



## The Twenty-Year Death

*Ariel S. Winter*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# The Twenty-Year Death

*Ariel S. Winter*

**The Twenty-Year Death** Ariel S. Winter  
THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BOOK LIKE  
THE TWENTY-YEAR DEATH

A breathtaking first novel written in the form of three separate crime novels, each set in a different decade and penned in the style of a different giant of the mystery genre.

1931—

The body found in the gutter in France led the police inspector to the dead man's beautiful daughter—and to her hot-tempered American husband.

1941—

A hardboiled private eye hired to keep a movie studio's leading lady happy uncovers the truth behind the brutal slaying of a Hollywood starlet.

1951—

A desperate man pursuing his last chance at redemption finds himself with blood on his hands and the police on his trail...

Three complete novels that, taken together, tell a single epic story, about an author whose life is shattered when violence and tragedy consume the people closest to him. It is an ingenious and emotionally powerful debut performance from literary detective and former bookseller Ariel S. Winter, one that establishes this talented newcomer as a storyteller of the highest caliber.

## The Twenty-Year Death Details

Date : Published August 7th 2012 by Hard Case Crime (first published January 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9780857685810

Author : Ariel S. Winter

Format : Hardcover 670 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Noir, Pulp, Thriller, Mystery Thriller, Historical, Historical Fiction, American, American Fiction, Murder Mystery

 [Download The Twenty-Year Death ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Twenty-Year Death ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online The Twenty-Year Death Ariel S. Winter**

---

## From Reader Review The Twenty-Year Death for online ebook

### Chaunceton Bird says

One would think, given Ariel Winter's style, that this was written in 1938. It bleeds the same deep red as all classic noir and punches above its weight in substance and plot. This is a truly great work of pulpy crime fiction.

---

### Arah-Lynda says

Hands up! When it comes to hard boiled or pulp fiction as I tend to call it I am most assuredly not well read. I have read a few sure, but not enough to weigh in as well informed.

That said:

The Twenty Year Death is comprised of three interlinked stories each of which is told through the voice of a past master of the genre.

**Malvineau Prison:** 1931 France. When a dead man is found in a gutter, the investigation leads the authorities to Malvineau Prison and a series of unexplained disappearances. Our victim is a previous inmate and is survived by his beautiful teenage daughter (Clothilde) and her angst ridden, alcohol fueled, American husband. Told in the style of Georges Simenon.

**The Falling Star:** 1941 Hollywood. A Private Investigator is hired to keep his eye on the studio's leading lady Clothilde, now known as Chloe Rose. Her husband is still bathing his woes in alcohol and the allure of another woman's arms. When our P.I. stumbles upon the body of a brutally murdered young starlet things get dicey. Told in the style of Raymond Chandler.

**Police At The Funeral:** 1951 Maryland. Clhoe's gin soaked, two timing, down on his luck, loser husband Shem, spirals out of control with blood on his hands and the police in pursuit. Told in the Style of Jim Thompson.

Through the above noted stories, the reader is able to follow the course of Clothilde and Shem Rosenkrantz's life and marriage. I never found either one of them to be particularly interesting, except perhaps in the first story, which while not compelling characters even then, they at least piqued my curiosity to some degree.

I did recognize the style of Raymond Chandler in the second story, despite the fact that I found the overall effect to be low on pulp and heavy on cheese.

The last story was without a doubt my least favourite. My Mother once told me that if I had nothing good to say I should keep my mouth shut. Advice taken.

---

### F.R. says

I'm torn between being enthusiastic and ever so slightly churlish over this one. We have three novelettes welded together by character and theme. The first one is a French set mystery very much in the mould of Georges Simenon; the second is your Raymond Chandler Hollywood mystery; while the third is the Jim

Thompson special of a man facing desperation and brutality in a small city in the middle of nowhere. The first and third are excellent tales, which really understand their source material and stay expertly close to it; while if the Chandler tale is a bit of a let-down, well, many writers have tried and failed to impersonate Raymond Chandler. Read together or read separately you have some really good crime fiction here; crime fiction that comes to honour its history even as it plays with it.

And yet...

I don't really think it hangs together as a whole. The two characters whose journey we follow across these stories – American writer, Shem Rosenkrantz and his French wife Clothilde – are not given enough to do in the early tales for us to be invested enough in them in the third part. True, she plays a prominent role in the first tale but never stands out enough as a character, and as the stories progress she becomes little more than a beautiful, tragic cypher. Her husband goes from being just a loud and aggressive drunk in the first two tales, to the tragic anti-hero of the last. But it feels somewhat jarring as hitherto he hasn't been in any way a compulsive a character, and so it almost feels like that last story is struggling hard to make us care enough about him as the protagonist.

For it all to hang together properly we need a greater investment in the characters all the way though. We need Shem to be a suspect in the first story, and a new Terry Lennox-esque drinking buddy to the detective in the second, and then he can take his place in the sun in the third; while Clothilde, instead of fading further into the background with every page, should have been carved carefully into a full and working character, who is more than just the sum of her beauty and her insecurities.

So in the end we have a series of pastiches, and it's a really good series of pastiches, but I can't put my hand on my heart and say that it's anything more than that. I want it to be more than that. I want it to coalesce into some magnificent whole where, yes, each part is a pastiche, but together they try to say something important about the characters and the world(s) they live in. Instead what we have is an entertaining book, but one which has placed itself in a valley under the shadow of three giants.

---

## Josh says

**THE TWENTY YEAR DEATH** comprises three novels, the first of which, 'Malniveau Prison' is a police procedural with a hint of the hardboiled. The second, 'Falling Star' is a formulaic, by-the-numbers hardboiled PI set amongst the glitz and glamour of the movie biz tainted with blood and lies. Rounding out the trio is 'Police A At Funeral' - an ode to noir which highlights the struggle of a fractured man with everything to gain and nothing to lose. The concept is refreshing and the execution exemplary, Ariel S. Winter does a great job at paying homage to multiple genres while creating something new and easily re-readable.

Below are reviews for each of the three complete novels in 'The Twenty Year Death':

### **MALNIVEAU PRISON**

On a stormy night, water flows frequent bringing chill and the depressing discovery of the departed into a French bakers life. A body found in the gutter not only floods his basement but also drowns his perception of reality in a watery mist of the unreal. The small town (with a distinct country, almost rural feel) is rocked by the disguised murder. Little did the inhabitants (and police force) know, that Meranger's death, would lead to a far darker and disturbing truth, one that unveils serial murder and deceit in an unlikely form.

