Nobody had any thoughts on that.  

“Well,” Wolfe said, “I will see what I can do with these slivers of information. Meanwhile permit me to say that if this sort of gathering is representative of anything to come in American literature or theatre, we might as well move into a cave with a television.”  

“Good evening.” He turned his back on them and picked up his book.  

“Far out,” said Thin Lizzie.  

* * * * *  

CHAPTER 6  

Archie Goodwin closed the door on the departing guests and returned to the office. Winthrop had gone along with his friends. He had a lot of apartment cleaning to do. Nero Wolfe was reading.  

“Well,” Goodwin said. “That certainly cleared things up. I never would have suspected that Robbe-Grillet and Sartre were on the outs. Congratulations.”  

No reply.  

“Yes sir,” he continued. “And I think we should add ‘far out’ to the business cards. Think of all the wealthy hep cats ... well, beating a path to our door.”  


“Yes sir. If you were to ask me, it’s Frederson. He was worried that Harold Harold would distract Winthrop from attaining his nuances of insight. Me, I hate that. I can see him flying into as homicidal rage.”  

The doorbell rang. Archie looked at the clock.  

“Send whoever it is away,” Wolfe snapped.  

“It’s only ten-thirty. The cats and chicks are probably coming back for an all-night party, with poetry, wine, and Dizzy Gillespie’s new album.”  

Goodwin, who had a keen sense of when to stop, did so, and went to answer the door.  

2011 GAZETTE WRITING CONTEST WINNER  

The Third Brother  
An Exercise in the Higher Criticism  
David A. Appling  

The Lord Peter Wimsey Canon, so ably recorded by Dorothy L. Sayers, contains an interesting anomaly that should be of considerable interest to Wolfeans everywhere.  

Peter Death Bredon Wimsey is the second son of the late fifteenth Duke of Denver. His elder brother Gerald is the sitting Duke. Their only other publicly acknowledged sibling is a younger sister, Lady Mary.  

In some of Miss Sayers’s chronicles, there is a prefatory profile of Wimsey by his maternal uncle Paul Delagardie. Here, Uncle Paul refers in passing to Peter Wimsey’s “brothers” — plural. It is of considerable interest that in one of my American editions, the “s” in “brothers” has visibly been cut out of the leading. This suggests a deliberate attempt on someone’s part to mislead the reader and obfuscate the search for truth.  

It’s fair to assume that Paul himself was not attempting to mislead. Indeed, this assumption is amply supported by the complete openness regarding matters of sex and progeny displayed not only by Paul but also by his admirable sister the Dowager Duchess Honoria, Peter’s mother. We may take it, then, that the “Third Man” exists.  

So Peter had an unacknowledged second brother. On which side of the blanket was this brother born? Regrettably, we must immediately conclude that it was the wrong side. Had it been otherwise, Peter’s elder brother, the sixteenth Duke, would not have been so notoriously obsessed about the lack of a “backup heir” to the dukedom, should his only son, the reckless Viscount St. George, meet an untimely end.  

Similarly, it was not Duchess Honoria who was “outside the blanket” during her confinement. Not only would that have been far out of character, but Her Grace would not have been able to resist telling us. Therefore, Peter’s second brother was the bastard son of

15
Mortimer Gerald Bredon Wimsey, fifteenth Duke of Denver. This par-
entage is wholly consistent with that Duke’s known predilections.29

Let us return now to Uncle Paul. In the same “biographical note,” Paul
states that the Duke was “willing enough to turn his other son over to
me. Indeed, at the age of seventeen, Peter came to me of his own ac-
cord.”29 (Emphasis supplied.) That is, Lord Peter, born in 1890, had only
one brother as late as 1907. We know also that the fifteenth Duke died
in a hunting accident in 1911.30

What do we now know about this Third Brother?

- He was born illegitimately between 1907 and 1912 inclusive.
- The circumstances of his birth — indeed, his very existence — were
hushed up and have continued so over the years. It is significant
that a New York publisher chose physically to eradicate the written
evidence of his Uncle Paul, as late as 1955.
- He was the son of a man of action, not of cerebration.
- He was the son of a man with a definite eye for the female sex, a
trait shared by both his half-brothers as well.
- His half-brothers, each in his own way, also exhibited an extraordi-
nary sense of duty: Gerald’s to the Denver estate, Peter’s to King
and country.
- And he was half-brother to, arguably, the greatest amateur detective
Britain has ever known.

To the student of the detective art, a name must leap to the mind. Call
him “X” (a deliberate obfuscation which this person and his employer
often used themselves in their many adventures).

