



The Black Curtain

Cornell Woolrich

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After a slight accident on a tawdry street, Frank Townsend goes home - only to discover he hasn't been there in years. Suffering from amnesia, accused of murder, and the object of a deadly pursuit, he must overcome the crime that time has thrust upon him...

The Black Curtain Details

Date : Published July 12th 1982 by Ballantine Books (first published 1941)

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Author : Cornell Woolrich

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From Reader Review The Black Curtain for online ebook

Jim Thomas says

Dark and atmospheric yet somewhat dated. Woolrich is a sadly forgotten writer considering his tremendous turnout of short stories and novels. One of his books was one of the 5 chosen by The American Library in their collection called American Noir of the 30s & 40s. That book is the strange I Married a Dead Man, a hard one to put down. Another one of his creations was the basis for one of Alfred Hitchcock's most famous movies, Rear Window. The Black Curtain was worth the time since it was less than 200 pages but unless you like writing of this type, I'd suggest some of his other creations especially the aforementioned I Married a Dead Man.

Dan Schwent says

Frank Townsend is knocked unconscious by a falling piece of plaster. When he comes to, he wanders home to find his apartment empty and his wife gone. He tracks his wife down to find that three years are missing from his memories and that he ran out on her sometime after the last day he can remember. Frank tries to rebuild his fragmented life until a man from the missing three years shows up looking for Frank. Will Frank pierce The Black Curtain and put the missing piece of his life in place?

This Woolrich was okay, if a little long-winded for what it was. Frank Townsend, aka Dan Neary, loses three years of memories after a bump on the head, then goes about clearing his name. The revelation of who the man in the gray suit was was one of the better parts of the story. Everything else seemed a little convoluted and flimsy. The women, as per usual in Woolrich's stories, didn't have many favorable qualities. Who would let a man back into their life after he ran out on them without a word three years before, no questions asked?

As a friend recently commented, Woolrich's Black series were probably his way of coping with his alcoholic blackouts and it's nowhere more apparent than in The Black Curtain. Townsend trying to piece together the fragments of his memories is very similar to someone trying to figure out what they did during a blackout.

Not my favorite Woolrich but not terrible.

Edoardo Nicoletti says

Quasi perfetto, in particolare la graduale accelerazione senza scampo alcuno della seconda parte della storia. Come una locomotiva che si avvia sbuffando e alla fine, in piena corsa, "fischia come urlasse d'angoscia".

Mark Bacon says

I recommend the 1941 novel, The Black Curtain, as an introduction to Woolrich. In it, Frank Townsend gets a bump on the head and suddenly three years of his life disappears—or reappears. He searches for his home and discovers his apartment is vacant and that his wife has moved out. He finally finds her and she tells him she hasn't seen him for three years.

So starts this different version of an amnesia story. After he's been back with his wife a short time, Townsend discovers someone is following him. The more dangerous the pursuit becomes, the more Townsend realizes he must figure out what happened during the missing three years.

His struggle to discover his past leads him through a threatening world of suspicious looks and dead ends. The fast-paced story includes a case of murder and a decrepit, isolated mansion. The Dancing Detective

Like most roman noir novels, there isn't exactly a Hollywood ending. The plot twists at the end leave some unanswered questions, but each step along the quick trip through Townsend's cloudy world is worth the effort and then some.

Carla Remy says

Another book about amnesia. I just have to say I have never even heard about anyone who ever had amnesia. Yet it is a constant plot trope in books and movies.

Tony says

THE BLACK CURTAIN. (1941). Cornell Woolrich. ***1/2.

This early mystery novel from Woolrich revolves around one of his favorite themes – amnesia. Amnesia is the 'black curtain' referred to by the author. This time, the protagonist goes into a state of amnesia when he is hit on the head. Three years later, he is again hit on the head by a piece of a falling building. Suddenly, he recovers his memory and he is back to who he once was – with an exception; the police are after him for murder – a murder he knows he didn't commit. The plot of this work is full of holes big enough to drive a trash truck through – if you can still find a trash truck that isn't being used to contain demonstrators instead of picking up trash. This is a middling read by Woolrich that is probably only on the list of dedicated fans.

Karl says

Originally "The Black Curtain" by Cornell Woolrich was published in 1941. The times were different than today. All the men wore hats and suits and most everyone smoked. In 1945, a poll asked Americans, "Do you know what television is?" Most didn't. There certainly were no credit cards, so pennies mattered. The book should not be judged by today's standards much less by today's world.

Although the story that Woolrich tells here is highly improbable, the paranoia that he is able to build and maintain throughout the story is something quite amazing. Not knowing who you are or what you did has been utilized often in today's television and books.

I seem to recall reading an Ace paperback of this book many years ago, however I enjoyed it much more this time around.

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Jack Seabrook (Introduction Author)

Matt Mahurin (Cover Painting)

Jacob McMurray (Jacket design)

Sophie says

First everything was blurred. Then he could feel hands fumbling around him, lots of hands. They weren't actually touching him; they were touching things that touched him. He got their feel one step removed.

That's the opening of this novel, and I get what the author is trying to do here—convey the character's bewilderment about where he is and what is happening to him—but unfortunately the entire novel feels like it's "one step removed." There's a detached feeling to the action, as if there's a screen between us and the character making the action more opaque than I would have liked.