While led by two senior police officers, there is a lone wolf aspect to 'Malniveau Prison' with Pelleter often acting on instinct and keeping local law informed when it suits him. This direction enabled the story to

become semi detached from the typical police procedural while still maintaining the core elements. Accompanying the lead mystery are a number of other cases that present the police with added headaches, from neighbourhood disputes over pets, missing children, and a rather grisly discovery with all adding realism and providing depth to the day-to-day work undertaken by the undermanned outfit trying to keep the peace and contain the townsfolk hysteria.

There are some really interesting characters in this book with Mahossier (a child abductor currently serving his sentence at Malniveau and sometime police informant), Fournier (stand in warden and type cast Government official), Letreau (in charge of the local police who always seems one step behind Pelleter), and Clotilde Rosenkrantz (a 19yr old wife to an American writer who finds herself in the thick of the murder investigation). Author Ariel S. Winter gives each of his characters enough backstory to maintain the illusion of depth and humanity against the crime driven plot and investigation.

'Malniveau Prison' was a very enjoyable opening to THE TWENTY YEAR DEATH - 4 stars.

### **THE FALLING STAR**

The second book, 'The Falling Star' is a hardboiled PI novel that oozes pulp and was a refreshing turn of events for 'The Twenty Year Death' following the police procedural driven 'Malniveau Prison'. I see a little of Megan Abbott's noir Hollywood in this with an investigative angle baring likeness to James Ellory. 'Falling Star' is just that - a popular Americanised French starlet, Chloe Rose, is given protection by the studio who fear for her safety and sanity. Enlisting Dennis Foster as shadow and body guard yields far different results than designed when co-stars and lovers of co-stars start turning up dead. This was a true-to-era whodunit with a likable protagonist and simplistic linear plot. I had hoped for some connection with 'Malniveau Prison' but wasn't disappointed by the strength of Winter's delivery and effortless free flowing storytelling. 3.5 stars.

### **POLICE AT A FUNERAL**

The final installment in 'The Twenty Year Death' tells the story of Shem Rosencrantz, a has-been author turned accidental murder and the women who consume his thoughts and provoke his actions. His wife, the broken starlet Chloe Rose is living in an institution, his former wife is dead, his mistress Victoria - the hard boiled whore sleeps with anything who's likely to improve her cash flow, and his soon to be daughter in law who's grief is an outlet for taking advantage of - providing his will power falters. All these women play a key role in Shem's glorious fall from glitter to gutter.

Shem, broke, walked over by a pretty face, ignored by publishers, and lacking in friends, sees his family reduce by actions he cant be accounted for - wholeheartedly that is, is the epicentre for misery. After the will of his deceased wife is read, a window of possibility opens which stands to earn a big pay day providing his son and inheritor is out of the picture. Victoria plants the seed, Shem does the rest. Accidental murder soon leads to intent as the loose ends pile up matching a growing body count.

What starts in death ends in death. Ariel S. Winter has crafted an obliquely dynamic noir that's an ode to the greats and a testament of what's to come. I liked the flawed, fractured man that Shem was - a man who has risen, fallen, and comes to realise the only way out if facing those bright lights head on. The shortcomings aren't hidden, his central character isn't a thing of beauty but that's the allure. Coupled with a whore whose trick turning leads to unearthed facts distinctly similar to the current predicament and police on the hunt and you've got a melting pot of steaming backstory and smouldering murderous lust.

'Police At A Funeral' is just as good as the other books in the 'Twenty Year Death' - perhaps its the style, or the fact that it rounds out a characters' story so well that left such an impression that's sure to be lasting - either way, this was a hell of a read. The ending is one that cant be missed; true to the genre and one that exemplifies the dire situation Shem finds himself in. Beautifully written - 4 stars.

## Robert Carraher says

I've read trilogies that had five books (Douglas Adams) but I've never heard of a debut novel that was, in fact, three complete novels. To be fair, Ariel Winter did – well write isn't completely correct – publish a picture book. For children. And he has written short stories. For Elle, The Urbanite and McSweeney's.

Hardly the background you'd expect for a crime novelist, though in his former life as a book seller, he no doubt read some crime fiction. But to decide to write your debut novel, that is in fact three novels, in a genre you have never published anything in previously takes an audacious author. And since he decided to tackle such a task, why not really go out on a limb and write these three novels in the style of three giants of the genre? Or three subgenre of the genre.

That is exactly what Ariel S. Winter did with *The Twenty-Year Death*. First he tackles Georges Simenon, an author probably more important in Europe than America, but a seminal author of the crime fiction genre. His Commissaire (Jules) Maigret novels and short stories were a kind of bridge between the 'cozy' detective stories, where the crime was solved through deductive reasoning, and the police procedural, where the crime was solved through hard work and the collecting of evidence. Maigret appeared in Seventy-five novels and twenty-eight short stories between 1931 and 1972.

The first novel in *The Twenty-Year Death* is "Malniveau Prison" and, fittingly, Winter has modeled his Chief Inspector Pelleter on Maigret. Maigret, like Sherlock Holmes, was known for his pipes. With Pelleter, it is his ever-present cigars. Both policemen employ a mixed bag approach to detecting, at times relying on pure intuition, at other times on police methodology. A certain laconic manner is also present in both detectives, as is the penchant for mentoring and encouraging underlings. Both also have a fondness for beer and wine, although Maigret is more of the heavier drinker. I think it is no coincidence that "Malniveau Prison" takes place in 1931, the same year that the first Maigret story, *Pietr-le-Leton* was written.

In "Malniveau Prison" Pelleter is in the village of Verargent, near the prison of the title. He is there to question a serial child killer who has, in the vein of Hannibal Lector, helped Pelleter solve other crimes. While taking Mahossier's testimony, the killer drops a hint about a series of stabbings that have taken place at the prison but have been hushed up. At the same time, in the village, a body has been discovered lying in the gutter during a rain storm. Initially the victim was thought to have gotten drunk and drowned in the gutter, but it is soon discovered that the man was in fact stabbed to death. Further, he is not known to the people of the village and he also had his clothes changed after having been stabbed.

The victims identity is soon discovered to be that of an inmate at the prison, though he hasn't been reported missing from there and he is also the father of Clotilde-ma-Fleur, the French wife of the American writer, Shem Rosenkrantz, who has come to the village to write in peace and quiet. It is only after moving to Verargent that Clotilde discovers that her father, who she has not seen since she was a little girl, is housed at Malniveau. When Clotilde disappears and the bodies of other inmates float out of the ground in a farmers field during the continuing deluge of rain, Pelleter must solve the murder and try and find out who is behind the killings of other inmates.

