

From the Desk of George Hodel [Part I]

Extant Works: The 1910s and 1920s



LUIGIWARREN

NOV 05, 2025



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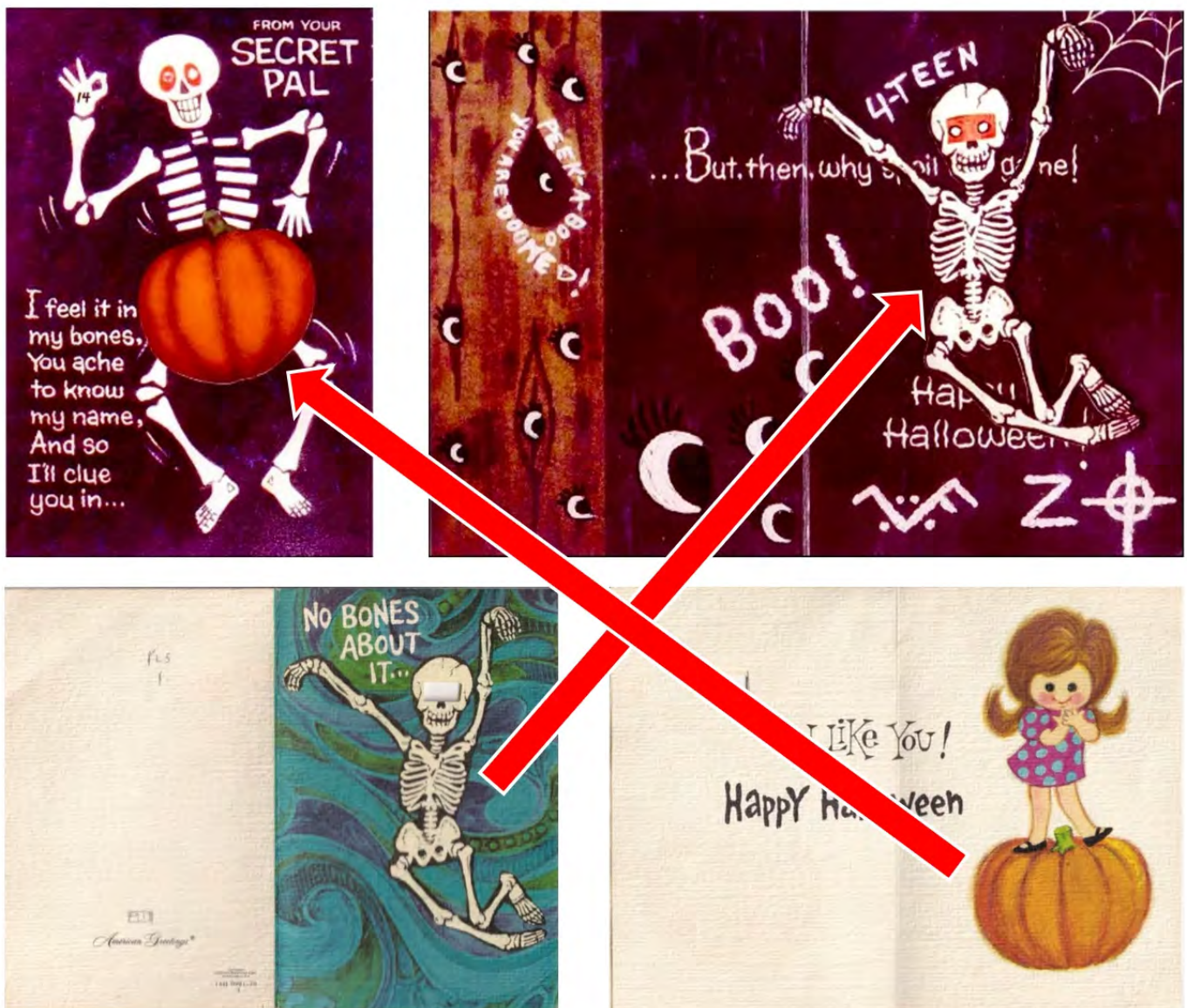


San Francisco, circa 1992 (Most Evil II/SKH)

It has been two years since the last big development in the Zodiac case—a December 2023 announcement on the identification by DNA of human remains in [the unsolved disappearance of Donna Lass](#). There was one minor but interesting breakthrough in January of this year when a Reddit user found a commercial greeting card on eBay which is clearly the origin for paste-up elements in Zodiac’s October 1970 “Halloween Card.” That complex, taunting message purports to offer clues to the killer’s identity. It takes the form of a collage based upon an off-the-shelf “Secret Pal” Halloween card.

Zodiac added text, mysterious symbols, and disembodied eyes to the original artwork. He also pasted a cut-out pumpkin graphic over the pelvis of the skeleton depicted on the front of the card and pasted a cut-out skeleton within the card's gatefold.

The elusive original “Secret Pal” card was finally run to ground in 2023—also through an eBay listing—but the source of the paste-up additions remained unknown. Now we can see that the pumpkin and gatefold skeleton graphics were excised from a different greeting card, perhaps with a craft knife, rather than being ready-made products such as Halloween stickers. The precision with which these two elements were extracted is impressive. If you look closely at the pumpkin you can see how Zodiac cut well inside the borders of the source graphic to avoid carrying over extraneous material (the feet of the little girl) into his collage. Certainly, this find confirms that we are dealing with a meticulous individual with an eye for detail and excellent hand-eye coordination.



Apart from that, though, 2025 is shaping up to be a disappointment in terms of new clues to the riddle of the Zodiac. I have not seen anything to write home about even in the way of novel theories, speculations, or proposed cipher solutions. Since we seem to be treading water in the case I hereby offer a bit of consolidation, in the shape of a survey and roadmap covering the extant writings of my preferred Zodiac suspect, Dr. George Hill Hodel. Today, I will focus on what has come down to us from the desk of George Hodel dating from the second and third decades of the last century.

Biographical Context

George Hill Hodel (1907-1999) was born in Los Angeles to George Hodel and Esther Leov Hodel, immigrants originally from Russia and France, respectively. George Sr. was a businessman who made his living in insurance and real estate, and seems to have been quite an “operator.” Esther Leov had been a dentist in Paris, and was a real “culture vulture” with high-falutin’ social connections. In 1912, two years before the outbreak of World War I, George Jr. moved to [Belle Époque](#) Paris along with his mother. There he attended one of the first model schools established by [Dr. Maria Montessori](#) outside of Italy, and lodged close to the Eiffel Tower with [Prince Paul Troubetskoy](#) of the illustrious [House of Troubetskoy](#), at that time among the most [sought-after sculptors](#) in the world. The Hodels returned to the US within a year.

CALIFORNIANS OFF FOR EUROPE.
The following Californians sailed for Europe this week: From San Francisco—Henry Garner, Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Georges, Mrs. George H. Hodel and Master George H. Hodel, Adolph Jehnninger. From Los Angeles—Sophia Gruber.

The San Francisco Chronicle
September 8, 1912



PAUL TROUBETSKOY PHOTOGRAPHED BY ARNOLD GENTHE, 1914. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS. THE CROWLEY.

Events in Society Circles

Russian Sculptor Vegetarian.

While on this subject of diet and fasting it is interesting to note that the distinguished Russian sculptor, Prince Paul Troubetskoy, who is staying just now in Chicago, is a pronounced, rabid, out and out, fanatical vegetarian. He does not even eat butter or things cooked in milk, holding that both partake only of the animal in their construction. Bread, fruits, nuts, and vegetables cooked in water form his diet. He uses olive oil as an agent in his cooking instead of butter, but above all he relies on fruits of all kinds to form his menu.

He is of fine physique, well built, rather spare, smooth shaven, not young, with an impressive head, rather somber expression and piercing, all seeing eyes. His manner is dignified, though genial. He speaks little English, preferring French or Italian.

Princess Troubetskoy is Swedish by birth. She seems much younger than her husband, and is of an attractive type, slender, well built, with an exquisite complexion and the ineffable air of a Parisienne.

The Troubetskoy's live in Paris in a house set in a garden. They have several dogs and a Russian wolf as a pet. "A charming animal," said the prince, "gentle and friendly." His master fed him only on vegetables. When, as an experiment, the wolf was given meat, it was observed that he quickly developed fiercer tendencies, which faded away when he was put back on his leguminous diet. Unfortunately he had a habit of howling.

Have you ever heard the howl of a wolf? It is desolation, horror, and utter hopelessness embodied in sound even when it comes to you from a great distance. When you hear it from the next door garden its unbearable becomes easily understood. The neighbors tossed over to the Russian pet a ball of poison and food neatly combined. He howls no more, but Prince Troubetskoy mourns his untimely taking off. This wolf is immortalized, however, in some of the most vivid and brilliant of the prince's work now on exhibit at the Art Institute.

Several Chicago Commissions.

This distinguished sculptor is executing several commissions here in Chicago, among them a charming portrait statuette of Mrs. Harold McCormick. He has also under way similar likenesses of Julius Rosenwald and his daughter, Miss Rosenwald, another of Mrs. Leatherbee and one of Mrs. Edward Moore's little boy. The prince works quickly, deftly, and for the most part silently.

Prince Troubetskoy is in the vanguard of modern Russia, and there is nothing more up to date than a modern Russian. He knew Tolstol well. When he was in Naples he made a trip to Capri especially to see Gorky. Yet he numbers among those who have sat or stood for him Russian grand dukes and other important court officials.

He is a brother of Prince Nicholas Troubetskoy, the well known Russian artist, who married Mrs. Annette Rives Chandler after her divorce from her erratic first husband.

The Troubetskoy's belong to that interesting, brilliant, and smart set of New Yorkers who revolve about Mrs. Guinness and her intimates living on or near Washington square. It is a rather dazzling coterie of artists, musicians, literateurs, and people of the world, who are giving a cosmopolitan flavor like that of London to New York society. Money alone cannot make a really illustrious and lustrous society. There must be brains, wit, originality, and that elusive, indefinable quality called "chic" as well.

Chicago Tribune
February 18, 1912

George was an only child. Hailed as a prodigy, his well-to-do parents raised him as if he were a princeling. He was tutored in piano by [Vernon Spencer](#), an erudite English musician, educator, and composer—and also something of a martinet, according to contemporary press accounts. George's prospects as a concert virtuoso waned by his early teens but, based on sky-high test scores, he was recruited to the "Genetic Studies of Genius" run by IQ pioneer [Professor Lewis Terman](#) at Stanford University—the most famous longitudinal study in the history of psychological research.

VETERAN MUSIC FIGURE TAKEN BY DEATH AT 73

Vernon Spencer, 73, veteran music instructor in Europe and Los Angeles and former president of the Los Angeles Music Teachers Association, died of a heart ailment Sunday in the Glendale Sanitarium.

Mr. Spencer's published compositions included music for the piano, voice and violin. He resided at 4452 Dundee Drive. Funeral services will be conducted at 2:30 p.m. tomorrow in the Church of the Recessional, Forest Lawn Memorial Park.

Born in England, Mr. Spencer studied there and at the Royal Conservatory in Leipzig. He later taught at this conservatory and in Berlin before becoming director of the Nebraska Wesleyan University Conservatory of Music for five years. Since coming to Los Angeles in 1910, he edited The Music Student two years, headed the Music Teachers Association in 1913-15 and was an assistant professor of music at UCLA three years.

Mr. Spencer leaves his widow Ruth, four children, Vernon P., Dr. Carl, James and Elsa Spencer; four grandchildren and, in England, a brother and sister.

GAR Leader Gets Aides

Five women who will assist Comdr. Charles L. Chappel, 102, in conducting meetings of Stanton Post No. 55, Grand Army of the Republic, will be seated at the organization's regular meeting at 10:30 a.m. Friday in Patriotic Hall.

The Los Angeles Times
January 11, 1949

GOT A CHILD OF GENIUS IN YOUR HOME?

Professor Lewis M. Terman of Stanford Wants to Study Your Supernormal Offspring.

Have you a child who is a genius—an especially gifted offspring. If so, Prof. Lewis M. Terman, authority on educational psychology at Stanford University, would like to know about it. In fact, he has a corps of experts out combing the California schools in search of the child genius, for he asserts that in the development of the gifted child the supernormal child, like a tremendously important work of the State.

From the parental point of view there's a monster IF in the situation, however. Fond fathers and mothers are not the ones to decide on their child's brain power. No, in the coldly scientific eyes of the Terman mental testers their testimony is not worth much.

But by a simple and logical probing of the young mind, Dr. Terman

The San Francisco Examiner
July 17, 1921

Dr. Lewis Terman, Stanford Psychologist, on Trail of Genius, Reports on Study of Physical and Mental Traits of 1,000 Super-Youngsters

By NADIA LAVROVA

One thousand highly gifted children of California actually form the material for a veritable scientific investigation on the origin and development of genius undertaken by Professor Lewis Terman, executive head of the Department of Psychology at the Leland Stanford Junior University and author of the Army mental test, methods now used in schools throughout the United States under the name of "Stanford Test".

but the results thus thrown open to the student are still "terra incognita": it is time to move forward, explore and consolidate.