All sources agree that X was born on October 23, but his year of birth is
quite mysterious. In chronicles written by him during his working years,
X implies31 birth years ranging from 1908 to 1912.31 But in a late work,
X himself clearly states that he was eighteen in December 1926.32 We
may take it that X was born on October 23, 1908.32

X also deliberately obscures his parentage and place of birth. He does
consistently refer to having been born in Ohio, but is most evasive about
the place (Zanesville? Chillicothe? “a farm”? He cites them all.) He re-
fers to his mother sometimes as living, sometimes as deceased. His relation-
ship with her is described now as close and affectionate, now as dis-
tant, now as hostile and the proximate cause of his leaving home. Most
significantly, her identity is closely guarded at all times.

X’s treatment of his mother is garrulous compared to that of his father,
who is hardly mentioned at all. He is named twice (two different

blink, so I plugged him. He screamed, then he croaked. I went over, and
he had this Luger in his hand. He was gonna take me out with it. I had
another Luger for a time, but I traded it with my topkick for three car-
tons of Luckies.”

“Oh, indeed,” Wolfe said. “May I offer my congratulations? And yet, you
spend your time singing songs of peace and understanding in Washing-
ton Square.”

“Indeed,” Wolfe replied. “Mr. Holstein, the moment you spoke the
words of peace, I knew you were lying.”

Wolfe nodded. “Did Mr. Harold speak to you at any length?”

“Yeah. He talked about how unfair the world is, what with Ralph getting
10 grand and him having to go around trying to sell his poems to tour-
ists.”

“Isn’t that the source of your income as well?”

He smiled. “Well, if you’re asking if I thought he was cutting in on my
turf and that I shot him to clear the field, I think my best day, in the last
six years, brought in eight bucks.”

“The French writers compete so viciously because they are all fighting
for a piece of a very small pie,” Wolfe said.

“Robbe-Grillet never took a potshot at Sartre,” he replied. “And he
knows how to use a gun.”

Wolfe looked around the room.

“Here is another general question. Who hated Mr. Harold enough to kill
him?”
“How about your physical being?”

“Oh sure. Everybody saw me. Everybody’s always staring at me. They’re jealous of me.”

“Indeed. Was Mr. Harold jealous of you?”

“Of course he was. My poems didn’t get rejected by every cheap press in New York.”

“They would be if you wrote them down and sent them in,” said Linda, wearily. “And if your rich father didn’t send you a check every month, you’d be waiting tables like everybody else!”

“I don’t write things down. How could I possibly take lunch orders?”

Wolfe, according to Goodwin’s books, had an extremely low tolerance even for normal women, but here he was being as patient as a social worker. I made a mental note to buy Greg French a bottle of champagne.

“What were your feelings toward Mr. Harold?”

“He was all right,” she replied. “But I didn’t really like him. But then, I don’t really like anybody.”

“Why, then, did you attend? Why were you even invited?”

“Obviously, since they were there to suck after mammon, Ralph and Harold were trying to inject some class into the gathering.”

“My God!” Linda yelled. “You’ve got about as much class as a nosebleed!”

Wolfe sighed. “I would like to pose a general question. Does any one of you own a gun?”

“I do,” said Josh, the folk singer. He did, too. He may have been an easygoing folk singer, but he was also a World War II veteran, and had in fact been in on the D-Day landings.

Wolfe nodded. “What sort?”

“A Luger. A souvenir. They were the top keepsakes. I took it off a dead Kraut. He was playing possum, lying in a bunch of bodies after an artillery attack. It’s an old Kraut trick. We were supposed to shoot them anyway, when we saw ‘em like that, so I had him covered. Then I saw him names), but given X’s other evasions and manipulations in this area, we have no reason to believe either. Significantly, though, on one point X is consistent: his father is dead. Indeed, as we now know, the father died when X was a toddler.

X lives and works in New York and is closely connected with the publishing industry. Besides having a well known “in” at a major New York paper, several of his cases have involved him with book publishers, one of which may well have been Harper & Row (see footnotes) with its name disguised.

X followed his half-brother Peter into the fascinating world of detection. Unlike Peter, but like his father and his half-brother Gerald, he is a man of action — perhaps the quintessential man of action. His sense of duty, to his employer and to his country during World War II, is without flaw. His eye for the ladies is legendary, although — at least as far as we know from his writings — he treats the fair sex as a gentleman should. In this he closely resembles his brother Peter, as documented by his Uncle Paul and, in fact, throughout the Wimsey Canon.

