

JOHN CREASEY (as Anthony Morton)  
*Danger for the Baron*  
New York: Walker, 1974. Pp. 189.  
\$5.95.

The mystery-thriller has long been regarded as an important sub-genre of the event-novel (see, for example, Wolfgang Kayser, *Interpretacion y análisis de la obra literaria*, 4th. ed., Madrid: Gredos, 1961, pp. 460-489). While its value as a manifestation of social trends has not been denied, its literary values have not always been accepted. Thomas Narcejac has outlined some of these literary values in an article entitled "Le roman policier" (in *Histoire des littératures*, ed. Raymond Queneau, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1958, III, 1644-1670). Narcejac divides mystery-thrillers into two great groups; the French, in which character and psychology play the major role (e.g. Simenon's Maigret novels) and the Anglo-Saxon, in which the enigma, the problem, is of central importance (e.g. Agatha Christie).

*Danger for the Baron* falls into the second category, for it may be compared to a crossword puzzle (perhaps the supreme example of the modern enigma) in which all the clues, bar the essential one, are provided from the start. However, the central clue is not revealed until all the others have been played with. When the truth is known, everything falls into place with surprising ease, and the reader is filled with an initial sense of relief which, in the case of a book like *Danger for the Baron*, is soon followed by a more powerful feeling of having been deceived. Now let us find out what happens to the Baron.

John Mannering, also known as the Baron, agrees to purchase some jewels on behalf of a client who wishes to remain anonymous. The jewels are owned by three former business associates of Mannering's unknown client and the mysterious tragedy which connects past to present is rapidly revealed. As the plot deepens, the action accelerates. Murder follows murder until three people are dead. Eventually, Mannering, now sought by the police in connection with these crimes, is trapped in a seemingly flight-proof cellar and forced into a Houdini-type escape. Then, in a dramatic finish, he disguises himself and breaks into a

heavily guarded country house, in which he discovers that the first person to die was not a victim at all, but a desperate criminal, living incognito; this man has planned the whole affair. When it is discovered that the imagined victim is still living the enigma is solved, and the novel is brought to a quick and happy ending.

Style and narrative voice are closely linked. The omniscient narrator narrates almost exclusively from Mannering's point of view, guiding and prompting him. In fact, Mannering's extra-sensory perception is directly attributable to the narrator who heightens the tension and stimulates the reader with such reflections as "Did his fingers clasp more tightly together?" (p. 9), or "There was going to be a sting in the tail of this job; at least, there might be" (p. 11). The first form, that of the direct question, presumably addressed to the reader, is frequent throughout the novel, and occurs 160 times in 188 pages. The most revealing sequence of questions (without answers) can be found on page 168 where there are seven of them.

As will be readily understood, *Danger for the Baron* is a mystery-thriller which is entirely dependent upon its enigma. As a consequence, characterization is at a minimum. Mannering is the complete man of action. Perhaps—with his culture, his physique, his disguises, his reliability, his strength, his agility—perhaps, with all these things, he is even the complete man.

For the anglophile reader who finds complete men boring, the novel has some minor compensations; these may be summarized as memories of the good old days. There is a ride on a double-decker bus (p. 45), a thin Victorian penny (p. 39), a three-penny phone call (p. 39) in an old-fashioned kiosk complete with a genuine button B (p. 41), and there are reminiscences of a pre-decimal Britain (for example, pp. 45, 139).

*Danger for the Baron* is not the world's best mystery-thriller. Neither is it the world's worst one. The enigma is there, and one is forced to admit, perhaps shamefacedly, that while one is trying to resolve it, it is almost impossible to put the book down.

Roger Moore