Winter has managed to capture the style of the prolific Simenon in using many of what were to become standard tools of the trade in crime fiction. Pelleter doggedly follows the clues using a mix of scientific and police procedure (door to door canvassing, questioning of witnesses, the tedious examination of records and files) as well as intuition, logic and the process of elimination getting inside the heads of the characters to ascertain their possible motives– the author, Rosenkrantz – singularly self absorbed, but madly (perhaps too

madly) in love with and protective of his new bride-, the killer Mahossier and his psychotic crimes, the local police and business people. He follows many dead ends and pursues red herrings – the disappearance of a group of young boys, the possibility of Rosenkrantz involvement in the disappearance of his wife and how that could tie into the stabbed inmates – and meets many physical and mental challenges, seemingly from both good guys and bad guys until he is finally able to solve a puzzling case.

This first ‘book’ of the trio is totally satisfying and stands on its own two feet. It captures the voice of Simenon perfectly and if left unsigned and stashed in Simenon’s notes could easily have passed as his own work. Indeed, Winter could have stopped here and spent the next decade or two writing Pelletier novels to the utter delight of crime fiction fans everywhere. The plot is masterfully drawn and the sense of place as well as place in time, are wonderful. The characters, both in the French villagers and , the American Rosenkrantz and the melodramatic Clotilde are an achievement. Having succeeded so far, Winter then turns his hand to Raymond Chandler.

To be sure, Raymond Chandler is probably the most important and most copied writer in crime fiction. Many worthy writers have tried to capture that same style – the use of language, his sharp lyrical similes, and some of the finest dialog ever written in any genre. Most have failed. Most end up with parody and pastiche or at best works that are successful but pale in comparison. Chandler (in his own words) took “a cheap, shoddy and utterly lost kind of writing, and made of it something that intellectuals claw each other about?” Winter will have Chandler fans giggling with glee and those same scholars tearing their hair out. His detective, Dennis Foster could be a drinking buddy of Phillip Marlowe’s. It’s not hard to picture them playing chess, chasing the same women. They are both loners, both ex-cops. Both oh so quotable.

Titled “The Falling Star”, book two moves the scene ten years into the future and from France to Los Angeles. I’m sorry, it moves the scene to San Angeles. Much as Chandler wrote of Los Angeles and its environs pseudonymously - Bay City is Santa Monica, Gray Lake is Silver Lake – Winter does the same. Winter even goes so far as to spell ‘okay’ in the “Chandleresque” fashion; “Okey”. But it is not through a few clever name changes and quirky spelling habits that he manages to capture Chandler. His detective, Dennis Foster is cut from the same cloth; He refuses a prospective client’s money because he is ethically unsatisfied with the job and in reality, works for the interest of a character he is investigating.

“The Falling Star” opens with Foster being hired to bodyguard a Hollywood starlet; Chloe Rose – the same Clotilde Rozenkrantz of “Malniveau Prison”. She is still married to Shem, whose career is nearing its ebb, as he works as a script writer, though he has become less important as he sinks in to drunkenness and womanizing, usually with the younger actresses working on his super star wife’s movies. Foster is, as Phillip Marlowe was, not your stereotypical tough guy, but a complex, sometimes sentimental man. He doesn’t like working as a bodyguard, as his self-image is that of a detective. He also doesn’t like the fact that he is hired, in actuality, to NOT do a job and in the end discovers that he was lied to. But, in his diligent way uncovers another crime and as he wades through the Hollywood egos, the single minded police, the shady crime figures and the requisite femme fatale’s he not only sees justice done, but follows his own unique code of ethics which is defined as doing the right thing, not necessarily the legal thing.

I cannot recall a single author who captured Chandler so well. The plot and story could have been pulled from Chandler’s notebooks. The characters could have stepped out of the pages of *The Big Sleep* or *The Little Sister* or any of the novels. And the dialog is wholly satisfying and could have been penned by Chandler from his grave. When Foster narrates, “Hollywood. The talent was crazy and the people behind the scenes were crazier.” It is exactly in that lyrical, cynical fashion that Chandler would have used and when he finishes the story/book with, “That’s why the movies never made any sense. The screen’s not big enough to hold everyone in it.” He adds to the Chandler ideal.

Again, Winter has managed to do, what many have tried, only do it not just successfully but brilliantly. The reader will be left hoping this is not the last time that Winter channels the master.

And for the grand finale, and to wind up this marvelous odyssey of crime fiction, from the cozy/police procedural to the heart of the hardboiled era, Winter takes on another persona from the pantheon of 'crime fiction gods' by summoning the "Dimestore Dostoevsky", Jim Thompson. "Police At The Funeral" finds Shem Rosenkrantz in his home town in Maryland. He is now the kept man/pimp of the casual prostitute, Vee, the "should have been enticing, but she is just vulgar," Vee. Winter pulls out all the stops and would appear to embrace the "three brave lets" that Stephen King spoke of when discussing Thompson; "he let himself see everything, he let himself write it down, then he let himself publish it." It is totally over the top, and sinks to the deepest depths.

Chloe/Clotilde has been institutionalized in a mental hospital for the past ten years, since 1941 when "The Falling Star" took place. Shem has not written anything in years and is mostly forgotten by the public. He is home to hear the reading of the will of his first wife, Quinn where he is reunited with his son, Joe who we met in the opening scenes of "Star". Shem is hoping to inherit his ex-wife's estate but when the entire thing is left to his son, Joe, he finds himself nearly penniless and living off the money that Vee gets from her gangster Johns.

Shem has borrowed money from his publishers and from the Hollywood executives and even gamblers and underworld king pins to the extent where they won't even accept his phone calls or answer his telegrams anymore. Vee is about to abandon him as well, since he won't be getting his hands on his ex-wife's money and young Joe holds him in contempt, seeing Shem as nothing but a drunk who abandoned his mother. As the story progresses, Shem sinks deeper and deeper into drunkenness and desperation, but clings to the lie he tells himself that he deserves the money so as to keep Chloe Rose out of a state hospital. But when Joe is killed in a drunken argument with Shem, Shem enlists Vee's help in staging the scene as an accidental fire.

Winter captures the noir genre and the godfather of the noir movement, Thompson, to perfection. Shem is perfect as a desperate, egotistical, totally self-absorbed, devoid of any redeemable qualities protagonist. Vee is his perfect accomplice and finds her lineage in the buxom female characters that Thompson and many others of the noir subgenre drew so well. Every single time that Shem has a chance to redeem himself as a human being, he destroys it. His every 'real' motive is selfish. At every turn, he is his own worst enemy and has gone from a downward spiral to the final plunge into madness and damnation.