A tremendous survey of the things accomplished at the Leland Stanford Jr. University will of necessity be superficial. Laboriously gathered data cannot be chopped up into neat paragraphs. A general idea of the work is all that can be given here.

Boys in Lead

In 1919 Stanford University established a research fellowship for the study of gifted children. This was a stimulus for the psychology staff for a research search for cases. As interest built, they arranged for the child to fill out. By the spring of 1921 considerable supplementary data had been secured. Dr. Terman stated:

"The results of these 111 cases have not been published, but it may be stated that they substantiate the following tentative conclusions:

1. There is probably a somewhat higher incidence of intellectual superiority among boys than among girls.
2. In physical growth and general health gifted children are



DR. LEWIS M. TERMAN

The San Francisco Examiner
April 12, 1925

For his 15th birthday George's parents gifted him with his own guest house, built alongside their South Pasadena home. The Swiss chalet-style addition, which is today a designated historical landmark ([HCM #802](#)), was designed by an old friend of the Hodels, [Alexander Zelenko](#), a distinguished Russian architect and academic.¹

BOY'S HOME IS PLANNED BY RUSSIAN

*Famous Architect Decides
to Remain in City After
Completing Work*

BY ALMA WHITAKER

Not many boys can boast that a famous architect came over from Russia to build them a house as a fifteenth birthday present.

This was the distinction which fell upon young George Hill Hodel, who attained his fifteenth birthday on the 10th inst. and fell heir on the same day to a beautiful Swiss-Russian residence high on the hill at 6512 Walnut Hill avenue, built and completed by M. Alexander Zelenko of Moscow to the day.

M. Zelenko, life-long friend of M. and Madame G. Hodel, was invited to come to this country six months ago for this purpose—to build a worthy house for their son. The result is a most interesting structure comprising nine rooms, and two oriental outdoor rooms. Terraced gardens lead up to the house, which is a last-word model of modern efficiency although outwardly having all the charm of the old Russian and Swiss architecture.

Everything inside, including the heating arrangements, work by electricity—a mere pressed button warms any room. An unusual feature is a sunken fireplace with inglenooks, framed in Russian carving.

M. Zelenko is an artist as well as an architect, and four hand-painted panels of great beauty bear witness to his skill in the main living-room.

M. Zelenko is not a stranger to the United States, having been deputed with a mission from the Czar's government in 1913 to visit Europe and America to study educational methods. His report in book form graces the Russian archives today. When the Bolsheviks came into power M. Zelenko was offered the portfolio of the Ministry of Education, but being out of sympathy with the Bolsheviks, he declined in favor of Maxim Gorky, his friend, who now holds it.

And now he is so enamored of California that he has built a home in the Japanese style, replete with faithful detail, where he intends living with his charming wife on Walnut Hill—never to return to Russia as a subject.



Hodel Family Photograph Showing Alexander and Anna Zelenko with Sergei Rachmaninoff

**The Los Angeles Times
October 15, 1922**

George attended South Pasadena High School and gained accelerated entry to the [California Institute for Technology](#) (Caltech), matriculating as a freshman at the age of 15 in fall of 1923. Originally a vocational school, Caltech had only recently taken on its current name and role as a word-class research university. Hodel does not seem to have declared a major, but he reportedly had ambitions to be a chemical engineer. For unknown reasons, George left Caltech after his freshman year, never to return.

Hodel's first job out of Caltech was as a cub reporter for the [Los Angeles Record](#), the smallest and most intellectual of six major papers competing for readership in 1920s Los Angeles.² Two years after Hodel's apprenticeship [Aggie Underwood](#) (1902-1984), the so-called "[Grande Dame of L.A. Journalism](#)," cut her teeth at the *Record* as a

switchboard operator. She would go on to christen, report, hype, and theatrically embellish many of the most notorious murders in the city’s history. George’s tenure at the *Record* encompassed the “[crime of the century](#),” the kidnap-murder of 14-year-old Bobby Franks by two boy geniuses in Chicago, Nathan Leopold and Dickie Loeb—a long-running story which became a national sensation. Following that half-year stint at the *Record* George went on to work a variety of jobs: as a taxicab driver, classical music compere on the radio, advertising copywriter, and in the rare book trade. He was also active in the arts as a poet, publisher, photographer, and thespian.

ALL COURSES					
FIRST YEAR					
SUBJECTS	Subject Number	Hours per Week			Units
		Class	Lab.	Prep.	
REQUIRED (Throughout the Year)					
English and History	En. 1 a, b, c.	3	0	6	9
Physics	Ph. 2 a, b, c.	3	2	4	9
Chemistry	Ch. 1 a, b, c.	3	6	3	12
Mathematics	Ma. 1 a, b, c.	3	0	6	9
Orientation	SS. 1 a, b, c.	1	0	0	1
Drawing	D. 1 a, b, c.	0	3	0	3
{ Drawing	D. 1 d, 2 a, b.	0	3	0	3
{ or Shop	Sh. 1-4	0	4	0	4
Physical Education	PE.	0	3	0	3
Military Science	Mi. 1 a, b, c.	1	2	1	4
*Elementary Analysis (3rd Term)	Ma. 5	2	0	2	4
SUMMER (FIRST THREE WEEKS)					
{ Shop	Sh. 1-4	0	4	0	4
{ or Drawing	D. 1 d, 2 a, b.	0	3	0	3

Caltech Freshman Curriculum (1923)



The Los Angeles Record (Red Ink White Lies/RLW)

Hodel’s movements become a bit murky in the mid to late 1920s. Recently, evidence has emerged that he moved to New York for a period, apparently gaining admittance to the newly established and quite prestigious [International House](#) in Morningside Heights. This was and remains a sort of mini-United Nations on the Hudson—a communal residence expressly designed to facilitate the mingling of high-flyers from across the globe with select North American peers. Generally, its residents were students at universities and professional schools in the city. It is not clear how Hodel ended up there after his abortive studies at Caltech, or where he was studying at the time. What is known is that by the late 1920s Hodel had moved to San Francisco and rebooted his undergraduate career at the University of California at Berkeley on a pre-med track. He had also taken his first wife—Emilia, a librarian and antiquarian books expert, and a future San Francisco arts journalist.

Childhood Poetry (1917, Age 9)

George Hodel's first extant writing is a poem quoted in a *Los Angeles Herald* article celebrating the 9-year-old *wunderkind*. It deals with the then ongoing Great War:

Armies; scattered; withered—what for?
What has Europe gained by war?
When will cannon's mouth be cold
From killing by the hundredfold?
German's strength and England's flower
Ruthlessly destroyed for lust and power!
Rulers' jealousy, monarch's hate;
Not the sudden turns of fate,
Has made this murderous field!
When will kaiser, king and tzar
Be no more, human lives to mar?

On the face of it, we have here a budding angry young man, and potentially a future scourge of the Establishment. With one notable exception, discussed below, George Hodel's later published writings reveal no interest in politics. As an adult, and often a paid adviser to authority, he seems to have worn a mask of professional impartiality and scientific detachment. However, George's son, Steven K. Hodel (henceforth, SKH), has observed that, privately, his father was a misanthrope with a decidedly pessimistic view of the human race. Perhaps the kernel of that mindset is on display here.

BOY OF NINE CHIEF SOLOIST AT SHRINE HOLIDAY EXERCISES



George Hodel, young musician who will perform at Fall of Bastille celebration

A little boy, 9 years old, has been chosen by the French committee to play before the Belgian mission at the French celebration at Shrine auditorium today.

The lad, thus chosen above scores of adult musicians, is George Hodel, son of Mr. and Mrs. George Hodel of 6446 Walnut Hill avenue. He is a pupil of Vernon Spencer and is regarded in the world of music as a genius.

Though a mere youngster, he has studied music for years and he was selected as a piano soloist by the French committee entirely because of his great talent. While he has composed several musical works, he will play Massenet and Chaminade selections when he appears before the Belgian mission.

This little French boy is declared by his friends to be a genius along several lines. At the age of 9 he is in the seventh grade at school and he has already written many poems. Recently his verses have been on the European war. One of them, written a short time before the fall of the Russian czar, reads:

Armies; scattered; withered—what for?
What has Europe gained by war?
When will cannon's mouth be cold
From killing by the hundredfold?
German's strength and England's flower
Ruthlessly destroyed for lust and power!
Rulers' jealousy, monarchs' hate;
Not the sudden turns of fate,
Has made this murderous field!
When will kaiser, king and czar
Be no more, human lives to mar?

Since there are grounds to suspect Hodel might have been involved in the notorious [1921 kidnap-murder of Father Patrick Heslin](#) in San Francisco, I note in passing that the European war theme has echoes in the bizarre, clever-yet-childish ransom note issued in that case—"I HAD CHARGE OF A MACHINE GUN IN THE ARGONNE AND POURED THOUSANDS OF BULLETS INTO STRUGGLING MEN..."

"A Sad, Sad Tale" (1921, Age 13)

The next bit of writing is a mordant short story published in the South Pasadena High School yearbook, the [Copa de Oro '21](#). In "A Sad, Sad Tale," our narrator is accosted by a stranger in a railway carriage. This talkative chap relates the story of a housewife who postpones signing up for a life policy on her husband on account of spilling a cup of tea, and consequently misses out on a big payday and a life of ease when he is promptly run over by a street car. By the end we realize the stranger is an insurance salesman trying to gin up anxiety (what we might call "FOMO") to push his product. George's use of irony is impressive for a 13-year-old, as is his worldly knowledge, such as his reference to the fortune hunters ("big tippers") who prey upon rich widows.



A Sad, Sad Tale



There were only two of us in the smoking-car, a reflective individual across the aisle and myself. He broke the silence first. He threw away his five-cent cigar, crossed his knees, and began:

"Friend, have you ever pondered on the instability and commutability of happiness and contentment?"

I replied that my mind had never run in that particular direction.

"Ah, 'tis sad, very sad—let me tell you a little story which I think is a remarkable illustration of that principle. First, tell me, are you married?" "I am."

"Then this concerns you all the more."

"There was a very nice middle-aged lady by the name of Mrs.—let me recollect, oh—yes—by the name of Mrs. Johnson. One afternoon she was having a visit with a friend, and gossiping, the way women do, over a cup. While particularly interested in a scandal or something, she spilled a bit of her tea. Please remember that, as it does an important part in the future development of the story. She spilt some tea. Thus she waited two or three minutes fixing it up, and in this inconsiderable period of time, she missed her car. As the cars passed at periods of twenty minutes, she re-entered the house to grieve over her misfortune. But she had more to grieve over than she knew of, as her husband had just come home and was waiting for his dinner. Very angrily now, her husband was trying to decide whether or not to take out an insurance policy with her as the beneficiary of the spoils. Well, no dinner had made him decide to drop the policy at once."

"Remarkable coincidence, remarkable," I interrupted.

"Yes, and true as Abraham Lincoln. Well, the soul-distressing part of it is, this man was run over by a street-car and completely killed the next day. You know in a case like that, if he had been insured, he would have received double indemnity—double! But his poor wife was penniless and had to go to work sweeping floors. Deprived from the pleasures of life by a cup of tea—think of it!"

I thought of poor Mrs. Johnson. If she had received the insurance money, she would have either lost it to some "good tipper," or she would have kept it and ridden around Pasadena in a little electric with a tinkling bell, going every Sunday to the Methodist prayer meets, and lived 'til fifty-five. Here she worked, grew hale and hearty, went on picnics, sent her sons to public schools instead of a private educational institution for excellent moral, mental and physical training, "and lived" 'til eighty-five.

But I was afraid of offending my distressed friend and replied that her case was indeed sad.



"Yes," he answered, "and now do you want to leave your wife in that condition? Why a cup of tea might ruin her whole life, and so, before it is too late, take out one of our excellent life insurance policies giving absolute protection to—"

But I started out.

"But listen," he went on, "a cup of tea, just a cup of tea, just a cup of tea might—"

But that is all I heard.

GEORGE HODEL.

"A Sad, Sad Tale" was presumably informed by George Jr. hearing his insurance man father talk about his work. In the 1950 Black Dahlia probe surveillance transcripts a conversation is logged which demonstrates George Hodel's cynical attitude towards the insurance business (see *Hodel-Black Dahlia Case File No. 30-1268*, SKH, p. 75). It seems he was not averse to pulling an insurance fiddle to turn some quick cash, which might account for this police report concerning the theft of a purportedly extremely valuable Chinese sacrificial tablet in 1947:

Prowler takes \$25,000 tablet

A 1400-year-old Chinese sacrificial tablet valued at \$25,000 was reported stolen today from the Hollywood home of Dr. George H. Hodel.

