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The Spectrum of English Murder: The Detective Fiction of Henry Lancelot Aubrey-Fletcher and G. D. H. and Margaret Cole

Curtis Evans

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That British mysteries from the Golden Age of detective fiction (customarily defined as the period between the First and Second World Wars) were not only aesthetically but ideologically conservative has long been a commonplace of mystery genre criticism. In The Spectrum of English Murder, Curtis Evans challenges this view by looking at the detective fiction of Henry Lancelot Aubrey-Fletcher and G. D. H. and Margaret Cole, a trio of popular British crime writers from the Golden Age. Although Aubrey-Fletcher, a Great War veteran and member of his country's traditional gentry elite, and the Coles, prominent socialist intellectuals, wrote about fictional murder from polar points of the political spectrum, the detective fiction of all three authors is alike in that it often defies conventional expectations of between-the-wars British mystery writing. Aubrey-Fletcher's detective fiction, published between 1926 and 1957 under the pseudonym "Henry Wade," offers searching and sometimes searing criticism of myriad aspects of English society. A pioneer of both the police procedural and the crime novel, Aubrey-Fletcher was an important figure in the movement to transform the classical tale of detection. As a sideline from their serious writing on politics and economics, the Coles between 1923 and 1946 produced a significant body of detective fiction, much of it mocking cherished conservative values. Although less formally innovative in their mystery writing than Aubrey-Fletcher, the husband and wife were exceptional within the genre at this time for their employment of leftist-tinged satire and farce. The Spectrum of English Murder offers both fans and scholars of Golden Age detective fiction an entertaining and illuminating analysis of the works of three of the period's most interesting crime writers, all of whom merit modern-day revival.

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