What Winter has accomplished with *The Twenty-Year Death* will have not just the crime fiction world, but the literary world talking for years to come. To have captured so perfectly the style and voice of three disparate giants and then set them in three separate but interconnected and absorbing stories is truly an accomplishment. It is hard to imagine that he could possibly hope to achieve this kind of tour de force in his future works, but then again, it's hard to believe that he could do it in the first place and right out of the gate.

Article first published as Book Review: *The Twenty-Year Death* by Ariel S. Winter on Blogcritics.

The Dirty Lowdown

---

## **Jonathan says**

Let me start off by saying that if you haven't heard of *Hard Case Crime* by now, you need to be shot. Well, maybe not shot. That might be a tad harsh. Maimed, then? Bludgeoned about the head and shoulders? Slapped with a catfish? Yeah, that's about right. When I'm king of the world, all justice will be dispensed via

catfish, so we'll go with that one.

Hard Case Crime is a line of books, formerly of Random House, now of Titan Books, that specializes in reprints of classic crime novels, new novels by old masters (see my review of *Getting Off* by the inimitable Lawrence Sanders—see also the interview in which the crime master hands me my ass), and crime tales from new writers in the genre. Their covers are inspired by the “pulp sleaze” aesthetic of the 40s, 50s, and 60s—a fact which makes them as visually pleasing as they are literarily pleasing... if that's even a real term.

One of their biggest titles to date—both in the media hype it has generated and the size of that huge honkin' tome—was something called *The Twenty-Year Death* by Ariel S. Winter. Maybe you've heard of it? It has certainly made the rounds on all the important news outlets—and for good reason. *The Twenty-Year Death* is unique among crime literature, for a number of reasons. For instance, it's Winter's first novel. Not all that impressive, really, until you consider that the book is a 670-page behemoth that is, in actuality, three separate books told in the style of three separate mystery/crime masters that intertwine to tell the story of a doomed novelist and his pretty but fragile wife. In a world where many publishers won't even consider a book from a first-time novelist that is over 80,000 words, that's nothing short of amazing. As Charles Ardai, creator of the Hard Case Crime label, said in a (somewhat) recent interview:

*“I fell in love with the book and bought it even though it's three times the length of our usual books (by far the longest book we've ever published—180,000 words), and even though you're always told, as a publisher, that first novels don't sell. I did it because it's a stunning performance and just left me grinning the widest grin I've had on my face for a long, long time.”*

Now that's a strong endorsement. But what else do you expect from the publisher of said book? The real brilliance of the novel, however, isn't its length. It's the way in which Winter is able to deftly mimic the styles of no less than three crime writers of decades past while at the same time managing to avoid making the narrative satirical or pastiche. The three separate books could easily stand on their own as novels to themselves, but Winter connects them all with an (at times tangential) thread that weaves its way through the narratives all the way to the grand finale at the end. Doing something like that on your first outing takes talent, perseverance, and guts. A whole freaking lot of guts.

The first book, “*Malvineau Prison*,” is set in a small French town during the year 1931. It's written in the dry, semi-clipped style of Georges Simenon, the world renowned French/Belgian mystery writer who created the Paris commissaire and investigator extraordinaire, Jules Maigret. The protagonist, a Paris policeman named Inspector Pelleter, arrives in the small town to speak with a prisoner currently being held in the nearby penitentiary, Malvineau Prison. The prisoner, whom Pelleter put in prison years ago for unspeakable crimes against children, has summoned him to the town to look into the murders of several prisoners. The guards don't seem to want to help, and the local police don't know dick, so it's up to Pelleter to ferret out the murderer. One of the slain prisoners is the father of a young French girl, Clotilde Rosenkrantz. She is shy, petite, and utterly lovely, inspiring in men an almost uncanny desire to protect her from the evils of the world. She is married to an impetuous (and often drunk) American novelist, Shem Rosenkrantz. Both of them live in the town near the prison. And even though the couple plays a supporting role at best in “*Malvineau Prison*,” theirs is the story that will tie each of the books together.

The second book, “*The Falling Star*,” owes its setting, tone, and stylistic idiosyncrasies to none other than Raymond Chandler—my hero. It's set in Hollywood/L.A. (or Santa Ana, as it's been renamed in the story—another Chandlerism) during 1941 and is told from the first person perspective of Dennis Foster, an ex-cop-turned-private-investigator with a nihilistic world view and a heart of gold. Clotilde Rosenkrantz has relocated to California and is now a big-time Hollywood star known as “*Chloe Rose*.” Shem Rosenkrantz is a screen writer/drunken/philanderer/sometimes pornographer who, though still dedicated to Clotilde, is, as Philip Marlowe might say, “a heel of the first order.” A movie studio hires Foster as a babysitter for Chloe Rose who is paranoid that she's being followed. It turns out that she really is paranoid and is only imagining

the whole thing, but in the process Foster stumbles upon Rosenkrantz's girlfriend--brutally stabbed and exsanguinated—which puts him on to a string of similar murders. Foster is discharged from the studio's employ, warned off the case, but in true Chanderlesque form, he refuses to let go and follows the bloody trail to the doorstep of Hollywood royalty.

The final book, titled "Police at the Funeral," is homage to Jim Thompson—you know, the guy who wrote *The Killer Inside Me* and dozens of other crime novels? Jump another 10 years in the future, and Shem Rosenkrantz is a washed-up novelist who owes thousands of dollars to creditors, shacks up with a known prostitute, and is running on the fumes of his alcoholism and washed-up literary career. For the last ten years, Chloe Rose has been living in a private "rest home" where she's been interred due to her paranoid and nervous delusions. At the opening of the narrative, Rosenkrantz is in Maryland for the reading of his rich ex-wife's will. The entire estate is left to his estranged son, Joseph (who hates his father's guts because... well, he ran out on his mother and he's also just a self-serving asshole). Rosenkrantz attempts to ingratiate himself upon his son and make up for the past (and also maybe con some money out of him so he can pay Chloe's overdue hospital bills), but Joseph will have none of it. There's a struggle, and Rosenkrantz accidentally kills his own son. Knowing that Rosenkrantz, as Joseph's closest living relative, stands to inherit a lot of money, the prostitute girlfriend helps him cover up the murder by setting the house on fire, but things are contemplated by... well, a lot of stuff. Eventually Rosenkrantz attempts cover up the first murder with yet more murders, and, as the narrative begins to spiral out of control, the meaning behind the novel's title starts to become apparent.