Dr. Hodel said a prowler entered his home at 5121 Franklin Ave. last night and took the 11-inch ebony tablet, its 40 Chinese characters inlaid with precious stones.

Daily News
November 19, 1947

Again in reference to the 1921 Father Heslin kidnapping, I will note here that there was a curious line in the ransom note—a sentence that was originally withheld from the newspapers—which justified the oddly specific ransom of \$6500 by relating it to a financial loss the kidnapper allegedly incurred as a result of the Catholic Church's doctrine on divorce. This rationale was a work of pure imagination—like the rest of the note, including its far-fetched specifics on elaborate boobytraps and pyrotechnic gadgets. But it does suggest a peculiar type of imagination—just conceivably, that of a precocious and half-worldly, half-naive child.

RANSOM LETTER IS PROBED BY EXPERT

The ransom letter demanding \$6500 for Father Heslin is the work of a crazy man obsessed by a purpose, who is not a foreigner but English trained, and who has widely read upon popular science subjects, and who is operating under a mental delusion, and who used probably a rebuilt Underwood typewriter in constructing it.

This is the opinion of E. O. Heinrichs, of Berkeley, micro-analyst, criminal psychologist and Government handwriting expert, who today declared in his opinion that the kidnaping of the Colma priest was the work of educated rather than ignorant agencies. Heinrichs said:

Understand that I have not made more than a casual examination of the typewritten reproduction of the ransom note and the handwritten additions as reproduced in newspapers. A detailed examination of the originals, which I have not seen, would undoubtedly reveal more. But of this much I am morally certain.

NEW TREND OF PROBE.

The declaration of Heinrichs that the kidnapers of Father Heslin were probably the work of more or less educated agencies gave a new trend to the police investigation into the missing priest's disappearance today. With it came a new sidelight on the character of the man or men thought to have the Colma priest in custody. Heinrichs said:

There is more to be learned from the typewriting than from the handwriting. The handwriting shows that it was not written by a Japanese or by a foreigner from Europe, but rather by a person of English training. Its peculiarities may come from the using of a left hand by a person accustomed normally to writing with the right hand.

The typewritten portion of the note contains real information. The machine used was probably a rebuilt Underwood. It shows the Underwood capital letters with changes that indicate that it may have been rebuilt. The use of the word "dope" shows that the writer was not familiar with narcotics, as narcotic users do not use that word, preferring rather "snow." "C. and M." and words of a similar character.

MAN WIDELY READ.

The mention of scientific details indicates that the writer has read widely on popular science matters as well as chemistry. He was familiar with a typewriter, but not a regular user of it. His technicality about the length of the candle, the phrase "ignite" used in connection with the matches and other details show that.

Summing up the analysis, I should say that he was less interested in a ransom than in the carrying out of a purpose based upon a mental delusion, and that his purpose was rather to produce fear than to get results. In other words, he is probably crazy.

**San Francisco Bulletin
August 6, 1921**

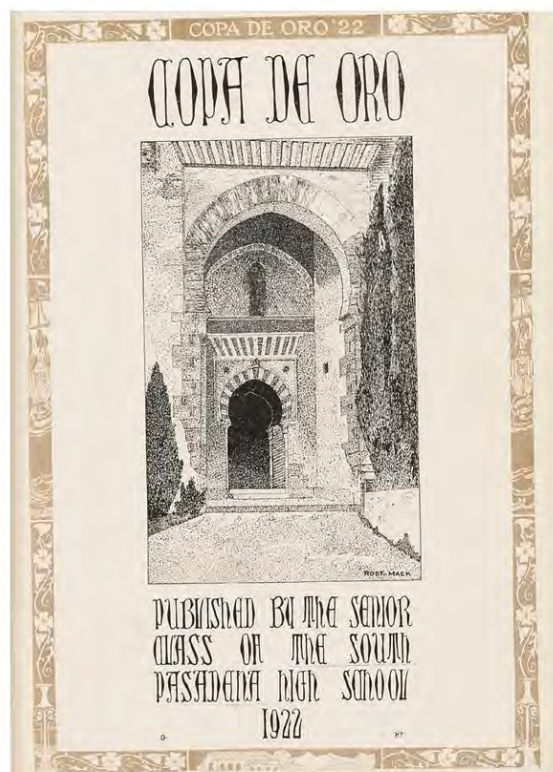
"K" (1922, Age 14)

The following year's [Copa de Oro '22](#) has a second George Hodel short story entitled simply "K." This one startlingly foreshadows the author's career as a serial killer with a highly theatrical urban terrorist crime signature.

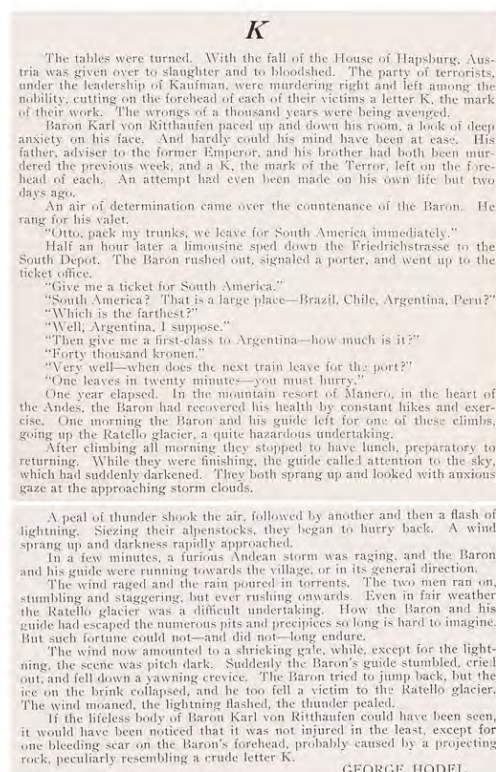
"K" tells of a Baron von Ritthausen and his efforts to escape the murderous followers of a crime lord named Kaufman who has taken over Austria in the wake of the fall of the House of Hapsburg. The henchmen's trademark is to carve the letter "K" into the foreheads of their victims among the nobility—the old exploiters. Even while George labels Kaufman's gang "the party of terrorists," he appears to take their part in saying, "The wrongs of a thousand years were being avenged." The Baron flees to Argentina and the Andes mountain resort of Manero (like Kaufman, an invention of the author). He seems safe at last. Only, skiing over a glacier in a thunderstorm, he tumbles down a

ravine to his doom. The Baron is killed when his head hits a projecting rock, which leaves a gash “peculiarly resembling a crude letter K.” Divine retribution!

Gee... That certainly sounds like the kind of story that the future self-proclaimed “Black Dahlia Avenger” and self-proclaimed “Zodiac” (aka “Z”) would write!



George Hodel



SKH originally presented this find in [The Early Years: Part 1](#) (2021). In researching this post I realized that he actually missed out most of his father’s story, including the title and everything on the first page. SKH therefore describes the story as “untitled” and presents only the finale describing the trek over the glacier and the deadly fall. I also missed the preceding page when I reviewed the source document a while back, so perhaps we both came across an incomplete scan of the yearbook. Regardless, while what appeared to be an untitled gothic vignette in *The Early Years* was already pretty suspect, the full story with its single-letter title seems much “worse,” foreshadowing-wise. It also makes a lot more sense. Indeed, it is an impressive outing for a child of 14.

SPHS “Tiger” and “California Tech” Journalism (1922-24, Age 14-16)

Hodel’s bio in the 1923 edition of South Pasadena High School’s *Copa de Oro* annual confirms his early interest in journalism, as he is listed as a member of staff on the school paper, the *Tiger*. George would continue to pursue his avocation at Caltech the

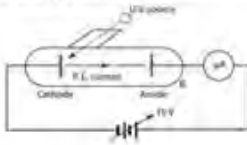
following year. He is credited as “Editorial Assistant” on the production of the 1924 Caltech *Big T* annual, which publication also notes his position as “Reporter” on the weekly college newspaper, the *California Tech*. I am not aware of any identifiable writings from these early jobs, but they might await us in the archives somewhere.



I have always found it interesting that the photoelectric trigger mechanism Zodiac depicts in his jokey “Bus Bomb” diagram bears a resemblance to the apparatus which Caltech chief [Professor Robert Millikan](#) built to test Einstein’s photoelectric equation and measure Planck’s constant (h), one of the achievements for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize just weeks after George Hodel began at the Institute. Did Hodel cover that big event as a cub reporter for the *California Tech*? At minimum, he would surely have been well aware of the story.

Millikan's Experimental Verification of Einstein's Photoelectric Equation

In 1916 Robert Millikan verified the Einstein photoelectric equation using apparatus similar to that shown in the figure below. Millikan reversed the potential difference between the anode and cathode such that the anode was now negatively charged. Electrons emitted by light shone onto the cathode now face a 'potential barrier' and will only reach the anode if they have a certain amount of energy. The situation is analogous to a car freewheeling along the flat and meeting a hill. The car will reach the top of the hill only if its kinetic energy is greater than or equal to its potential energy at the top of the hill.



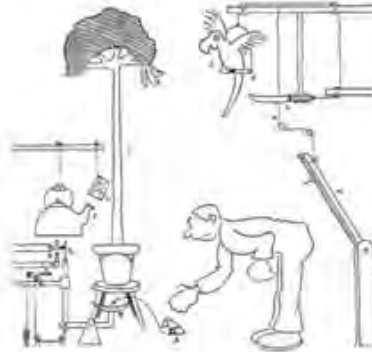
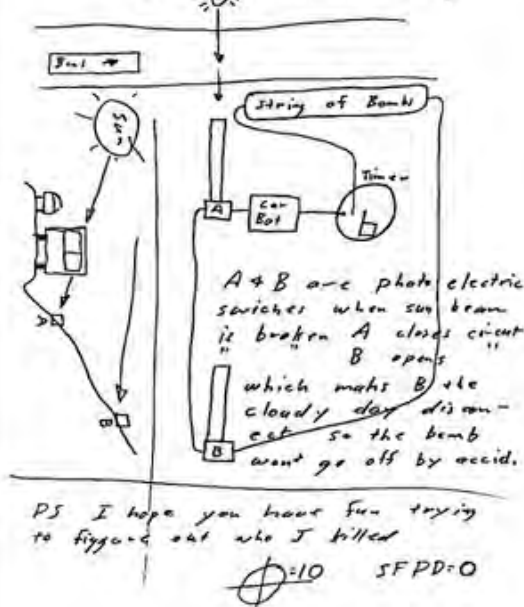
The Nobel Prize



DR. MILLIKAN RECEIVING THE CURE

The new bomb is set up like this

Sun light in early morning



A BOON FOR FRATERNITIES

Automatic spankers for initiates. Direction for using:

Let the initiate try to catch frog (A); the frog will jump to scale (B)—sending sandpaper (C) up lighting match (D) at the same time gas will be turned on at (E). The gas will heat water in kettle (F) the steam will loosen the envelope seam (G). The seeds will drop on fertile soil. Seeds should be for Pine, Banana or some other suitably tall tree. Tree will grow up (H). Parrot (J) sees tree and jumps over—reaction pushes perch (K) down. The motion will draw knife (L) across card (N) card is cut releasing spanker (M)—which then performs its duty.

A DIRECT PHOTOELECTRIC DETERMINATION OF PLANCK'S " h ."

Los Angeles Record Journalism (1924, Age 16-17)

In *Black Dahlia Avenger* (BDA), originally published in 2003, SKH presents three non-bylined examples of writing from his father's time on the *LA Record*: an inside account of a police raid on a speakeasy (the Hummingbird Cafe), plus crime scene reports on the Teresa Mors and Peggy Donovan murders. Later on, SKH presented an additional, non-crime article, a bylined profile of the poet Sadakichi Hartmann. I have found two more George Hodel *Record* articles recently, both bylined and neither crime related.

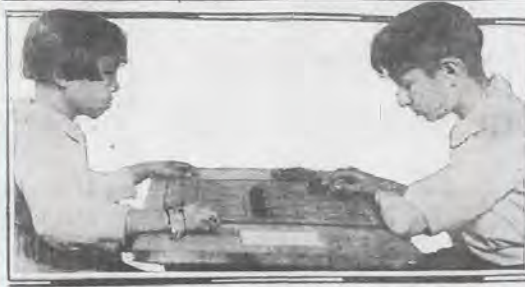
Searchable scans of the 1924 *Los Angeles Record* became available a few years ago on newspapers.com, and I have located original articles corresponding to the three crime

stories excerpted in *BDA*. I am not sure how SKH was originally able to hunt down the articles or attribute them to his father—two of the pieces I found have no byline, and the third (the Teresa Mors piece) actually features the byline of Don Ryan, one of the paper’s star reporters during Hodel’s tenure. I think it likely the *BDA* crime stories were found among George Hodel’s effects after his death, given his name is nowhere attached to the versions I found, but *BDA* does not address this question.³ Possibly the articles exist in alternative versions in different editions of the *Record*. I see signs on newspapers.com that the paper had multiple editions. Alternatively, it could be that Hodel saved drafts or proofs of writing that was edited or re-written and/or re-attributed to a “name” reporter for publication.

