

## The Case of Erle Stanley Gardner

THE LATE John Foster Dulles used to be a Perry Mason fan; Einstein died with a Gardner book on his bedside table . . . Evelyn Waugh may have been wrong when, in 1949, he called Erle Stanley Gardner the "best American writer," but he was certainly referring to one of the richest and widely read writers of all time.

It is no coincidence that heads of several law schools are devoted Perry Mason readers. Born in Massachusetts, Gardner was admitted to the California bar in 1911 and practiced law for twenty years in California. Always he championed the underdogs, those of whom others despaired. In the meantime, since his fees were charitably small, he tried to write for a living. With the creation of Perry Mason, the brilliant courtroom lawyer who (currently on television) has yet to lose a case, not only because he reads the statutes well but because he knows how, dramatically, to expose the guilty witness at the bar of justice.

Gardner has published his hundredth novel, and others are on the way. "I never get tired of writing them," he says, although he is now over seventy and could afford to rest. "I have very little social life, and sometimes I start work at 4 a.m. I love work. I used to write longhand, but then I bought a typewriter; next an electric typewriter, and finally I began to dictate my novels."

He travels widely, so that there is little danger of his source of adventurous material running dry. Even more unusual is the fact that, as he says, "I've never forgotten what I've written." If the law has a million loopholes, Gardner can write forever about them without repeating himself.

Most of his titles begin with "The Case of"—followed by alliterative, or at least suggestive, punchlines: the Negligent Nymph, Careless Kitten, Lame Canary, or Singing Skirt. His most recent is *The Case of the Waylaid Wolf* (a reverse Little Red Riding Hood); it is expected to sell enough to make his total sales, since 1933 and in America alone, over 110 million copies! At his ranch in California, he dictates his works—occasionally several at a time—

\* Exclusive Panorama Feature.

to shifts of seven secretaries on a six-day week (their salaries alone run over \$5000 each month). His record is a book completed in three and one-half days. Reporters say, "He has been known to excuse himself from a house guest for an hour and say he had to write a chapter. Within an hour he would be back, the chapter finished." Besides his publishers and television, he writes for radio and the movies. Forty-nine of his books have sold over a million copies apiece, in all editions; 11 have exceeded two million. *The Case of the Lucky Legs* (1934) has sold over three million: and these figures do not count translations into 13 languages! To "relax" from Perry Mason, he also writes about Bertha Cool, a female "private eye," but under the pseudonym, A. A. Fair. He is one of his greatest competitors.

Critics—some of them jealous—complain that he constantly follows formulas; that he works fast because most of each novel is sheer dialogue, in or out of the courtroom; that no symbolic implication is apparent in his work, no maturing vision, as for example in the equally prolific work of George Simenon, French detective writer. Yet more than second-rate minds enjoy him. Is it because he still is on the side of the underdog? He has organized the Court of Last Resort, lawyers and trained technicians who reconsider evidence of "hopeless" cases where it is suspected that justice has gone astray. Many an innocent man owes his freedom to Erle Stanley Gardner, who has never forgotten why, years ago, he decided to defend poor people of minority groups, the helpless, the victims.

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### **Pun On Can**

*A canner, exceedingly canny,  
One morning remarked to his granny,  
"A canner, can can  
Anything that he can,  
But a canner can't can a can, can he?"*

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