Winter masterfully channels each selected crime author. "Malvineau Prison" portrays the grim rigidity of life's circumstances often found in Simenon's work. "The Falling Star" captures one man's futile struggle against a corrupt world—the knight in rusting armor immortalized in Chandler's Philip Marlowe. And "Police at the Funeral" encapsulates the bleak, soulless world of Noir where no character is truly good, and all are motivated by the base emotions universal to the human condition. It's so masterful that, if you changed around some names and locations, you might think you were reading a long lost classic. But that unbelievable skill is also the very thing that hamstringing *The Twenty-Year Death*. If all you're doing is channeling the masters, you can't really cement your place as a master in your own right, now can you? I mean, No one ever called Weird Al Yankovic a musical genius, now did they?

Oh wait, they did? Damn it...

Kurt Cobain's opinion notwithstanding, I'm sticking with my original statement. While it was fun to pick out the familiar tropes and idioms in each story, there was little suspense to the narratives. Winter pulls off a virtuoso impersonation, true, but his talented mimicry is a double-edged sword that telegraphs the intent of each novel. If you're familiar with the genres—and it's safe to say you are if you're reading a book like *The Twenty-Year Death*—the events don't come as a surprise. Perhaps that is why the ending comes as something of a foregone conclusion rather than the bang modern readers are accustomed to. And to be honest, it took me way more time to this sucker than its 670 pages should have warranted. That probably had more to do with the drama that was going on in my personal life at the time I read it, but then again, maybe not. Whatever the reason, I might as well throw that out there too.

All things considered, I give *The Twenty-Year Death* four stars—albeit a hesitant four stars. It just doesn't seem quite there, you know? But at the same time, three and a half stars doesn't do it justice either. Three and three quarters maybe?

Ah, the hell with it. Four stars. Final answer.

<http://www.ireadabookonce.com/2013/01...>

## Toby says

Reads like a literature student who thought it would be easy to write a genre novel after reading a few works by great authors with readily identifiable styles, only Winter fails in this instance because he fails to understand what makes those authors so great - hint it's not the surface style. The Simenon pastiche is full of anachronistic Americanisms and Winter goes to great lengths to explain his fake Maigret's thought processes - something that Simenon never would have considered. The Chandler pastiche is so very lazy, the kind of thing hack writers have been doing for decades in an attempt to get published, more than anything else it's boring. And anyone who has looked beyond the major works of Jim Thompson will know what I mean when I say there's an undercurrent of mediocrity to his oeuvre - hack jobs that he dashed out for the pay, with very little thought for the meaning of the content, and that is how Winter's pastiche of him feels, like third rate mediocre Thompson. I've been wanting to read this for years and the disappointment in the reality of the work is palpable, what an absolute waste of 606 pages.

---

## Monique Snyman says

In the first segment of *The Twenty Year Death* by Ariel S. Winter, called "Malniveau Prison" starts off with the discovery of a corpse that's found in a gutter in France in 1931. The Chief Inspector, Pelleter is led to Clotilde-ma-Fleur Rosencrantz - the dead man's daughter - and her hot-tempered American husband, who is a successful writer. The second segment of the novel, "Falling Star" plays off in Los Angeles, 1941. Los Angeles private investigator, Dennis Foster is hired to keep an eye on the paranoid starlet called Chloe Rose. Chloe Rose, who is actually Clotilde-ma-Fleur Rosencrantz, moved to Los Angeles to become a star and so that her husband can write screenplays, but the death of her father still haunts her and it seems that someone's out to get her... The final part of the trilogy novel is called "Police at the Funeral", which is narrated by Shem Rosencrantz - Clotilde-ma-Fleur Rosencrantz's husband. He travels to Calvert, Maryland in 1951 for the reading of his first wife's will. By now, Clotilde is in a mental facility, Shem has squandered everything in support of his drinking habits. But when a fight leads to death, Shem hits rock bottom and the mysteries that surround Clotilde and Shem, are slowly revealed.

Three books in one, *The Twenty Year Death* stretches over three decades, three narrators and three styles, which in turn all blends into one riveting novel that is reminiscent of 1940's and 1950's crime noir novels. This Hard Case Crime book is exceptional in so many ways as debut author, Ariel S. Winter keeps true to the genre and marks his territory with exceptional characters, a great plot and a mystery that is sure to give the reader a lot of pleasure with his magnificent writing. Already making name for himself amongst some of the great authors of our time (Stephen King, David Morell and James Frey) with *The Twenty Year Death*, it's safe to say that this is not merely another one-hit-wonder's book...

What will keep the readers truly in suspense is how these mysteries unfold, whilst keeping the reader wondering "Why?" long after you've finished the book. Not all mysteries are resolved though, which keeps true to the genre in many ways, but as far as crime noir goes, *The Twenty Year Death* is definitely worthy of the title - Our Generation's *The Great Gatsby* - which is a title I don't hand out lightly. Mandatory for collectors of Hard Case Crime books, crime lovers and noir fanatics should definitely get their hands on it, but that's not the only people who would find delight in *The Twenty Year Death* though. Those dames who always enjoy watching old-school Hollywood films would find Clotilde (Chloe Rose) a compelling character as well and will definitely want to read about her tale.

With the characters so endearing and the writing so very good (word use, editing, formatting... they're all of the best quality), it's a good purchase and definitely something that you'd want to read again and again.

What's more is that this reviewer is hoping they make a movie out of the book too, it's about time that a new pulp film comes out in a grindhouse form and The Twenty Year Death would make a brilliant subject.

(originally posted at <http://www.killeraphrodite.com/2012/0...> )

---

## Eddie Dobiecki says

In general, I love the Hard Case Crime books (Except for Stephen King's "I shouldn't have to write an ending" addition, but I can hardly blame them for publishing it).

But this ambitious book, while encompassing a great deal of the types of fiction they publish, is a technically interesting work that falls flat in the telling.

This is going to be a bit of a long review, so hold on to your hats, folks. In my defense, this is three novels bundled as one.

Let's start off with some basics in case this is, for some reason, the first and only review you've read of the book:

This is Ariel S. Winter's first "novel", even though it's a trilogy. Seems like a tricky way to attempt to avoid the sophomore slump, to me. Time will tell whether it worked, or just set him up for a bigger fall.