July 28, 1924: Juvenile Checker Championship

The earliest dated Hodel *Record* article I have found is a report on a juvenile checkers championship. It seems like a straightforward case of a bright kid being assigned to do a story about other bright kids. George was probably happy to get his own byline in a big city paper at the tender age of 16, given the vast majority of *Record* stories went out unattributed. I was pleased to note a Camelot analogy in Hodel’s write-up, having previously spun a web of speculation from a later [Hodel reference to Arthurian myth](#).

One of These Kids Won the Juvenile Checker Crown



Here is Louis Cohen, 12, of the San Pedro street grammar school, winner of the city playground's checker contest, playing a tense game with Teo Watanabe, 10, another devotee of the thrilling sport.

By GEORGE HILL HODEL.

All the atmosphere of a medieval tournament was present in the crowded room in the Bulfinch building, where the playground department held its open competitive juvenile checker contest.

Intensely leaning over their boards are the pink and cream of the checker players of Los Angeles' checkers division. Each youngster represents his best of some thirty or forty who have been eliminated.

All air of tense triumph is in the room. It means a great deal to them—these finals of the tournament. For to win of them will go the crown of championship—a crown so eagerly contested as any of the royal prizes of America.

Deep Concentration
A distant Chinese girl peers over the table where she is playing a bright-eyed, black-haired youngster. No power could the man could tear his gaze away from their game. The flash of the photographer's camera makes no difference. The players' eyes are fixed on the board. Others pay not the slightest heed to the momentary distraction.

Smile of Victory
And then a confident smile of victory comes on the face of one of the players. A few more plays and the

winner of the two contestants is pushed for board away and another defeated.
"But it was a good game anyway, wasn't it?" the boy says in his cockle.
And they unanimously agree that it was.

And so Louis Cohen, 12, is the undisputed king of juvenile checker players of Los Angeles.

The crowd of youngsters making up the bulk of the spectators as he passes out.

Here's the 'Sweetheart of Austria'



Drank His Own Booze

And Died

FOR three weeks, police had been trying to locate C. Stanley, also known as Tom Welch. They suspected him of bootlegging.

ALLIES IN MEET

By LOYD ALLEN
(United Press Staff Correspondent)
London, July 28.—With the American backing group apparently strong, the joint and Francoist effort of France appears to be making significant gains in the battle of the air.

YEGGS ON TRIAL

"A safe-cracker's life is the life of hell."
No wonder Homer France, 10, as he skinned the thirteen-year-old from the surface of a ball, the egg, ever while sides of dynamic were suspended.

In a court room, the judge, Judge, kept the pace when the boy was on trial.

UNDER HANDICAP?

Because Henry De Vries had his nose of small when he was a boy and couldn't tell his "left" from his "right," until he passed out, he was under a handicap.

But Judge J. F. Thompson, "How often was she drunk?" "Four or five times a week," he replied. "Then she got in going out and leaving the little girl in the daytime. I found later she was with a man named George."

"Did she go out with the same man every time?" "She told me she loved all the men," Thompson gave De Vries divorce when the husband read a letter he said he got from his wife, named "Mabel."

"Life with you is unbearable," and the letter.

\$1000 PER WINK

Charles E. Ginn, recently federal prohibition agent in Southern California, said "Monday that the 'saint and brotherly' play of hotel bookkeepers" once showed him the great sum of \$1000 a week if he would only wink (nod) his right eye and show the left eye when the freight was shipped into downtown hotels with the hotel money.

Feeling able, however, that he should the offer after a Bureau of prohibition conference with the treasurer of Union Run.

BOOTLEGGERS?

"Find the woman!" Tom spoke Los Angeles police Monday, however, the woman was not found. Through the afternoon sunlight at Park View and French View, the checkers south of Winkler Park, and

TINKERS WITH FLI

Discovers-Lost Art That Has B Science 2000 Years



Jim Cummings and one million-and-a-half-dollar smile. Jim's family—they're smiling, too.

East St. Louis, Ill., July 28.—Jim Cummings lost his job and made a fortune because of it.

Today he is worth a million and a half. And regular are beginning to come in right along.

And he can think the old family driver for his party fortune.

"The family was about to go bankrupt," Jim explains. "We owned an automobile—two with a front of big service but disposable speed. I figured I might fix it up a bit and sell it."

And in the ending operation he accidentally discovered a process for building and repairing engines, not yet since the days of the old Egyptians.

In cleaning the garage Cummings used a chemical mixture he had successfully had invented.

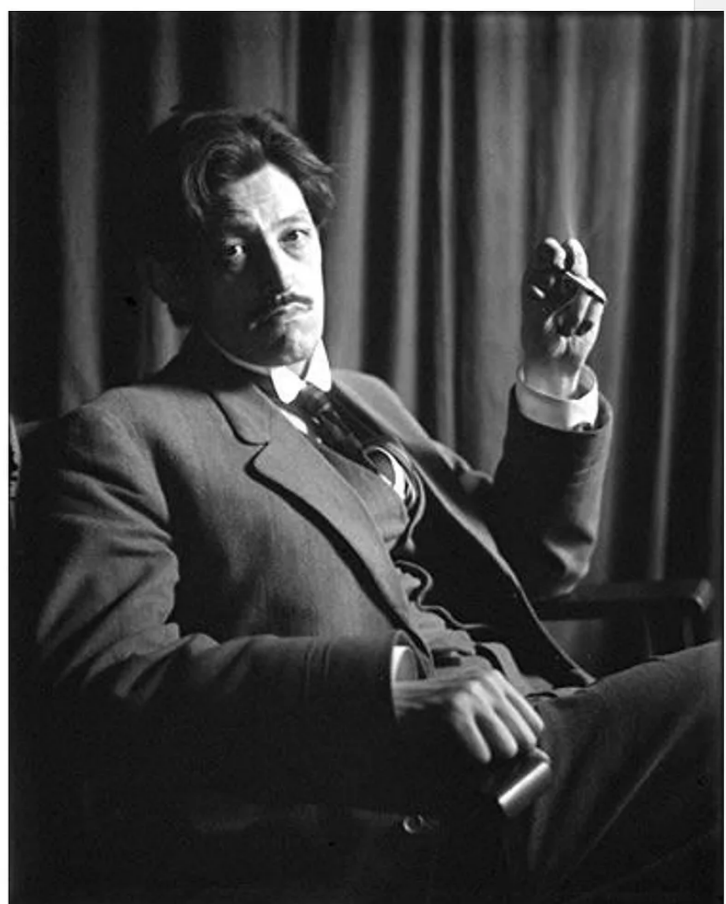
One of the garages was built and when Jim tried to rebuild it, it flew long into the air and burst.

The first a fifteen-minute alarm

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August 8, 1924: Sadakichi Hartmann Profile

A second Hodel-bylined article came out on August 8: "Oriental Harmonies," a profile of the poet and critic [Sadakichi Hartmann](#) (1867-1944). Hartmann was an eccentric itinerant intellectual who was quite a celebrity in the late 19th and early 20th century—dubbed the "King of Bohemia" and hailed by Ezra Pound, no less—although he faded into relative obscurity for years after his death.



From the sound of this profile, George was truly smitten. As discussed below, Hodel would re-publish four of Hartmann's poems in his own literary magazine, *Fantasia*, a few months later, so it is likely that there was ongoing contact between them. We do know that one of George's artist friends, [Ben Berlin](#), was [close to Hartmann](#) during the poet's years in Los Angeles.

There are numerous points of potential affinity or influence involving Hodel and Hartmann, some of which seem pertinent to George Hodel's highly unusual adult crime signature as the Black Dahlia Avenger and Zodiac:

- An elitist philosophy according to which secret understandings and cryptic allusions place the few above the common herd. From Hodel's profile:

Hartmann is a literary aristocrat. "Art must be by the few and for the few," he is saying. "Poetry can only be the religion of the aristocratic minority."

- A mutual fascination with the work of that old Zodiac favorite, [Edgar Allan Poe](#). In the 1930s Hartmann would cosplay as Poe while reading his poetry at soirees

held at the King's Road, Hollywood home of famed architect [Rudolf Schindler](#) (another Hodel acquaintance). From the *Record* article:

Sadakichi Hartmann is a disciple of Edgar Allan Poe, and like Poe, he has a keen understanding of the shades and colorings and variegated nuances of poetry.

- A shared taste for the morbid eroticism of the [French Decadents](#), as exemplified by the Hartmann works reproduced in Hodel's *Fantasia*. Another member of the Decadent fan club was George's future friend, [Man Ray](#), the Surrealist artist and photographer who seems to have inspired his staging of the Black Dahlia murder.
- As a critic, Sadakichi Hartmann played an important role in the acceptance of photography as a fine art. George Hodel was himself a keen art photographer in the 1920s. Sadakichi Hartmann and Man Ray both had strong links to [Alfred Stieglitz](#), one of the main pioneers of fine art photography.
- George Hodel had a strong interest in the Orient which took him all over the Far East in later life. Hartmann, who was half-Japanese, was a significant figure in the rise of [Japonisme](#) in Western art, one of whose most celebrated manifestations is that old Zodiac favorite, Gilbert and Sullivan's [The Mikado](#).

August 14, 1924: The Teresa Mors Murder

The next *Record* piece linked to Hodel is from August 14, and it is a doozy. "Words of Death" reports on wealthy antique dealer Teresa Mors' murder by [Kid McCoy](#), a still-famous prizefighter who had been reduced to fortune-hunting and out-and-out crime after a failed career reboot as a movie actor.

As noted above, the byline on this version of the story, which includes significantly more material than the text in SKH's *BDA*, is that of Don Ryan, one of the *Record's* top reporters. How much was really written by cub reporter George Hodel, ex-member of the South Pasadena High Latin Club? It would be nice to have more clarity on that.

Another point of interest here is that the lawyer who defended McCoy, [Jerry Giesler](#) (1886-1962), was the advocate who got Dr. George Hill Hodel off the hook for incest in 1949. In 1924 he was just getting started on his storied career as a superstar criminal defense attorney. Giesler did a pretty good job for McCoy, who feigned insanity and got off with a light sentence. Jerry Giesler died while defending Carole Tregoff in the 1962 West Covina [Finch-Tregoff murder](#). There are signs that the man who would become Zodiac (aka “The Red Phantom”) followed that case with interest.

This Deed of Trust, Made this **15th** day of **October, 1949**, between

GEORGE HILL HODEL,
 , herein called TRUSTOR,
 whose address is **5121 Franklin Avenue,** **Los Angeles,** **California**
 (Number and Street) (City) (Zone) (State)

TITLE INSURANCE AND TRUST COMPANY, a California corporation, herein called TRUSTEE, and
JERRY GIESLER and ROBERT A. NEEB, JR.

Editor—
 Put Marco back in the hell-hole
 from whence it came—he has
 a serious psychological disorder—
 always needs to feel superior. I
 suggest you refer him to a shrink.
 Meanwhile, cancel the Count Marco
 column. Since the Count can
 write anonymously, so can I—
 the Red Phantom
 (red with rage)

"Dear Count Marco: Instead of
 sneaking up on women like a red
 phantom with black paint, you
 should work openly and usefully
 to help this free and generous
 country which feeds your nasty
 face.

—Chicago."

Red Phantom?! I'll have you
 know I wear gold Chinese silk
 or gold Italian raw silk evening
 jackets, and I don't sneak. I go
 about town in them openly so you
 will be sure to see me. In fact,
 I'll be in Chicago on December 5
 to give you a personal look at me,
 so be prepared.

NO ONE WAS better than the Count at getting
 personal publicity, even upstaging a murder
 trial. In 1961 the newspaper sent him to Los
 Angeles to get a new slant on the trial of Dr.
 Bernard Finch and his red-headed receptionist,
 Carole Tregoff, accused of doing in the doctor's
 wife. (Both were subsequently found guilty; Finch served 10
 years for first-degree murder, and Tregoff did nine years on
 a second-degree rape.)

"Scott Newhall flew me to L.A. and rented me a 1927
 Rolls-Royce, which was a block long. At 9:04 a.m. the
 defendants were scheduled to arrive at L.A. City Hall. At 9:02
 a.m., I pulled up in this maroon chauffeur-driven limousine. I
 got out wearing an Italian suit, and had jewels up to my
 elbows. The flashbulbs started popping, so that Finch and
 Tregoff arrived relatively unnoticed. I sat in the courtroom
 with the press, waiting for a recess. When it was called, I
 cued my photographer, jumped over the railing, and stood
 behind Tregoff with my fingers spread behind her head, as
 if I were examining her roots.

