

is a pattern matching process. Your mind hears sounds and tries to match them to possible meanings. Actually, it matches to several possible meanings and then chooses the one that makes the most sense. There are even ambiguities when it has identified all the words. "Time flies like an arrow" has six or seven meanings even

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if each sound is correctly matched to the right word. Where the disorder comes in is what happens if that old processor gives a false positive, matching "Suez" to "sewers." That means that when Palin says he is "spending the day in Suez," the mind does extra processing, holding on to both "day in sewers" and "day in Suez" until the final elimination. That is more processing, of course. The punning mind is a little less efficient, but it compensates by making use of the false matches. It turns them into jokes.

A pun is a special kind of joke. It actually is a small act of sabotage against the mental process that interprets language. And in sabotaging the process it reveals a little of how the processor works. The processor thinks it has found a match on the first pass but continues to check and finds contradictory information and jumps to another interpretation. The mock anger one feels over a pun is the anger of being intentionally betrayed.

When the mind gets a string of words it seems to process them in parallel or at least not match them in parallel. I say that I am happy that Evelyn is not too perturbed by my pleasant portliness since, after all, a waist is a terrible thing to mind. Now, what just happened? Your mind just matched that phrase with a familiar phrase, then rejected it because the words are not in the correct order. To do that, the order of the words must initially not have been important. It is a later check that tells you that the first match was a false match and the order of the words was important. You also probably recognized that the first match--the false one a trap left intentionally for you.

2. I think it is going to be a real plus for our tourist industry for the world to see how cooperatively, quickly, and efficiently the United States pulls together to catch and punish people who kill tourists.

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If you attack stupidity you attack an entrenched interest
with friends in government and every walk of public life,
and you will make small progress against it.

-- Samuel Marchbanks

THE WHITECHAPEL HORRORS by Edward B. Hanna
Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-861-1, 1992, \$19.95.

A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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While having Sherlock Holmes investigate Jack the Ripper seems an obvious extension of the body of work about the Great Detective, there have been surprisingly few such stories published. Of the half dozen or so novels, only Ellery Queen's Study_in_Terror and Robert Weverka's Murder_by_Decree are at all well known. (The fact that they were made into movies certainly helps.) And The_White_chapel_Horrors is perhaps the best example of why this is so.

When writing a completely fictional Sherlock Holmes story, the author can make all the clues fit his or her plot and s/he can make sure all the necessary clues are there. In mathematical terms, all the clues are necessary and sufficient. Occasionally there is a false clue, but it is always explained. Very neat, very tidy.

Real life, however, doesn't work that way. And therein lies the problem. The Ripper murders left a lot of clues, most of which were useless and many of which were contradictory. Everyone has a theory as to who did it (and the same was true at the time), but they all run into some problem with the clues and in the end, no one solution seems better than the others.

Given all this, and given that Hanna is more a stickler for accuracy than most (at least in the details of the actual crimes), it is not entirely surprising that his ending fails to satisfy the reader. Hanna captures the feeling of a Holmes story, so the reading enjoyable enough, but ultimately the ending causes the whole experience to be diminished. In fact, more effort seems to be expended on solving a completely different mystery--somewhat related, perhaps, but not the main thrust of the book.

Hanna also does something that some people will undoubtedly like, but I found annoying. He makes mistakes--intentionally. For example, he will have Holmes quote from a play and then in a footnote will explain that the play was actually not written until a year after the story took place. This seems to be an attempt to imitate William Baring-Gould's annotations to the original stories, but that was one author trying to explain another's inadvertent mistakes. Here Hanna is explaining Hanna--the book itself is not written in the first person by Watson, but in the third person, supposedly from notes by Watson. (Minor editorial nit: the footnotes are all at the end instead of at the bottoms of their respective pages. This makes them much harder to read; one has to use two bookmarks and keep flipping back and forth.) Hanna also makes unintentional mistakes: he uses the term "heir presumptive"

incorrectly two or three times.

It's possible that Hanna chose to use the Ripper murders as the basis for his book because they gave him most of the story prepared. Unfortunately, he doesn't do much with what he has. I would have to say I have mixed feelings on this, and would suggest waiting for the paperback or reading the library's copy rather than buying the hardcover.

STRICTLY BALLROOM
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Who would have expected a subtle and very funny satire of bad movie making in an Australian film about competition ballroom dancers? This film may be more on-target than T h e P l a y e r. Rating: low +2 (-4 to +4).

Society has its rules. Because of these rules everybody knows where they stand and what is expected of them. Who c Scott Hastings started to go wrong. He came from a good family. His parents ran a ballroom dancing studio. Scott himself had the makings of one of Australia's great ballroom dancers. Then one day Scott broke society's rules. In the middle of a minor ballroom competition Scott just snapped. Suddenly he was dancing his own steps--steps not accepted by the Australian Ballroom Dance Federation. Here in Technicolor and stereophonic sound is the story of Australia's Spartacus of ballroom dancing.

Here also is a delightful satire of really bad over-ripe dramatic story-telling. It is all here: the boy with the dream, the girl from the wrong side of the tracks, the pushy mother, the conspiracy to fix the big dance competition, the dark secret from the past, and, of course, the climatic dance competition. And not one un-telegraphed plot twist. In fact, everything is here to make the plot feel like an old friend. The target is contrived film plotting and S t r i c t l y B a l l r o o m hits the mark with deadly accuracy.

The film stars Paul Mercurio as Scott Hastings, who instinctively knows that a man has got to dance the way a man has got to dance. Actually, this particular man d o e s dance very well, not that that is really the point of the film. Scott's love is Fran (played by Tara Morice). She has glasses and a bad complexion, and is ugly and surprisingly clumsy, but inside she knows she has what it takes to be beautiful and a great formal dancer. Bill Hunter plays Barry Fife, who wrote the videocassette on ballroom dancing. But does he hide a sinister secret?

This is a film that has echoes of what is wrong in even the most popular films from 4 2 n d S t r e e t R o c k y and H o o s i e r s. I give this one a low +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. It's a hoot!

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