So *The Twenty Year Death* is three distinct pieces, set in three distinct time periods, written in the style of three distinct authors from those time periods.

The first piece is *Malniveau Prison*, set in 1931 France, written in the style of George Simenon.

The second novel in this first novel is *The Falling Star*, set in '41 "San Angeles", California, and written Raymond-Chandler-esque.

The third tale is *Police at the Funeral*, dropping in in '51, supposed to be in "Calvert City", Maryland, written like Jim Thompson.

Set ten years apart from each other, the whole shebang takes place over twenty years, with two characters consistent throughout: Shem Rosenkrantz, and his wife Clotilde.

A lot of people loved this book, based on the ratings. But I'm sorry, while it's certainly an interesting idea to write three interconnected novels spanning the early ages of noir, the whole thing reads far more like a writing exercise for a class than it does a cohesive whole.

Spoiler alert: the characters who tie the whole series together don't take center stage until the last act, and even then it's really only one of them: Poor Shem Rosenkrantz, whose descent into alcoholism and petty childishness we get glimpses of in the first two books before being confronted full-bore with it in *Police at the Funeral*. Clotilde never gets to be a full character and, in fact, gets her most sympathetic portrayal in the first novel.

Ariel got the relative voices of the authors he was *homage-ing* right, at least, even down to the titles. *Malniveau Prison* is a bloodless murder mystery, with a simple explanatory title whose letters I constantly transposed as I read to form "Malvineau".. Reading it, I thought maybe I had missed something. I had to flip

ahead to be sure the other books weren't written in the same style, because it seemed like it had actually been translated from French.

*The Falling Star* has a certain edge to it, the outsider detective looking at the crannies of the glamour of Hollywood, its title a euphemism for the plot. It's no *The Big Sleep*, but it would fit in on a shelf.

*Police at the Funeral* rounds us out with a title that seems clumsy and rough-violent manner of narration with just a hint of the self-righteous whininess of a drunk, complete with a Jim Thompson protagonist flailing his way downward and acting surprised that when you do things, things are done. The title seems, in the context of this story, to have been created by an editor, rather than by the author. By an editor who flipped the book open at random, at that. This is not a dig: that's how titles were sometimes picked for this type of book, so it seems fitting.

Little geek note, here: *Police at the Funeral* is also the title of the fourth Campion novel by Margery Allingham. It was published in 1931.

Ariel tried a hint of the modern in each one: a Hannibal Lector type in *Malvineau*, a particularly grisly murder in *Star*, and an educated drunk in *Funeral*.

But honestly, the three novels here appeal to different tastes. And the thread which binds them all is exceedingly thin; The Rosenkrantz's are set-dressing in the first novel, McGuffins in the second, and only half-present in the third.

*Malvineau Prison*, being the type of parlor-mystery with all-too-convenient plot twists that you now find in shows like *Monk* and *Psych*, has an awful lot of dread cluttering it up. Winter tries hard to impose a sense of foreboding on what ends up being a particularly pedestrian tale whose ending is mostly clear from the beginning, but which is impossible to divine fully until the end due to a scarcity of actual *clues*.

That's not really a ding on it; it was common practice at the time. But there's a reason that these days the shows I mentioned focus so much on the clues the detective finds: I know I, as a reader, don't like to feel cheated or that my time was wasted. The ending is a cheat, and a goodly portion of the novel is spent on red herrings. If I mentioned them specifically, I'd ruin them. But the novel could have been shorter, and the Rosenkrantz subplot seemed forced.

*The Falling Star* is more my taste. Winter is no Chandler, but he does a decent job. I figured the rough outline of the ending pretty quickly, and had things wrapped up in my head as soon as the character whodidit was introduced, but that might just be because I've read similar stories a thousand times. Again, that's not necessarily a dig; the first time you get a Chandler twist you're surprised, the thousandth time you expect it. But here, again, the Rosenkrantz's are superfluous, and their transition from the characters they were in the first novel to these seems forced. Without ruining anything that you don't find out in the first ten pages, I can tell you that Clotilde Rosenkrantz has become Cloë Rose, and she thinks she's being followed. Her husband has become a true Drunk, as opposed to previously when he just Drank Too Much. But I didn't really feel like these were the same characters as ten years ago. And yes, people change in ten years, but it's the author's job to connect them, and I didn't feel connected. They were cutouts to fit the hole in the plot. The McGuffins go through some motions, but in the end they aren't people, they're objects for the Marlowe (whose name is Foster) to circle around and look at. I'll give one spoiler: at one point, Cloë has a breakdown and winds up in an institution. It's not much of a spoiler, since it comes out of almost nowhere and means almost nothing, except that it needed to happen for the next book. Admittedly, people in the story call her paranoid and flaky, but then, she's an actress in a noir story. So of course she is both those things, particularly since she's not given a real personality, and (another spoiler), she really was being followed.

*Police at the Funeral* is a typical hard-boiled piece of pulp. Usually, it's a man thrust into this type of story.

Often you've either got a hardcore character, or at least a character who winds up hardcore, who is thrust into the situation for reasons out of their control, or at least not their fault. And then there's the other kind of protagonist. The one where on page 1, you know this isn't going to go well for him, it's going to be entirely his fault, and you have absolutely no sympathy for him. Having recently read *Money Shot*, a piece with a female protagonist of the former type (really, it shouldn't be so uncommon, but it is, so there you go), this one was a dramatic disappointment of the latter type.

Shem Rosenkrantz was a shabby two-dimensional character in the other two novels. Now he's a shabby, whiny three-dimensional waste of narrative space. Clotilde is absent except for a few phone calls and another money motivation for Shem (private psychiatric hospitals cost money, donchaknow). Apparently, her forced-by-Winter breakdown was bad enough she's been in the bin a decade. Which doesn't say much about the therapeutic care she's receiving.

But really, she just needed to be not present, so Shem could be shackled up with a prostitute, because Winter knew such he couldn't pull off Clotilde in the role he wanted to create. He needed her gone, and in a way that wasn't the same as Shem's ex-wife, whose death is the reason he comes to his old town. The ex was rich, and he might get some money.

A big character in the third book is a character mentioned in passing in the first, and seen for a second in the second, Shem's son, Joe. He's an angry young man for reasons which are never made quite clear; he seems angry that Shem left his independently wealthy mother, who was a wreck for the next over twenty years. The divorce happened before Joe was even born, and while Shem was clearly a crappy father, the scale of anger here doesn't ring true. If they'd been left destitute by his leaving, and his mother had had to scrape barely by, it would make more sense. But the "You left us here in this mansion!" rage just doesn't work for me.