"The next day that picture ran on the front page of the
 Chronicle, and was picked up by papers across the country.
 My story told how the bloom was off the rose, that six weeks
 in jail had ruined Tregoff's dye job. The doctor hadn't fallen
 in love with a redheaded paramour after all. Some people
 were outraged, but I saved Tregoff's life. Every woman in

Giesler Asks for New Judge in Tregoff Case



STARTLING SUMMATION—Defense attorney Robert A. Neeb confers with his client Carole Tregoff before presenting his summation to the Los Angeles court. Neeb advanced a startling argument when he said in effect that Dr. Bernard Finch may have committed the murder of his wife but that Miss Tregoff was innocent. Hitherto, both sides had presented a story of complete innocence of both parties.



The version of the “Hummingbird Cafe” story I pulled up from newspapers.com is different from the one reproduced in *BDA*—the latter is a much fuller, more literary account. The article offers an inside view on a police raid on a downtown eatery that was known for illegal boozing, prostitution, race-mixing, and late-night revelry.



I note the uncredited front-page Hummingbird story is sandwiched between articles by two of the *Record*'s star reporters, Don Ryan and Ted Le Berthon. Ryan, at least, was a member of the “Pomegranate and Pemmican Club”—a house book club their editor set up to keep his boys on their toes intellectually. Quite possibly Ted Le Berthon and Hodel were involved, too, but I have not been able to establish that for a fact.

A year after George left the *Record*, [Ted Le Berthon](http://www.newspapers.com) (1892-1960), who was a devout Catholic, elected to dedicate his “Merry-Go-Round” column in William Randolph Hearst’s *Los Angeles Evening Herald* to a critical and vaguely ominous profile of his very junior former *Record* colleague, introducing him as “George Morel,” the editor of “Whirlpools” poetry magazine. Remarkably, if I have it right, Le Berthon’s own editor at the time was [James Richardson](http://www.newspapers.com), the future *LA Examiner* City Editor who took the call from the Black Dahlia killer.

December 9, 1925

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

By TED LE BERTHON

The Clouded Past of a Poet

GEORGE MOREL is tall, olive-skinned with wavy black hair and a strong bold nose. His eyes are large, brown, somnolent. A romantic, hawk-like fellow, a pianist, a poet, and editor of *Whirlpools*, a bizarre, darkly poetical quarterly.

"George is a nice boy but—"

How often did one hear that!

What his friends hinted was that George, being young, was inclined to write of melancholy things.

Of course, George could have pointed to Keats, Rupert Brooke or Stephen Crane for precedent, but—"It's not George's gloom, his preference for Huysmanns, De Gourmont, Poe, Baudelaire, Verlaine and Hecht that pains us," these "friends" would parry, "but his stilted elegance, his meticulous speech!"

George drowned himself at times in an ocean of deep dreams. Only part of him seemed present.

He would muse standing before one in a black, flowered dressing gown lined with scarlet silk, oblivious to one's presence.

Suddenly, though, his eyes would flare up like signal lights and he would say, "The formless fastidiousness of perfumes in a seventeenth century boudoir is comparable to my mind in the presence of twilight."

One might have answered "What of it?"—but one just didn't.

As one of George's "friends" put it: "He's young. He'll get over it. What he needs is contact with harsh realities. At present his writing is tenuous, dreamy monotonous—and he is like his writing."

A Future Realistic Novelist

I HADN'T seen George for about a year—

And last night, strolling up Spring street in a sort of Morelian reverie myself, I was startled by hearing a familiar voice. The next moment I saw a tall young fellow in a taxi driver's uniform seize a burly, argumentative man by the coat lapels and growl menacingly:

"Come across with that taxi fare or I'll smack you in the nose, right here and now!"

The speaker was GEORGE MOREL.

October 16, 1924: The Peggy Donovan Murder

An October 24 story, "The Morning After a Party," reported the kicking to death of one Margaret Donovan, a down-at-heel cafe singer. It has no byline, but the text is essentially as given in *BDA*. This is another "murder as an artistic tableau" piece like "Words of Death," but in this one even the setting is unrelievedly sordid owing to the victim's straightened circumstances.

FORGOTTEN ADVICE

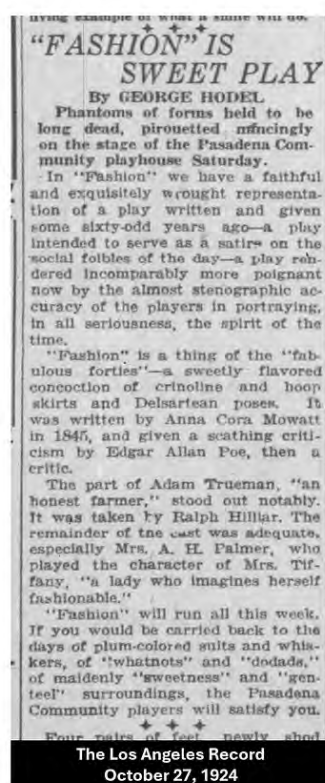
OWN FEET

(Copyright, 1924)

The subtle mockery of religion and the parodic “sob sister” rhetoric in this story and in the “Words of Death” article would find echoes within Zodiac’s missives years later, e.g.: “I saw + think ‘THE EXORCIST’ was the best saterical comidy I have ever seen,” and “SHE WAS YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL. NOW SHE IS BATTERED AND DEAD.”

October 27, 1924: Review of “Fashion”, A Satirical Comedy

Speaking of “saterical comidy” (sic), I recently unearthed a theatrical review by George Hodel of Anna Corat Mowatt’s *Fashion*, an 1845 satirical comedy that enjoyed a great resurgence in popularity during the 1920s. It seems to be the last identifiable piece we have from Hodel’s time at the *Record*.



History Matters

*Celebrating Women's
Plays of the Past*

Summary

Fashion is a satire of nouveau riche Americans who aspire to the pretensions of upper-class Europeans. The extravagant Mrs. Tiffany and her equally frivolous daughter nearly lead the family into ruin. Countering them are Gertrude, a young governess from the countryside, and Adam Trueman, a plainspoken farmer. French affectations prove no match for the solid American virtues of honesty and hard work.

Background

Anna Cora Mowatt was already an experienced writer when her friend Epes Sargent suggested that she try stage comedy. Mowatt insisted that “There were no attempts in *Fashion* at fine writing. I designed the play wholly as an acting comedy.” She gave her audience what they wanted but knew the limitations of the formula: when later asked to act the role of the wholesome Gertrude, she protested that the part was dull. Still, the main targets of Mowatt’s caustic wit are useless society women who, unlike the author herself, did no productive work. Edgar Allan Poe, one of the few critics who had serious reservations about the comedy, was intrigued enough to see it every day for a week and conceded that “in many respects (and those of a telling character) it is superior to any American play.” *Fashion* was a critical and box office success, despite a local newspaper’s pre-opening warning: “We have little confidence in female dramatic productions.” During the nineteenth century, *Fashion* was performed by theaters throughout this country and in England. Both the original and a musical version have continued to be revived over the past century and a half.

<https://www.historymatterscelebratingwomensplaysofthepast.org/plays/view/Fashion/>

The review reveals a different side to George Hodel’s personality—cultured almost to the point of effeminacy and quite female-friendly. Aside from the evidence for his crimes against women, and the written testimony we have regarding his explosive temper and potential for violence against women—his wife Dorothy’s letters to her ex-husband, film director [John Huston](#), and actress [Mattie Comfort](#)’s unpublished memoir of their affair—we have to remember George was a pampered mother’s boy, concert pianist, ballroom dancer, ballet aficionado, and a Casanova who got through five wives and countless paramours. Tamar Hodel likened her father to the brilliant

but pathologically jealous and manipulative ballet impresario Boris Lermontov in [The Red Shoes](#), which is perhaps a helpful point of reference.

Anyway, George does manage to work an Edgar Allan Poe reference into his *Fashion* review, showing us once again that he (like the future Zodiac) had an encyclopedic knowledge of the master of mystery and the macabre.

The *Fashion* article sheds a bit of light on something in Ted Le Berthon's December 1925 profile of Hodel, "The Clouded Past of a Poet," introduced above. Compare: "Phantoms of forms held to be long dead, pirouetted mincingly on the stage of the Pasadena Community Playhouse Saturday." v. "The formless fastidiousness of perfumes in a seventeenth century boudoir is comparable to my mind in the presence of twilight." That is called "taking the mickey."

Fantasia Arts Magazine (1925, Age 17)

The "bizarre, darkly poetical quarterly" entitled "Whirlpools" which Ted Le Berthon mentioned in his "George Morel" column was actually *Fantasia*, whose one and only issue came out in January 1925. I [wrote about this publication](#) at length last year after reviewing one of the three known surviving copies at UC Riverside Library Special Collections. There is a lot more to the magazine than Hodel's editorial, his review of *Kingdom of Evil* by [Ben Hecht](#), and his poem, "Inference," all of which I was familiar with from SKH's books and blog. There are over 30 pages of material—largely poetry—and most of it is better crafted than the teenage editor's contributions. I will highlight only those items which seem relevant to Hodel's criminal career and modus operandi.

LITERARY GOSSIP

South Pasadena steps into the limelight with a new literary and critical magazine of the ultra-modern type, entitled *Fantasia*. The new venture is edited and published by G. Bishop Pulsifer and George Hill Hodel. The office of publication is at 6512 Monterey avenue, South Pasadena.

Among the contributors to the first number are Sadakichi Hartmann, Beulah May Alma Elizabeth Gunning, Ben Berlin, Neal Gallatin, Samuel M. Sargent, Jr., and a number of others.

The magazine is dedicated to "the portrayal of bizarre beauty in the arts, to the delineation of the stranger harmonies and the rarer fragrances" as these somewhat esoteric elements disclose themselves in sound, color, form, line and the varying modes of literary expression.

The first number made its bow with the new year and will be published monthly.

The Los Angeles Times
January 11, 1925

Fantasia

A monthly magazine devoted to the portrayal of bizarre beauty in the arts

Poetry -- Drama -- Fiction -- Art

Fantasia

6512 Monterey Road
South Pasadena

Twenty-five cents the issue Two dollars a year

The Lyric West

The *Lyric West* is now in its fourth year. It was founded, primarily, for the purpose of fostering the interests of poetry on the Pacific Coast. Since art cannot be localized, however, the magazine has grown to have a nation-wide circulation. With increased circulation and increased opportunities it will strive ever to grow artistically and to become a recognized means of expression for sincere, vital poetry.

Will you not help to encourage the best in the art of poetry, as well as, we hope, contribute to your own pleasure, by filling in the following blanks?

THE LYRIC WEST, 3551 University Avenue, Los Angeles, California
For the enclosed two dollars please send me the *Lyric West* for one year, beginning with the _____ number.

Name _____
Street _____
City _____
State _____

Fantasia Advertisement
The Lyric West

22

FANTASIA

25¢

January 1925

Here is the future Black Dahlia killer's mission statement regarding *Fantasia*:

A Dedication

To the portrayal of bizarre beauty in the arts, to the delineation of the stranger harmonies and the rarer fragrances, do we dedicate this, our magazine.

Such beauty we may find in a poem, a sketch, or a medley of colors; in the music of prayer-bells in some far-off minaret, or the noises of a city street; in a temple or a brothel or a gaol; in prayer or perversity or sin.

And ever shall we attempt in our pages the vivid expression of such art, wherever or however we may find it—ever shall we consecrate our magazine to the depiction of beauty anomalous, fantasial.

Note the British spelling of "gaol," by the way. Like *Zodiac*, George Hodel's education bears the imprint of the British tradition, perhaps due to the influence of his English-born tutor, Vernon Spencer, or because Americans of his generation were still heavily influenced by the grand corpus of English literature.

George Hodel's review of the future famous Hollywood screenwriter Ben Hecht's early neo-Decadent novel, *The Kingdom of Evil*, is obviously of particular interest.



The Kingdom of Evil

By Anthony Angarola

In Review

"THE KINGDOM OF EVIL." By Ben Hecht. Pascal Covici, publisher.

Macabre forms, more dank and putrescently phantasmal than any of Hecht's former imagining, grope blindly and crazedly in the poisonous fog out of which loom the rotting fancies that people his "Kingdom of Evil."

This, Ben Hecht's latest book, is a continuation of the journal of Fantazius Mallare, the uncouth figure that stalks darkly across the varicolored vistas of the author's conjuring. Here the sonorous note of his former work is replaced in a measure by a frailer, yet a more poignant, strain of a most strange and lyrical nature.