I give you the Third Man, half-brother to Gerald, Duke of Denver, and Lord Peter Wimsey: Mr. Archie Goodwin of West Thirty-Fifth Street.

The reader may well ask: is this really possible? What can the connection be? How did the Wimsey family keep an eye on Archie Goodwin — as they surely would have, given the fundamental decency of all the Wimseys and Delagardies? Who was the intermediary?

Readers of the Corpus can perhaps guess the last answer at once. When Wolfe needs assistance in Great Britain, he calls upon a trusted and reliable British counterpart, Major E. G. Hitchcock, M.C., O.B.E. (retired). In recent years something of the history of the Wolfe-Hitchcock relationship has been revealed. We find that Wolfe and Hitchcock go back to 1917, to World War I in the Balkans. They were not merely long-distance professional colleagues; they were comrades, their friendship tempered in war. When the young Archie Goodwin arrived in New York, surely it was Major Hitchcock who saw to it that Archie landed on his feet in the big city.

But what connection could there possibly be with the Wimsey family? In the same memoir, Major Hitchcock reveals — almost in passing — two vital facts: he was born in 1891 (one year after Lord Peter), and he was graduated from Oxford’s Balliol College. Thus, he and Peter were “up” at Balliol at about the same time, with at least a two-year overlap — possibly all three years, as Peter did not “go up” until he was nineteen. Balliol is not a large place; it is inconceivable that Geoffrey Hitchcock and Peter Wimsey were not acquainted. Here is the missing connection:
it was Lord Peter who recruited Hitchcock to keep an eye on the young Archie, via his contacts in the United States — first among them his old friend and fighting companion, Nero Wolfe.

For the skeptical: as we know, Nero Wolfe is an intensely private person. Discounting longtime associates, Wolfe calls only five men (four since the death of Marko Vukčić) in the New York metropolis by their Christian names. He is also a profound skeptic, a very private person of mature judgment who gives his trust only to the few who earn it. Yet we are asked to believe not only that Wolfe almost casually hired this callow, cocky college dropout without references at the age of eighteen, but that he immediately began to call his new and untried assistant “Archie.” The mind boggles. But now that we know Archie was Geoffrey Hitchcock’s protégé, Wolfe’s uncharacteristic behavior is explained.

And finally: Archie calls the investigation of Bess Huddleston’s murder “Cordially Invited to Meet Death.” This seems a very odd title, unless Archie is slyly giving us a different message. Wimsey often used his two middle names when traveling *incognito* on Government business. In August 1941, as America’s entry into the war neared, did the Foreign Office entrust Peter Wimsey with a delicate mission to the United States? Can it be that Huddleston, New York’s “hostess with the most-est,” cordially invited Archie and Wolfe to meet — Death Bredon?

“The Duchess was always of the greatest assistance to his [Sir Peter Wimsey] hobby of criminal investigation, though she never alluded to it, and maintained a polite fiction of it’s non-existence.

— Paul Austin Delagardie, “Biographical Note, Peter Death Bredon Wimsey, D.S.O.”

“If you please,” Wolfe said, holding up a palm. “Miss Montieth, during the course of your friendship with Mr. Harold, did he ever reciprocate your good deeds and find the occasional assignment for you?”

“No. He was not well connected in that way. Or in any way, actually.” She looked at Wolfe, trying to make him understand. “He was a poet, Mr. Wolfe. Not a sycophant. Or a courtier,” she said, looking at me, stressing the word.

“Did anyone, to your knowledge, dislike him enough to kill him?”

“No,” she said. “Not at all.”

Wolfe turned to Thin Lizzie. “Miss Van Sween. Why were you invited to this gathering?”

She didn’t answer. She stared at Wolfe, which she had been doing since she sat down.

“Miss Van Sween?”

“You’re far out,” she said.

“I beg your pardon?”

“You’ve got flowers all over the place and you wear yellow shirts and socks and you’re so fat you could create a whole new species of human being. Circular humans. Far out. I’ve been writing a poem about you, while I’ve been sitting here. But I’m not going to recite it. I’m not even going to write it down. But it lives. It lives forever in the air we breathe. Shiva hears it.”

There was a substantial pause, which Wolfe finally broke.

“Thank you for not reciting it.”

“Once a poem is recited,” she said, “just anybody could hear it. Misinterpret it. Twist it to their own purposes. Look what happened to Nietzsche.”

“Thank you for that. If I may, could I ask you where you were yesterday at 4 p.m.?”

“I was sitting in a coffeehouse. I was thinking.”

“Of course. Did anybody see you?”

“See me think? I doubt it. Who can see the mental processes?”