Everything Shem does is his fault, but we have to spend the third book listening to him justify it. Now this again isn't necessarily a dig. I've read it a million times. Winter's spin on it is to make him, rather than a simple shlub, a formerly famous author, which makes his decisions even dumber. But then, I've seen Californication, so it's not like I find it unbelievable.

But on this last book I almost put the whole thing down, because *I don't care* about Shem Rosenkrantz. *I don't like* Shem Rosenkrantz, and I didn't before this story even started. I didn't need a whole book devoted to his stupidity, particularly a completely unsurprising book devoted to his stupidity.

Unsurprising up until the ending, I suppose. These types of books often have formulaic endings. There's a limited number of ways it can go. And the ending we get isn't an uncommon ending for that type of book, don't get me wrong. But it was surprising Winter went with the ending most calculated to make me feel cheated.

Taking into account the context of the whole thing, where we've seen this character deteriorate over twenty years into a wreck of a human being, the ending's semi-cliffhanging nature is annoying. We don't get closure. The book ends a moment before Shem is about to...well, to do something, I won't spoil it. But suffice to say, it's not certain death, and it's not certain arrest. And there are lingering questions on both fronts, so we're left hanging not after one book, where this is simply the *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*-type ending, but rather three books that we've invested our time in. Thank you very little, Mr. Winter. Your *Twenty Year Death* doesn't actually end with a death.

I feel like Winter started this as a project, a writing exercise to see if he could write in these three authors's styles. And that it was outlined to get him from point A to point Z, characters be damned. As much of a nerd as I am for neat narrative concepts, I'll stick to authors whose *story*, rather than its *format* is their labor of love. Three stars for being passable but annoying.

## the gift says

120414: later addition: reading a review which highlights the gender politics, the misogyny, inherent in a Chandler novel, i have to consider this critical perspective, which is not one i adopt without pause. is the 'hard boiled', the 'detective noir', the 'pulp crime' novels of midcentury America flawed (in politics, racism, sexism etc.) in any way more than other artworks of the time? i have read some somewhat more contemporary crime novelists, such as Andrew Vachs (90s on) which suggests this style is not necessarily predicated on rather violent and naturalized machismo and i think in some ways i have given these original pulp crime authors something of a pass, due to the times, the tenor, of popular culture when written. this book uses their style, their attitude, their plots, as material, but in their awareness still resonate with me now...

first review: this is actually three books in one. i do not know if i would have read them individually, but the idea of writing each in the style of famous crime writers of the last century, writers of whom i have read many, this intrigued me. i have never read Simenon's Inspector Maigret novels, only his 'roman durs', but i think these are the ones referred to. and well. clean, simple, direct, this is longest and obliquely introduces the central protagonists. the second is in the style of Chandler, set in Hollywood with his patented wise guy detective narrating hardboiled and class-conscious murder, where the outcome is very moral without being moral. the last is narrated by the linking character of the three novels: pathetic, once-great American author, now reaching the bottom in his life after falling since the start. not a very likeable character but this is style of Jim Thompson...

so would these books i have read these if they had been separate? if they had been of the times? or written by each crime writer? is it even necessary that they are linked, that there are characters we come to understand if not like? well this i cannot answer for everyone. i have read several of each author, i have read much crime-pulp, i have interest in short, sharp, dark novels in these despairing philosophical voices. so for me, this was a fun, easy read, and in reading them it is not simply the plots, the philosophical if moral and not decadent or nihilistic attitude that seems to underlay each case, coming out in a different way each time. i do not know if it works better with continuing characters, that each story could not be told alone, but i read one each for three days straight, and sometimes each catches the right voice- and thus reminding me what i have liked (class consciousnesses) or not really liked (extravagant metaphors and similes)- or misses the right voice (when the writer is drunk, i think more David Goodis than Thompson). this was an engaging read, though if you have not read much of the writers parodied, you might be less interested. i do not know if this is best place to start critical reading but they are homage more than pastiche, they are well written though not literary writing, and despite total length short, each story, and maybe you can read them alone. maybe something more if you read them together, if you are alert to the postmodern genre games...

---

## Dan Schwent says

Shem Rosenkrantz and his French wife Clothilde's lives turn toxic over the course of two decades.

I owned this gerbil masher since it came out but couldn't bring myself to read it until the Kindle edition went on sale for ninety nine cents.

The Twenty Year Death is three interlinked novellas, each written in the voice of a past master. Malniveau Prison is written in the style of Georges Simenon. The Falling Star is written in the style of Raymond

Chandler. Police at the Funeral is written in the style of Jim Thompson.

I've never read any Georges Simenon so I can't really say whether or not Malniveau Prison feels like one of his works. It's a locked room mystery of sorts with a convict found dead on the street. Clothilde is in her late teens and her husband is well on his way down the path of douchebaggery. The case itself was entertaining in an old school mystery kind of way but nothing remarkable. It's only been a couple days but I've already forgotten the names of the lead detectives.

By the time The Falling Star begins, Cholthilde is now Chloe Rose, a Hollywood starlet, and her husband is an even bigger asshole than before. A Marlowesque detective named Dennis Foster is hired to find the guy stalking her and stumbles upon the scenes of multiple murders. This story felt like a Marlowe homage but only because it features the wise-cracking detective that Raymond Chandler popularized and has been imitated quite a bit over the last eighty years or so. Unlike Chandler's work, however, there aren't quotable similes on every page and it lacks Marlowe's world-weariness. It felt like a reread of a much better work.

Police at the Funeral sees Shem Rosenkrantz at his lowest point, drunk, penniless, and living with a lady of questionable morals named Vee. He's in Maryland for his first wife's funeral when someone accidentally dies and Shem goes into a gin-filled Thompson-style spiral into madness. I could tell this was supposed to feel like a Thompson book since it features a drunken loser going off the rails but didn't have that undercurrent of insanity from the beginning that the better Jim Thompson books have. Much like the Chandler pastiche, there was a noticeable lack of colorful lines.

I had high hopes for this. It did not meet them. It's touted as some great work of literature, told in the voices of three masters. I can't speak from the Simenon but the Chandler and Thompson pastiches are without soul, without the spark that made the original works great. It's pretty much a collection of pastiches linked by an asshole character who doesn't take center stage until the end.

Tfitoby got the bullet in the right chamber when he said *"Reads like a literature student who thought it would be easy to write a genre novel after reading a few works by great authors with readily identifiable styles"* This thing screams style over substance. Instead of a fitting tribute to the masters, it's more like a ventriloquism act where you catch the guy's lips moving. Two out of five stars.