Hecht has, perhaps unwittingly, resorted at times to the devices of the sensationalist, the dauber, the splurger in colors too blazing for his understanding, but through it all there seems a basic sincerity too often notoriously lacking in his writings.

Mounting in its pellucid and rounded melliflence in passages to a poetry in prose to be likened only, perhaps, to the more artificial tales of Edgar Allan Poe, his fancies take on richly and darkly tinted hues. Most notably toward the end, where is pictured the debacle, the decay of the Kingdom, is the tempo powerful and the imagery colossal. A passage:

"As the tremendous stalk wilts, toppling into an ever deeper and more sinister arc, its walls blaze with a continual sunset. Phosphorescent seas appear to run down its broken sides. The flames and banners of decay creep out of its roots and spread in slow and ghostly conflagrations toward its summit. Daily the spectacle of its dissolution increases. Alkaline pinks and excremental yellows, purples and lavenders like tumerous shadows; browns that float like colossal postules through seas of lemon; reds that ferment into wavering islands of cerise and salmon, that erupt into ulcerous hills of scarlets and magentas—these revolve about the walls, mounting into vast patterns and dissolving one into the other. Slowly death postures in its coquetish shrouds."

Recurring in persistent refrain throughout "The Kingdom of Evil" is seen Ben Mecht's phallic symbolism—sometimes exhausting the sexual vocabulary in lecherous blatancy, sometimes shrouded in veils of obscure yonic characterization.

The black-and-white illustrations by Anthony Angarola, which accompany the text, are massive and guntly superb, though they are obviously forced in order to harmonize with the grotesque theme of the fantasy.

With almost animate pigments has Hecht painted this monstrous dream of Mallare's, and with delicate and meticulous craftsmanship has he fashioned its cadaverous and perverse beauty.

George Hill Hodel.



Some points of note arising from Hodel's fulsome tribute to Hecht's work:

1. The review features the customary Hodel shout-out to his (and Zodiac's) hero, Edgar Allan Poe: "Mounting in its pellucid and rounded melliflence in passages to a poetry in prose to be likened only, perhaps, to the more artificial tales of Edgar Allan Poe, his fancies take on richly and darkly tinted hues."
2. George sums up his aesthetic ideal, shared with Hecht, in the last paragraph: "With almost animate pigments has Hecht painted this monstrous dream of Mallare's, and with delicate and meticulous craftsmanship has he fashioned its cadaverous and perverse beauty."
3. The *Kingdom of Evil* was a sequel to [Fantazius Mallare: A Mysterious Oath](#), a [piece of literary provocation](#) that courted and received obscenity prosecution. Presumably, George was just as enthused about that one. These books seem to anticipate key aspects of Hodel's criminal psychology and Zodiac's "Paradise Slaves" mythos. The protagonist of *Fantazius Mallare* is an egomaniacal genius—a sculptor who descends into a solipsistic fugue state fueled by sexual jealousy, which leads to his murdering a random passer-by in a sublimated fit of rage against his lover. In the sequel, Mallare is reincarnated into a bizarre kingdom ruled by an even-more egomaniacal demigod who plucks humans from this earth and turns them into his slaves to be tortured and set to work building a citadel to his own greater glory. ⁴

4. Hodel's unusual boyhood experiences as a cub reporter poking around murder crime scenes mirror [Hecht's own formative years](#) in Chicago. During his later, much more celebrated career as a Hollywood screenwriter, Hecht claimed to know the identity and motive of the Black Dahlia killer—although he never let on who he believed it to be. Hecht, like Hodel a devotee of Freudian psychoanalysis, wrote the screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock's [Spellbound](#) (1945). SKH notes that it was among his film-buff father's favorite movies, which makes sense when you look at the parallels between the plot and Hodel's own life. Zodiac sleuths have long suspected that the killer's Halloween Card references *Spellbound*, given the way its array of disembodied eyes recalls the famous Salvador Dali-designed dream sequence in the movie.
5. I recently pointed out another possible Zodiac link to Hecht. The [1962 cold-case murder of cabbie Ray Davis](#) in the exclusive [St. Malo subdivision of Oceanside](#), CA—a small town north of San Diego—has attracted attention as a possible proto-Zodiac crime. Before committing this crime, the killer called the local police saying, “I am going to pull something here in Oceanside and you'll never be able to figure it out.” In the 1940s Hecht bought a castle-like beach house in St. Malo so he could write for the screen without being disturbed by movie execs. He invited other writers there, and turned his home into a factory for churning out scripts. Given all of this was covered in the press, and Dorothy Huston Hodel had strong personal connections to top Hollywood screenwriters, George Hodel was likely aware of Hecht's move to St. Malo. Hecht's 1954 autobiography, [Child of the Century](#), mentions that he is still residing in Oceanside. While he actually moved out before 1962, that would not have been public knowledge. It appears that the murderer drove past Hecht's chateau after dumping Davis's body several blocks away and stealing his cab. That raises the possibility that the Davis murder mystery was some kind of veiled homage by Hodel to his one-time hero...

undertaker's fingers and go gallivanting off into mystic space. And I shall never, even when I lie dying, ponder this question. I shall die with my eyes turned earthward, for I am a creature of earth and nowhere else.

MY FRIEND, THE OCEAN

THE PACIFIC OCEAN that lies a few yards beyond my window in Oceanside, California, and the curving sky above it make a hypnotic geometrical design at which I never tire of looking. The summer morning is like the inside of a diamond.

Hodel features one poem of his own in *Fantasia*, “Inference,” published under the pseudonym “Vernon Morel.” I am not sure how SKH originally concluded Morel was a pseudonym for his father, but I am confident that is correct—it all fits, including the linkage to the Le Berthon profile. “Inference” strikes me as a rather juvenile piece compared to the other poetry in *Fantasia*, but its thematic relevance is obvious. Hodel casts himself as a demon child—an avenging angel preparing to wreak unknown havoc upon the world. There is a hint of Poe influence, naturally—for example, his short story, [Morella](#). “Inference” also bears at least some resemblance to the “desktop poem” in the 1966 Riverside murder of Cheri Jo Bates. Notably, compare: “...rising / ...curling / ...writhing” with “...spurting / spilling / dripping” in the Riverside poem.

The four poems collectively titled “Naked Ghosts” by Sadakichi Hartmann are older works reprinted by permission, I think. Still, Hartmann was a “big get,” so original work might have been too much to ask. They are in the Decadent mode, but almost wholesome compared to some of the “cadaverous and perverse beauty” to be found in the works of the Hodel favorites listed by Ted Le Berthon, such as [Charles Baudelaire](#), [Joris-Karl Huysmans](#), and [Remy de Gourmont](#).

Inference

By Vernon Morel

I was conceived
In sin
On a mad night
Carnal
And incarnadin

Then was the incense rising
Poisonously
In the temple of Cybele curling
Dolorously
And in phantasmal wraiths writhing
Languorously

Then the night waned
Gloomily
And the thin spectral moon paled
Pallidly
And the lurid sombre skies darkened
Dismally

And I was born

Naked Ghosts

By Sadakichi Hartmann

Four Poems



Cyanogen Seas Are Surging

Cyanogen seas are surging over fierce cinnabarine strands, where
white amazons are marching in the radiance of the sands.
Oh, were my lambent love flame but like the surging sea, to
deluge the red of the desert and drown the white virgins
in me.



Prostitute Flower

When gardens lie dreaming in moonlight, the nocturnal flower
begins her reign, unfastening her mantle of glimmering
white, perfuming the air with a sinful strain.
The night moths are lured to the dangerous fire; each sips the
nectar of her desire, while her soul is yearning for unknown
treasure that can never be hers in this life of pleasure.



Immaculate Conception

A maiden flower stands lonesome on a vast and desolate plain, in
trembling fear that her longings for life and love prove vain.
But the passing breeze takes pity, it embraces some flowering
plant and carries its golden riches to the bride of the deso-
late land.
Windstirred, she tosses her elish hair to the dust of golden glow,
and flower-starred with the waxing moon, the desolate
meadows grow.



The Wanton Rose

A rose is opening her chalice with the charm of a wanton's art
and offers her languid beauty for sale on passion's mart.
The bee is the highest bidder, in love with her purple hue, and
scattering gold he revels in her lap of redolent dew.
In vain for her falling garments the queenly maiden gropes, and
the golden shrine bursts open with the jewelled seeds of
her hopes.



“The Game” by [Snow Longley](#) (1879-1963), a future teacher of Ray Bradbury, has an interesting title, if you know your Zodiac lore, and the theme—the way competitive sports recapitulate the basic struggle of nature—seems possibly apropos.

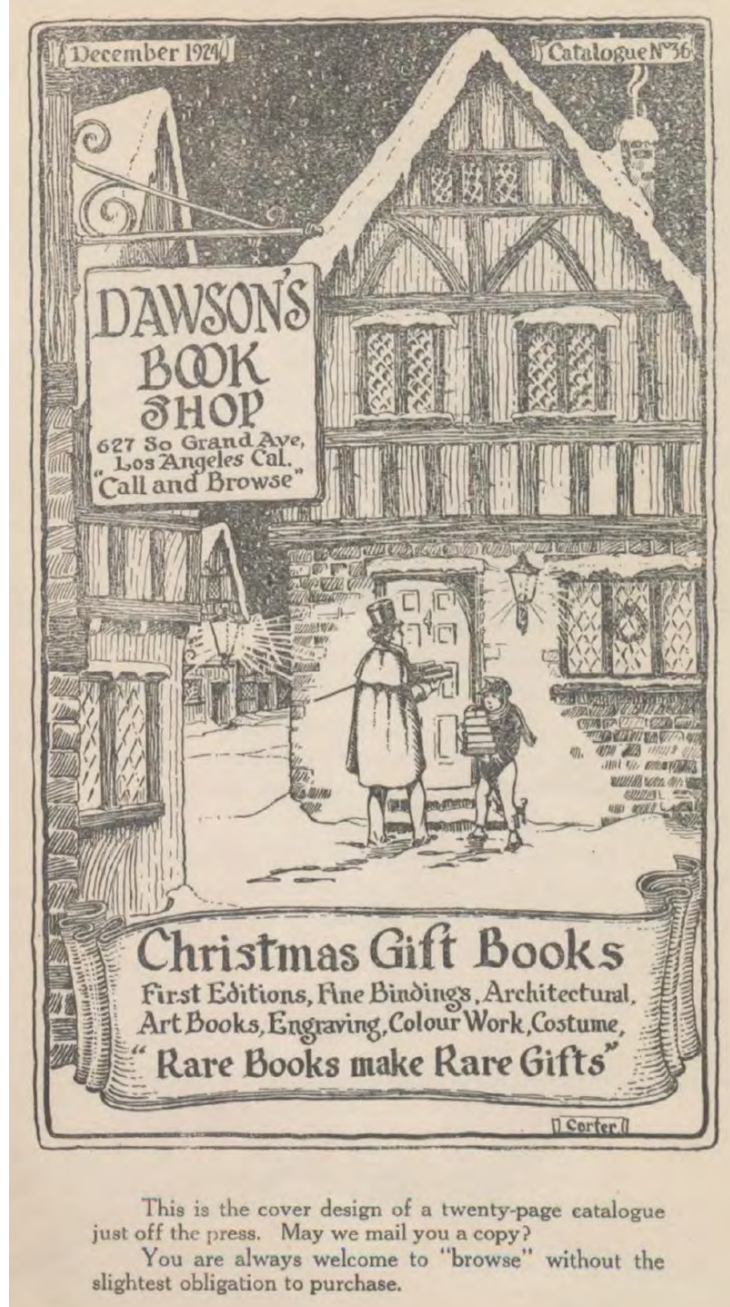
The Game

By Snow Longley

Youth plays the game. Across the barren field,
Mellow with autumn sunshine, sweeps the line
Of lithe young figures bending to the fray,
Strong shoulders, sheathed in muscle, bear the brunt
Of stress and strain, until a quicker hand
Wrests from the throng the sign of victory,
Eludes pursuit and triumphs to the goal.

Youth plays the game. Against the breath-drawn flush
My mind dreams back to wilder, lustier scenes.
I hear the shock when unscarred antlers clash,
The impact of young bodies when the whelps
Of lions try their strength in jungle sport,
Or, faint across far spaces, rhythmic feet
Of fleet young stallions galloping down the wind.

Also of special interest, we have a full-page advertisement for [Dawson's](#), a well-known rare book shop in downtown Los Angeles. Book collecting was a popular hobby for wealthy Angeleno aesthetes in this era—a fashion memorialized in *The Big Sleep*. The ad placements in niche publications like *Fantasia* often came about through personal connections. Whether George or his first wife Emilia ever worked for Dawson's is unclear, but they apparently did have some connection to the rare books trade.