The setup of the novel is intriguing, and the author does a good job of creating suspense and a feeling of menace, but I didn't find the ultimate resolution all that convincing. (view spoiler) Overall, I enjoyed the story but thought it could have been better.

Antje says

Cornell Woolrich enttäuscht mich auch mit diesem seiner Bücher nicht. Von der ersten Seite an zieht die Handlung einen in den Strudel von Gegenwart und Vergangenheit des Frank Townsend, der sich in einem schier unlösbaren Dilemma befindet. Durch einen Schlag auf dem Kopf scheint sein Leben nicht mehr das, was es einst war. Seine Adresse, die er am Morgen auf dem Weg zur Arbeit verließ, stimmt nicht mehr. Seine Ehefrau, von der er sich noch verabschiedet hatte, ist umgezogen und behauptet, dass sie ihn seit drei Jahren vermisst hat. Sein Hut trägt die Initialen D.N. Doch dem nicht genug, muss er feststellen, dass er von einem unbekanntem Mann unerbittlich verfolgt und bedroht wird. Townsend sieht nur noch eine Möglichkeit, sich aus dieser unheilvollen Situation zu retten. Er muss die verlorenen drei Jahre wiederfinden.

Die Geschichte ist derart gekonnt erzählt, dass ich das Gefühl hatte, vor einer großen Leinwand zu sitzen und in einem Film Noir einzutauchen. Ohne Ausschweifungen, sondern mit wenigen und gebündelten Worten, treibt Woolrich seine Handlung mit steigender Spannung voran. Es ist eben ein Krimi der alten wunderbaren Garde, bei dem die Handlung allein vom Hauptakteur getragen wird, der unschuldig von der Polizei gejagt wird und ihr immer wieder durch Zufälle entkommt.

Obwohl ich am Ende mit zwei offenen Fragen zurückbleibe, deren Beantwortung mir selbst nach reiflicher Überlegung nicht gelingen mag, verdient Woolrichs abenteuerliche Geschichte fünf Sterne.

David K. Lemons says

I've had Woolrich on my shelf for almost 20 years after I bought it in Webster, Texas. Xavier, an old friend of mine, reminded me of this writer of whom I had occasionally read favorable reviews. Well, *The Black Curtain* was pretty good for this genre. Woolrich probably got better as he wrote more. A couple of times his physical detail was a little hard to smoothly follow. I could imagine him doing repairs at home and bumping

his head on a shelf he had just put there an hour ago. The tone was good (the real reason for reading noir thrillers). I'll read the other novel I have by him now.

Rebecca McNutt says

Presenting a horrific yet plausible scenario of repression and crime, *The Black Curtain* has faded into the vast amount of other crime novels in the world but definitely deserves to be read more often.

Karen says

Vintage 1941 pulp fiction -- really fun. Like reading a noir movie. Some of the phraseology set me back a bit. On page 73, "His face was an unbaked cruller of rage." First of all, crullers are fried, not baked. Second of all, what the? But I could overlook that in the midst of such an intriguing, fast-moving plot. Then on page 178, "The ticket seller had hard crullers of stubbornness around his eyes." Seriously, take a break, Woolrich, treat yourself to a doughnut and a cup of coffee and get past this obsession. There were maybe a few plot holes but, honestly, I was having too much fun reading it to be very picky (other than that cruller thing). Overall, a great, quick, moody diversion.

Randolph says

It all starts when a guy gets hit by a piece of falling masonry. When he gets up he finds himself wearing somebody else's clothes and with a three year chunk of his life missing. He gets his old job back and finds his wife, who thought he had run out on her, but he doesn't have a clue what happened for the last three years. Then somebody he doesn't know recognizes him and points a gun at him...

From this point on Woolrich layers on the noir paranoia in this little existential mystery suspense thriller.

Not the best of his novellas, the plot suffers a little from the improbability (or inexplicability) of the circumstances and Woolrich doesn't do a good enough job this time to make us completely forget about them.

Bruce says

In the world of *The Black Curtain* paranoia runs rampant. The protagonist is besieged by he knows not what, and Woolrich's rich command of metaphor effectively insinuates an insidious malevolence into the reader's sensibility. Here's a small sample:

The things of the night began to slink into view. Blue shadows, like tentatively clutching fingers, began a slow creep toward Townsend out from under the trees. Deepening, advancing only furtively when they weren't watched closely, pretending to be arrested when they were. At first azure, scarcely visible in the still-strong light of day. Then dark blue, like ink rolling sluggishly amidst the grass blades and dyeing them from roots up. At last, freed of the vigilance of the closing red eye of the sun, turning black, showing their true color.

The denouement, (view spoiler)

byAx says

Sospeso nel tempo

Frank Townsend ha un piccolo incidente, grazie al quale scopre di aver dimenticato gli ultimi 3 anni della sua vita.

Oltre che fuori tempo, Frank si sente anche un uomo fuori posto, non sa più chi è. Decide quindi di ritrovare il suo passato.

Partendo da questa premessa, Frank - un Jason Bourne ante litteram targato 1941 - comincia un percorso a ostacoli fatto di ombre, inseguimenti e indizi che lo guidano verso l'altra sua vita, quella *sospesa*.

Woolrich, qui, imposta un ritmo altalenante: dopo una partenza briosa, il romanzo, nonostante l'azione, pare rilassarsi, per poi impennare verso il finale, più interessante che credibile.