---

## **Lou says**

The first book opens up with a scene of pouring with rain and a baker screaming murder as he finds a John doe lying sprawled out dead in the street. There are more troubles on the streets and behind the bars that pop up and show their face. Suspicion falls upon those behind bars, inmates and staff.

This story was a good read and I was enjoying the pursuit of truth.

The first book was all around a good noir crime thriller.

The second and third book just did not grab my attention is the right wording to use I think.

The narrative voice and the story pace just was not appealing to me. There was possibly some missing thrill factor and was slightly drawn out.

---

## **John says**

This is a big, ambitious and very good book. It comprises three crime novels, the first set in 1931, the second

in 1941 and the third in 1951. The three are written in the style of, respectively, Georges Simenon, Raymond Chandler and Jim Thompson. They're linked by the character of alcoholic writer Shem Rosenkrantz, who's almost peripheral in the first novel, moves closer to the focus of the second, and is the protagonist and first-person narrator of the third.

The first novel is set in a small French town near to which stands the grim prison where many of the town's citizens work. Inspector Pelleter, a Maigret substitute (although smoking cigars rather than a pipe!), comes here to visit one of the prisoners, a particularly horrendous serial killer. He stays on in the town when the corpses of murdered prisoners start to be found. Who could have killed these men? And, for that matter, how could they have gotten out of the prison? A subplot involves Shem Rosenkrantz and his beautiful, much younger second wife Clotilde-ma-Fleur, who happens to be the daughter of the first-discovered dead prisoner.

I liked the "Simenon" novel very much, although the solution to the mystery didn't quite satisfy (and I was bemused that a French town could have a pub, in which beer was served in pints!); and I was absolutely bowled over by the "Thompson" novel, in which, with Clotilde by now long resident in a mental institution, Shem must attend the reading of his first wife's will and try to make amends to the son who hates him. In true Thompson style, it's a searing tale of a man who's not entirely evil but who does evil things, who destroys others unaware that the person he really wants to destroy is himself. It's a novel that I know is going to stick with me for a long time, because Winter very skillfully makes us (or me, anyway!) identify and sympathize with Shem to the extent that even the vilest of his deeds seem quite reasonable, or at the very least an inescapable consequence of events over which Shem himself has no control.

I'd expected to like the "Chandler" novel best of all, yet it was the only one where I really had doubts. It's set in Hollywood, where a Marlowe substitute, Dennis Foster, is hired by a movie studio to be a sort of reassuring presence around its star actress, who has developed a paranoia that she's being stalked by a menacing stranger. That star actress is, under another name, Clotilde Rosenkrantz. In addition to her neurosis she's having to deal with the fact that Shem is openly carrying on with one of the other actresses. When Marlowe discovers Shem's mistress murdered and hideously mutilated he begins to realize that this is just the latest victim of a crazed serial killer.

There's a lot more to the novel than the mystery; Winter gives us at least the semblance of Chandler's habit of weaving several stories together. He also captures well the petty, non-malicious, casual bigotries that tend to taint Chandler's work. But overall the writing seems a tad more Hammett or Cain than Chandler, while Foster is quite a lot sourer than Marlowe; it's difficult to see him as the ruffled knight, even though he eventually delivers a knightly deed or two as resolution to the tale. And there are some ugly sentences that I couldn't quite imagine coming from Chandler's typewriter ("She pulled at her lip and put her eyes in their corners so they weren't on me").

Throughout, the book is magnificently readable -- especially in the "Thompson" section -- and it's much to be recommended. I read the *Hard Case Crime* hardback in which, presumably with the smaller-format paperback in mind, the type is almost big enough for this to be a large-print edition! This of course helps the book's 670 pages flip by pretty quickly, but really it's Winter's powerful storytelling and deft writing that make *The Twenty-Year Death* such an enjoyably addictive experience.

---

## Randy says

Ever since THE TWENTY YEAR DEATH was announced, I've eagerly awaited a chance to read it. The idea of a crime novel (actually three crime novels) spanning twenty years and written in the style of a novelist

prominent during the period of that novel struck me as a unique idea. The overall story is of an author in which tragedy strikes all those around him.

MALNIVEAU PRISON has a French inspector come to a small town in 1931, one with a prison, to visit a criminal he put away years ago and gets caught up in a murder investigation of a man found stabbed to death in the street in the middle of a horrific thunderstorm. When the body is identified, it's found to be a man sentenced to life in that same prison. Records say he'd been transferred to another facility. The man's daughter lives in the small town and is married to an older man, an American novelist working on a new book.

THE FALLING STAR is set in 1941 Southern California. PI Dennis Foster is hired by a film studio to babysit the star of their new picture so that it can be finished. A French actress married to an alcoholic ex-novelist that can't even write a proper script anymore, she believes she's being followed by a strange man. When a young starlet, seeing the drunken writer-husband, is found murdered, slashed to death, there may be more to the story than everyone believed.

POLICE AT THE FUNERAL finds the writer, Shem Ronsenkrantz, at center stage this time. He's in Maryland for the reading of his first wife's will, from a prominent family, and sees his estranged son for the first time in years. His French wife is still in the private sanitarium and the film money has run out. He's tapped out as well, owes everybody, and hopes for something in the will. The young woman he lives with also wants something. She's tired of being "pimped" out to support them both, though Shem doesn't see himself in that light. He just wants money to support his wife. But the hood she's seeing now also has his loans.

Georges Simenon, Raymond Chandler, and Jim Thompson are the three authors used in these three books. As luck would have it, I just recently got reacquainted with Simenon's work after a many years absence and I've loved Chandler for years. Not as familiar with Thompson's work(hangs his head in shame), having read only one novel, and a tie-in at that. The author here did a fine job with these three novels within a novel(and each can be read separately without any problem).

I look forward to his next book and his own style.

---

## Cheryl says

Composed of 3 short, connected crime novels, with a writer and his wife appearing in each of them. A bit of a gimmicky concept, but not bad.

Malvineau Prison: Set in 1931 France, written in the style of Georges Simenon. Interesting characters and setting. 3 stars.

The Falling Star: Set in 1941 Hollywood, written in the style of Raymond Chandler. I thought the writing wasn't as strong, especially the characters. 2 and 1/2 stars.

Police at the Funeral: Set in 1951 Maryland, written in the style of Jim Thompson. Very gritty and violent. The plot wasn't too original, but the characters were well-developed. 3 stars.

---