The Dawson's linkage is relevant as Zodiac seems to have been influenced by the work of [F. W. Goudy](#), the pioneer typeface designer, and F. W. Goudy's West Coast "fan base" heavily involved Ernest Dawson and the staff of his bookshop. Zodiac's interest in Goudy has been inferred, quite credibly I believe, by a curious similarity between his "My Name Is" cipher and a figure in Goudy's landmark book, *The Alphabet*. Now, that is a pretty obscure connection, and one originally proposed quite independently of the "Hodel is the Zodiac" theory. Further, when I looked into it, I discovered that George Hodel's first wife, Emilia, corresponded with F. W. Goudy in connection with a reprinting of *The Alphabet* by the University of California Press in the late thirties.



MR. FREDERIC GOUDY, Hotel Whitecourt, Berkeley, California, from EMILIA HODEL, *The San Francisco News*, June 1, 1940.

Writer hopes his enclosed story is accurate enough for PWG. The photograph, book and pamphlet are being returned under separate cover. I am deeply disappointed that the new type, which Mr. Fehquar [sic] so generously had set up, could not be used. But editors will edit, when space is concerned. [New type is University of California Old Style, #106, 1938].

T.L.S. 1 p. 28.0cm. x 21.6cm. 289

MR. GOUDY, From BESS MANNING, Dawson's Book Shop, Los Angeles, September 25, 1941.

PWG gave everyone a fine evening. Large numbers of people in Los Angeles speak with admiration and affection of PWG. Gay Beaman regretted he could not attend.

L.S. 1 p. 21.6cm. x 14.0cm.

test and shocked at his death. [Bender was a prominent member of Book Club in California, in San Francisco.] "I'm delighted to hear that Scripps is to have its own type [Scripps College Old Style, 1941, #110] at last. Dorothy [Dreke] has been working so ardently for it, and I remember the beautiful design you showed me." Hopes PWG won't suffer financially on this job. Sam [Farquhar] won't commit himself as to date for Alphabet [The Alphabet and Elements of Lettering, printed by University of California Press, 1942]. Writer bought copy of Grubbs Bibliography, \$35.00, from David Hagen on strength of PWG's "exceptionally fine" article about it. Hagen and Mr. Dawson going East for [A. Edward] Newton sale. "Mr. Dawson will then attend the A.S.A. [Antiquarian Booksellers Association] and is to be one of the committee to present the new library to F.B.R."

L.S. 4 pp. 27.9cm. x 21.4cm.

Buchanan Institute of Technology
RIT Scholar Works

Frederic W. Goudy Correspondence 1935-1946

The Alphabet

AND ELEMENTS OF LETTERING

REVISED AND ENLARGED
WITH MANY FULL-PAGE PLATES AND OTHER
ILLUSTRATIONS DRAWN & ARRANGED
BY THE AUTHOR

FREDERIC W. GOUDY
L.R.D. LIT.D.



BERKELEY AND LOS ANGELES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
1942

WHAT LETTERS ARE

finally the beautiful capitals of the classic days of Roman civilization, capitals that remain, to this day, unsurpassed for beauty of form and proportion.

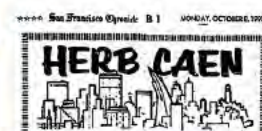
Lettering, the universal and most fundamental of all the arts of design, may be said to have its real beginnings in the lapidary productions of the Greeks. Their work was more monumental, but more primitive in idea, than the best of the earliest Roman work, from

A N E Θ E K E

FIG. 5 GREEK LETTERS FROM THE TEMPLE OF POSEIDON ON LAKE TAENARUS IN LAKONIA [475-473 B.C.]



On top of that, I found that Goudy exhibited at the [1939 Golden Gate Exposition](#) in San Francisco and came from the East Coast to attend. Emilia's second husband, artist [Franz Bergmann](#), contributed significantly to the staging of that Expo. Meanwhile, George Hodel, a recent graduate from UC San Francisco Medical School, was at the Expo on a training course, per SKH. The Golden Gate Expo has a role in Zodiac lore since it has been noted that the name Zodiac and certain aspects of his persona seem to have been borrowed from the film [Charlie Chan at Treasure Island](#), which is set at the Expo. That connection was first called out publicly by the *San Francisco Chronicle's* [Herb Caen](#), who himself reported from the Expo as a young journalist.



NOW THEN: Ken Maley, drowsily watching a 1939 Charlie Chan movie titled "Charlie Chan at Treasure Island," woke up when he discovered that the villain of the piece, a mystic and killer, was called — the Zodiac! —



Dear Editor

This is the Zodiac speaking I am back with you. Tell herb caen I am here, I have always been here. That city pig torchi is good but I am smarter and better he will get tired then leave me alone. I am waiting for a good movie about me. who will play me. I am now in control of all things.

Yours truly :

⊕ - guess

SFPD - O

All of which seems quite curious, to say the least...

One-Man Photography Show (1925-26, Age 18)

This next bit might more properly fall under “From the Darkroom of George Hodel.” George was a keen photographer and managed to land one-man shows for his work in two high-profile downtown venues, the [Gamut Club](#) and the Los Angeles Public Library in the [Metropolitan Building](#). The exhibitions included a number of portraits demonstrating George’s approach to “character analysis in photography.”



Many of the photo subjects are unknown, but SKH tentatively put names to some of the faces in *BDA*. One that seems a slam-dunk is Tom Evans, long-time associate of racketeer [Tony Cornero](#) (1899-1955). Cornero started as a bootlegger in San Francisco but moved to LA in the early 1920s. Evans would become his bodyguard and a host on the *Lux* gambling ship which Cornero parked off the LA coastline years later. He was “rousted” by police in the 1940s following a failed hit on Cornero, and again after the disappearances of “Merry Widow” Mimi Boomhower and actress Jean Spangler. We know from Rob Wagner’s *Red Ink White Lies* that Cornero was tight with the colorful

old-school crime reporter, Johnny Arrington, Hodel's contemporary at the *LA Record*, and this supports SKH's already convincing identification of his father's subject.



George Hodel Photo circa 1924 (Source: SKH)

BUM'S RUSH

Police See That Cornero Ex-Aide Leaves

Tom E. Evans, 47, one-time bouncer for Tony Cornero's "Lux," ex-convict on a narcotics charge and known associate of eastern hoodlums, was herded aboard a

Las Vegas bound Western Air Lines plane early today by members of Lt. W. L. Burns' gangster squad with the assurance that Los Angeles would never miss him.

The "roust pinch" technique was applied to Evans at Hollywood Blvd. and Vine St. late Saturday afternoon on the off-chance that he might be the man who pulled the trigger on the gun in Tony Cornero's doorway in Beverly Hills last Monday night. Police exonerated Evans as the gunman after questioning.

Citizen-News (February 18, 1948)

Gambler tired of jailing whenever a girl vanishes



SUSPECT TOM EVANS SUSPECTS THE POLICE
They'll try to pin Cock Robin on him next, he says.

Las Vegas gambler Thomas E. Evans is a weary man.

The ex-opium smuggler and former bodyguard of racketeer Tony Cornero is weary of being a suspect, especially in such cases as the disappearance of Mimi Bloomer and Jean Spangler.

Evans, 46, who was arrested last month for questioning about the missing Del-Air widow, was jailed again today for questioning

"Despite my age, police evidently think I'm a Casanova. What would a good-looking young actress like Miss Spangler be doing with me?"

Evans, whose well-filled wallet also arouses police suspicion since they say he has no visible means of support, said he is presently engaged in promoting a deal involving Philippine Island sugar and hemp.

Daily News (October 13, 1949)

There are also two Hodel self-portraits from about the same time with handwritten titles on the reverse, here shown as reproduced in [Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder](#) by Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss:

FIGURE 8

George Hodel
Self-portrait
1924

Inscribed verso:
"Portrait of a Chap Suddenly Aware
of the Words of Sigmund Freud"

COLLECTION OF STEVE HODEL

The self-conscious inscription on the back of this picture of George Hodel suggests a youthful awakening prompted by the discovery of Sigmund Freud's writings. The photograph was taken the same year that André Breton published the first "Manifesto of Surrealism" in France, an essay praising Freud's work. Breton's explorations of dreams were also influenced by Freud's theories. Later, Hodel became interested in hypnosis, and he practiced psychiatry in Hawaii and the Philippines.



FIGURE 9

George Hodel
Self-portrait
1924

Inscribed verso:
"Merlin Gazes at Cracked Mirrors"

COLLECTION OF STEVE HODEL

The inscription on the back of this picture probably references Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a novel that also inspired Pre-Raphaelite painters such as John Everett Millais (see fig. 41). The Pre-Raphaelites were in turn influential to the surrealists, especially Dalí, who referred to *Don Quixote* in many of his works.



The titles are noteworthy here. "Portrait of a Chap Suddenly Aware of the Words of Sigmund Freud" confirms Hodel's interest in psychoanalysis started early, long before *Spellbound* (1945) and his 1951 career switch from public health official to psychiatrist. Like that other Hodel favorite, [Remy de Gourmont](#), Sigmund Freud propounded a secular worldview which renders sex the most important and interesting force in the universe. George Hodel himself subscribed to that "universality of the erotic drive, which impels all creatures and unites them in a cosmic identity," as he put it in a brochure for an artist-protégé, Fernando Modesto, half a century later.

As I have elsewhere discussed, I think the figure legend in *Exquisite Corpse* is off the mark in connecting the title of Hodel's second self-portrait, "Merlin Gazes at Cracked Mirrors" to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The phrase "Cracked Mirrors" in the Arthurian

context set up by naming “Merlin” is surely intended to evoke Tennyson’s [*The Lady of Shalott*](#). In that poem, the lady Elaine lives alone in a tower by a river and patiently works at her weaving, barred by a curse from even looking at the world beyond, except chastely by means of a mirror on her wall. Only one day the reflection of Sir Lancelot passing below draws Elaine to her window. The mirror cracks, assuring her doom. Elaine leaves her tower and takes a boat in search of this knight in shining armor, but arrives in Camelot as a beautiful corpse fit only for the townsfolk to admire.

The ideas in this poem comport well with those in Hodel’s “Parable of the Sparrows,” featured in a long, philosophical letter which he wrote to his son Steven in the 1980s, adding weight to my interpretation.

I believe there is only one poem in Tennyson’s Arthurian cycle that features Merlin as a protagonist. In [*Merlin and Vivien*](#), the great wizard and counselor of the Court of King Arthur is seduced by Vivien, the Lady of the Lake, who schemes to usurp his magic powers. Trysting by a hollow oak in the forest of Broceliande, Vivien tricks Merlin into revealing a spell which she instantly turns upon him. Triumphantly, this harlot flashes “the bare grinning skeleton of death” and prances off into the woods leaving Merlin doomed, a prisoner trapped for ever inside the oak tree.

On that basis, “Merlin Gazes at Cracked Mirrors” appears to be a neatly constructed, Janus-like dual reference to the power and peril of sexual attraction. I believe that if you examine Zodiac’s Halloween Card of 1970 in the light of the mirror-image poems, and consider the hint offered by the sexually ambiguous skeleton on the front of the card, and the card’s deliberate evocation of Hecht and Hitchcock’s Freudian murder mystery, *Spellbound*, you will see that George has done the same thing all over again.

FIGURE 9
George Hodel
Self-portrait
1926
Inscribed verso:
"Merlin Gaze at Cracked Mirrors"
[illegible]
The inscription on the back of this picture
probably references Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a novel that also inspired
Pre-Raphaelite painters such as John Everett
Millais (see fig. 41). The Pre-Raphaelites
were in turn influential to the surrealists,
especially Dalí, who referred to *Don Quixote*
in many of his works.



22 ENIGMATIC CORPSE, JHANNUM AND THE BLACK DANCING MISTRESS



Footlights Essay (1926, Age 18)

Earlier this year I came across a [July 31, 2020 post](#) at the [Homestead Museum](#)'s LA history blog that features quotes from the last known writing of George Hodel from the twenties. The blog entry is devoted to the Potboiler Art Theater, which was an artistically ambitious amateur playhouse in downtown LA with friends in high places, including famed movie director [Cecil B. DeMille](#). The post's author, Paul Spitzzeri, discusses Potboiler artifacts preserved at the Homestead Museum, among them an issue of its *Footlights* newsletter featuring a humorous article by a certain "George Ho Del," who turns out to be our George Hill Hodel.

FOOTLIGHTS

ISSUED BY THE POTBOILER ART THEATER

February 15, 1926

Published at 930 South Grand Ave, Los Angeles, Calif.

Vol. 1. No. 5

CECIL B. DE MILLE

LEATRICE JOY

ROBERT AMES

"THE CANDLE"

Opening Feb. 15th. for One Week Only at the
Potboiler Art Theatre.

