, psychological and physical characteristics determine one's actions and beliefs, can we say that a person has free will? If there is no free will, can anyone be evil?

9. How do we define sanity? Who or what determines whether a person is sane or not?

S. A. Winn, Ph.D.

Literary Precedents

Many precedents for the current spate of serial killer novels exist, ranging from Elizabethan and Jacobean drama to Thomas Harris' The Silence of the Lambs. "Tragedies of blood" were very popular in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, including some of Shakespeare's works. Macbeth is a truly horrifying play, and at the end of Hamlet, the stage is littered with dead bodies. Perhaps in Hamlet, we can see the reason for the popularity of horror because of the relief that is felt when order is restored. A new king, Fortinbras; will take over, presumably to rule better than the previous rulers.

However, as Patrick Enright, a Shakespearean scholar, points out, Fortinbras is not especially promising. He has broken treaties and has slaughtered a number of his soldiers in a fight over a few acres of land.

Shakespeare does not seem to promise much with Fortinbras in control, and Patterson does not promise us much surcease from serial killers at the end of Pop Goes the Weasel. So the theme of removing one evil only to replace it with another continues in modern fiction.

Serial killers began fascinating the public in the Victorian period with Jack the Ripper's depredations, and, because he was never caught, we still theorize about his identity. In the second half of the twentieth century, John Fowles set the stage for the psychological crime novel in The Collector.

Fowles' work is not a thriller, but presents a psychological study of a man who kidnaps a young woman and keeps her imprisoned in his house until she dies. That her death is unintentional does nothing to relieve the horror of the idea of treating people as if they were insects, capable of being collected and neatly pinned to a board in a glass case. The Collector is the forerunner of the psychological crime novel which reached its apotheosis in Thomas Harris' The Silence of the Lambs in the 1980s, which was a hit both as a book and as a movie. Fans discovered Harris' previous foray into the world of the serial killer, Red Dragon, and a number of books about non-fictional serial killers have since been published. It is not really surprising that Harris' book received so much adulation. It was the age of Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer, two of the most notorious serial killers America has produced. Harris popularized the FBI's criminal profiling unit, and several former members of the unit have written their memoirs, explaining how they profile a killer. In fact, serial killers have received a great deal of publicity in the past fifteen years, possibly because they serve as metaphors for the seemingly random crime that plagues our cities and, increasingly, rural areas. They become metaphorical agents of chaos at a time when economic and social changes threaten our accustomed way of life. In this, our fascination with serial killers parallels the Elizabethan and Jacobean fascination with violence. They were experiencing the vast social and economic upheaval of the Renaissance. This parallel indicates the possibility that we are not merely decadent, but we are in the middle of a second Renaissance which is so unsettling that we find recourse in extremely irrational violence in order to reassure

ourselves that we really are sane in an insane world and that good will eventually triumph over evil.

Related Titles

Patterson's "Alex Cross" series debuted with Along Came a Spider and continued to chronicle Alex Cross' career with Kiss the Girls, Jack & Jill, Cat & Mouse, Pop Goes the Weasel and Roses are Red.

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