This is the most significant event in the history of the
Los Angeles Little Theater Movement and a most brilliant

I already knew that Hodel had dabbled in acting, having played supporting roles in at least three theatrical productions in the 1920s. The first was South Pasadena High's 1922 mounting of [The Yellow Jacket](#)—a very popular bit of stage "[Orientalism](#)" during the early 20th century. In 1924 Hodel appeared at the [Pasadena Playhouse](#) in a revival of William Congreve's satirical comedy, [The Way of the World](#), and in 1926 he was in a now forgotten play called *The Man Who Ate the Popomac* at the Potboiler.

George was "yellowface" as a "Chinaman" in two out of three of the aforementioned productions. The George Ho Del pseudonym used for his *Footlights* piece sounds like an in-joke referencing this typecasting. One might even detect a bit of foreshadowing here, given Zodiac at times playfully assumed the persona of Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner of Titipu from Gilbert and Sullivan's satirical comic opera, [The Mikado](#).

CLASS PLAY CHOSEN
[LOCAL CORRESPONDENCE]
SOUTH PASADENA, March 13.
"Yellow Jacket" will be this year's high school senior class play. The cast will include Edward Gray, Robert McEniry, Donald Thompson, Elwin Peterson, James Wickser, Roger Weldon, Dan Appling, George Hodel, Milton Greier, Raymond Spalding, John Stanton, Gene Meeker, Ruth Billheimer, Frances Ryan, Florence Fry, Virginia Judd, Virginia Clark, Hilda Taynolds, Josephine Stelar, Helen Hill, Virginia Giggas, Hazel Germain, Marie Lullive, Rosa Delphis, Dorothy Lane, Sarah James, Anna Bowling, Clarinda Kirk, Edna Plegier. The play will be given April 7.

Pasadena Players Revive Congreve

The spirit and soundness of faith inside England in the latter part of the 17th century, as seen through the unoppressed and unoppressed eyes of William Congreve and set down by him in "The Way of the World," are (naturally) mirrored this week in Pasadena by the Pasadena Community players.

As in Congee's earlier plays, there is an almost automatic display of plot and counterplot; all the characters are at painstaking work in valley film and just with terrible nervousness and each human is disclosed, before the end of the fifth and final act, as more or less of a knave or a dunderhead—or both.

Congress's humans, tracked out in parking, jump-start, and...
brochure and...
the same way...
boundedly...
with pouring...
but are...
material...
the...
Worries...

Werry Sophisticated
 "The Way of the World" gives us on the double-dealing infanticide of two married couples—with the dramatically personal method of one of the wives possessing a coveted fortune. The lines of the play thence with the devious living words, with busy imagery and breathtaking situations.

The cast was excellent, and it is doubtful if any "Little Theatre" players in America could have so convincingly interpreted the spirit of that naughty and saucy period. There was one exception. Ray Glass in the significant role of Pinelli, made wooden gestures and spoke his lines without spirit, flavor or style.

Countryville acting was done by Louise Greenleaf as the earthy widow Mrs. Mainwaring; by Christine Blanton as the schoolroom lover Muriel; by the dramatically lovely Jean Martin as the beautiful yet transient Mrs. Harwood; and by Florence McLean, as the shrewd old landlady, Lady Wootford. And by George Hodge as

Outstanding Acting
That the outstanding acting in the show was that of Lucille Tuttle as Tullie and of Ralph Miller as Sir Wilfrid Wilsford. This Tuttle demonstrated her mastery of the sweethearts, her droll walk and last but not from least, her magnificently airy voice resembling Ruth Chatterton, were irrefragable. Her funny (and a few sentimental) turns up as a conventional solo in the final act, were de-

myself and personally delighted.
 "Times of the evil smelling, gods-
 sent, earth for which I would
 travel half-brother to Wisconsin—may
 of fashion—brought in an honest
 businessman known as the farmers
 a name we had more took to the
 agriculturalists about here. I think
 and the Whitall body and soul.
 "The Way of the World" will be
 played, every night this week.
 * * *

By KAY LANE

The Potboller Art Theater, local center of the little theater movement, is scoring another hit with its production of "The Man Who Ate the Popomac," by W. J. Turner, which opens for the second week tonight.

Turner's play, an unusual bit of dramatic writing, is very modern, and seems to carry a moral for anyone and everyone—one of those plastic ideas which can be molded to meet almost any situation wherein emotions rank in the first magnitude.

It takes four acts in which to portray a conglomerate collection of notions, which have a hard time in reconciling themselves to each other. However, the show is amusing, although the action is not being handled as is usual in Potholer productions. Dan Freeman is fair in the leading role of Lord Belvoir. One feels all the time that he is acting, and is likely to make a slip most any time.

Riza Royce, as Muriel Raub, is quite good, and makes the most of a part, supposed to be a lead, wherein opportunity for unusual acting is not everpresent.

Sir Philo, played by Mique Spooner, is easily the best part in the production from the standpoint of dramatic handling. Sir Philo, a member of the Royal Geographic Society, is a characterization of a "goofy" old duffer, which offers ample opportunity for Spooner to display his ability as a character actor.

A sort of "fade-in" scene in the middle of the second acts bring three Chinamen into the story. The Oriental parts are ably done by Lavin Morse, George Hodel and Irving Victor.

Daily News
January 19, 1926

Mr. Spitzerri's blog quotes at length from Hodel's *Footlights* piece:

Perhaps no element of the *Footlights* issue was more emblematic of the “Potboiler Spirit” than a jaunty little essay by “George Ho Del,” who acted in Potboiler productions and who also appears to be the same George Hodel believed by his son and others to have been the killer of Elizabeth Short in the infamous Black Dahlia incident of 1947. The notorious doctor was a young musical prodigy who performed at the Egan in the mid-1910s, so his involvement at the Potboiler is another remarkable tangential tale.

In his piece, “Ho Del” referred to the desire to introduce light-hearted events within the Potboiler Spirit through “The Gaeties of Grand Avenue” in mid-March. With this event, he continued “the individual vices and personal sins of Potboiler Personalities will be exposed to the full light of day, through the use of pantomime, symbolism, song and dance, legerdemain, synchronism, and mud-slinging.” Through these, he went on, the “public may know” about a raft of modern problems, including “The Undoubted Shortcomings of the Tariff, the Box Office System, the Free Pass Evil, the Partisan Favoritism in the Appointment of Lady Ushers, the Curse of Insufficient Publicity of our Artists, and all the Whatnots.”

Moreover, “an intimate glimpse will be vouchsafed of the actual inside mechanics of the Potboiler machine—the turbulent, incisively intellectual, and yet big-hearted conflicts of artists, players and director. These things will be laid bare so that you may feel directly sympathetic with the cause; so that you may become, in all reality, one of the bunch.”

The goal, then, was that

combining art, uplift and clean fun, without affectation, we will try once more to rejuvenate those care-free Bohemian times of good-natured criticism that were prevalent in the whole-hearted days when the Potboiler boiled, to use a vulgar but unaffected phrase, boiled in all ebullient camaraderie. And to give us a flavor of the days when the Potboiler Theater was, so to speak, nothing but a struggling Art Center, struggling once and struggling ever, “For Art’s Sake.”

If this was the George Hodel of Black Dahlia notoriety, then this is notable as an element of his life as a Potboiler Bohemian not quite nineteen years of age.

This must be the most light-hearted sample we have from any of George Hodel’s writings—a rare display of verbal fireworks and creative whimsy. Perhaps Hodel took to heart Ted Le Berthon’s rebuke, published in the *LA Herald* only weeks before: “At present his writing is tenuous dreamy monotonous [sic]—and he is like his writing.”

On reading the Hodel quotes from *Footlights*, I had to wonder where all that exuberant wit had been hiding before: “... the individual vices and personal sins of Potboiler Personalities will be exposed to the full light of day, through the use of pantomime, symbolism, song and dance, legerdemain, synchronism, and mudslinging.” It calls to mind something I saw in the 1924 Caltech *Big T* annual:

Press Club



THE "RED HOT RIVET" has come to be an institution at California Tech as a razz sheet taking the place of one of the regular issues of the "Tech." This issue is put out once a year by the initiates of the Press Club as part of their initiation duties, and has for its purpose not only the portrayal of some of the great amount of humor which is ordinarily wasted around the Institute, but also to attempt to make clear to some men some of their traits which their classmates may believe to be in need of correction. Thus far in its existence, the "Rivet" has had a success which has certainly justified itself.

It seems George's writing was getting better. His extant writings from after the 1920s are typically serious in nature, but Hodel's mature style is leaner with more verve than we find in most of the adolescent efforts quoted above. I speak of his "official" voice. Perhaps that 1920s "razz sheet"-style humor never really went away...

Editor—
Put Marco back in the hell-hole
from whence it came — he has
a serious psychological disorder—
always needs to feel superior. I
suggest you refer him to a shrink.
Meanwhile, cancel the Count Marco
column. Since the Count can
write anonymously, so can I—
the Red Phantom
(red with rage)

- 1 The globe-trotting Zelenko was declared the most important Russian in America in *The Harvard Magazine* (May 1920) on account of holding the keys to the establishment of trade relations with post-revolutionary Russia. He was a connected figure, close to luminaries such as [Maxim Gorky](#) and Lenin's wife, [Nadezhda Krupskaya](#). Zelenko opened up shop in downtown San Francisco in 1919, soon adding a large, second office in New York. He crisscrossed the country to deliver lectures and meet business leaders. He and his wife, Anna Zelenko (the "queen of puppets") moved to Pasadena in the early 1920s to be near the Hodels. They even helped with [Petrushka puppet](#) performances at the Hodels. Following their move to Pasadena the Zelenkos worked in LA as academics, but they would return to Moscow a few years later.
- 2 See [Red Ink White Lies: The Rise and Fall of Los Angeles Newspapers 1920-1962](#) by Rob Leicester Wagner (Dragonflyer Press, 2000) for the history of the *Los Angeles Record*. Some flavor of it is given by veteran LA newsman Matt Weinstock's obituary of Johnny Arrington, the *Record* crime reporter who scooped his paper's rivals on the Teresa Mors murder.

Farewell to Johnny, Sage of Bunker Hill



My chum Johnny Arrington, the poor man's Schopenhauer, is dead at 63. Many knew him as J. Farrington Barrington Arrington, the sage of Bunker Hill. The two middle names were euphoniously phony, a sample of the mad whimsy which guided his life.

Johnny was a newspaperman of the old school. It is something you never get over. He hadn't worked on a paper since the Daily News closed in 1954 but he never stopped being a newspaperman. He made a meager living by doing investigation work for attorneys and writing fact crime stories for magazines and political publicity.

Several years ago he ghosted a book, "Thicker'n Thieves" for ex-vice squad officer Charles Stoker, which blasted the LAPD and created a furor, and the biography of Frank (Lefty) James, a tough police lieutenant of his day.

His writing was flamboyant and aggressive and he coined words and phrases that have been widely imitated.

I first knew Johnny when he was a police reporter for the L.A. Record in the 1920s. He was tough and abrasive and dominated the pressroom in the old red brick Central Jail on 1st St. between Broadway and Hill, long since gone.

He said what he thought to everyone, including policemen. He didn't mind going out on a limb. In fact, I always thought he reached for limbs to go out on. I was a shy youngster just out of college, sent to the police beat for the News, when I met him and he terrified me at first.

Johnny had an unmatched ability to get the facts of a hot story, grab a pressroom phone and dictate flowing prose from notes as fast as the reporter on the other end could type. No word needed to be changed. On rewrite he was so fast he could do the work of three men.

He also had a photographic memory. Name a man once prominent in politics or crime and he could give the date, perhaps 25 years ago, on which he was elected, killed or did something he shouldn't.

In recent years Johnny rarely moved out of his apartment on S Olive St. He read Spengler, Ouspensky and Ortega y Gasset, from whom he quoted gloomy lines on the decline of civilization. He also liked Remy de Gourmont and James Branch Cabell.

To Johnny, talking and writing were all that mattered. He violently hated hypocrisy and ostentation and talked tough to the end. He disapproved especially of what he called "the con." He would say, "Cut through the con and what have you got—a guy trying to feed his ego or make a buck or steal."

Johnny never tried too hard to get a job on a paper after the News collapsed. He knew that he had no place in today's world of compromise.

The Los Angeles Times, March 6, 1962

- 3 This, presumably, is also how the "Merry-Go-Round" profile by George's senior colleague on the *Record*, Ted Le Berthon, came to light. Le Berthon's disguising of George's last name and the name of his poetry magazine would have otherwise made it impossible to connect the column to George Hodel from a modern vantage point.
- 4 A decade later Hecht would revive the Mallare character in a film, *The Scoundrel* (1935), now rejigged as a brilliant, foppish, womanizing, manipulative, life-destroying publisher surrounded by a coterie of poets and wannabe intellectuals. This Mallare, played by Noel Coward in his first major US film role, resembles a mature version of the George Hodel caricature in "The Clouded Past of a Poet."

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