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When Lew Archer is hired to get the goods on the suspiciously suave Frenchman who's run off with his client's girlfriend, it looks like a simple case of alienated affections. Things look different when the mysterious foreigner turns out to be connected to a seven-year-old suicide and a mountain of gambling debts. **Black Money** is Ross Macdonald at his finest.

Black Money Details

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Author : Ross Macdonald

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From Reader Review Black Money for online ebook

Anthony Vacca says

A debonair Frenchman that appears out of nowhere and sweeps a young socialite off her feet, her gluttonous fiancé who's convinced this bride thief is a fake, a collection of the bored and rich who linger anemically about a decadent sports club, a lumbering gangster with delusions of propriety, a dreamy college professor with a book he can't finish and a sharp-tongued wife he can't please, a dead gambler and the heap of money he owes a Las Vegas Casino called the Scorpion Club, and hundreds of tasty similes to tie the whole mystery together—all in a day's work for Lew Archer, the roving moral consciousness who navigates each of Ross Macdonald's superior private eye mysteries.

Steve says

Like others, I assume, I picked this one up because I saw that the Coen's were writing a screenplay of it, and maybe direct it. If so, it's kind of an odd one for them, in that there's not a lot of action necessarily, and the story is somewhat convoluted (maybe not the right word), and as is often the case with Macdonald, reaches into the past quite a bit.

Fat rich college kid Peter hires Archer to prevent the girl he's in love with from marrying someone he doesn't trust, and who he thinks will not be good for her. This leads Archer into quite a tangled web, eventually involving the supposed suicide of the girl's father, seven years in the past, and the mysterious background of the man she wants to marry. Things play out much differently than you suppose they will as you follow it, as is Macdonald's way. He's really very good at portraying his characters, and though Archer seems like he would be cynical, he professes at one point in this book to "love people." But this is a hard crew to love, though Archer is attracted to one of the most broken characters in the novel, and also to one who is doing a good job of making her way in the world. A pretty engrossing novel, and I am looking forward to seeing what the Coens will do with it.

It's to Macdonald's credit that when he's describing his characters and Archer's attitude towards them, he doesn't get cynical. He portrays them the way they are, and though some are pretty despicable, Archer and Macdonald understand their motives and portray them well.

Jessica says

I feel like I have read a bunch of Ross Macdonald and never like his books but for some stupid reason I keep forcing myself to try. I bought this book because it had a hip, silly, massively appealing cover, but I find the characters extremely boring and the writing style kind of terrible and I'm just going to quit on it right now and that's that.

Yeah I know tons of people think Ross MacDonald is the greatest thing since hard boiled eggs. It seems like I might be one of them, but I tried and I'm not, which I'll do my best to remember the next time I come across one of his books.

F.R. says

Apparently this is going to be The Coen Brothers next movie. Personally I think there are more visually arresting MacDonald novels to adapt. 'Sleeping Beauty' opens with an oil spill on the Californian coast (and I believe I wrote in my review that it was crying out for someone to step into Paul Newman's shoes as Archer, properly named this time); while 'The Underground Man' takes place almost entirely in and around the smoke and flame of a forest fire. Can you honestly think of a more dramatic backdrop for a murder mystery? Having said all that, I am still amazingly excited. In 'Blood Simple', 'Miller's Crossing' and even 'The Big Lebowski' The Coens have demonstrated their brilliance with the hard-boiled genre, and there are no better hands to guide MacDonald to the screen for the first time in over forty years. It doesn't matter that I'd have picked a different book, I'll still be first in line.

"I recognised him instantly. He looked like money about three generations removed from its source. Though he couldn't have been out of his twenties, his face was puffy and apologetic, the face of a middle-aged boy. Under his carefully tailored Ivy League suit he wore a layer of fat like early penetrable armour."

The quality of writing in Ross Macdonald's detective novels is outstanding. Throughout his tales of the rotting underside of supposedly respectable California, there are lines which leap out as poetry, lines where MacDonald captures a moment so precisely and sparingly it takes one's breath away. There is no fat on a Ross Macdonald novel. He is constantly praised for the psychological depth he introduced into the hard-boiled yarn, but what people frequently miss is the restrained simplicity with which he brings these psychological insights to the fore. Macdonald is dealing with complex emotions, but doesn't make them unintelligibly complex. This is in effect psychology for beginners, but psychology for beginners written by a master wordsmith. He is taking those deep motivations and painful truths which drive human beings on and making them pithy and simple to understand. Macdonald is an expert at relating the dark and complex in a way which is clear and beautiful. Of course in this morally dubious world where murder is always just around the corner, it helps that we have the slightly unknowable character of Lew Archer as our guide. Yes, we understand little about his life, but we know what we need to know. He is a shop-worn private eye of the old school, who realises that the sands of what is right and wrong are always shifting beneath him. He wants to be the knight in shining armour and is always disappointed that the world around him isn't as honourable as he. He is the good man who will seek out wrong, though he will not just condemn, but try to understand. He is our guide through murder and treachery, he is our moral compass, but he is a compass who understands that North-East is sometimes as good as North.

Here Archer is hired by a jilted fiancé to find out all he can about the ex-lover's new man. What follows is a case of private tennis clubs, gangsters (and molls), colleges and illegal immigrants. Throughout MacDonald shows his mastery of the form, having tense scene follow tense scene, so that each character is dubious and a possible suspect. It means that even before the big reveal, every man or woman Archer encounters has their own guilt or guilt by association, their own motivations driving them forward. 'Black Money' isn't perfect, containing as it does at least two women whose main characteristic is that they are profoundly cursed by their own beauty, but it is still a brilliantly written work by a true master of the genre.

AC says

When I read *The Chill*, I thought that was Macdonald at his "peak". I was wrong.

If you've come this far in the series (#13), you're likely already a fan of Lew Archer/Ross Macdonald. Even so, I had always felt that he couldn't *quite* reach the level of Chandler - there was always something dated or a touch cheesy here and there -- in the language, in one of the characters, a false note in the dialogue somewhere... minor, but nonetheless a genuine tarnish.

Black Money was published in 1966 -- in other words, in the modern world. It is no longer sitting in or at the poolside of the 50's. It is a book taut and rich, both in its writing and in its plotting -- it is virtually flawless -- and its study of character shows no false tracks that I could discern.

His conscious and deliberate use of peripeteia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peripeteia>), moreover, masterfully handled as always, show *formally* what one already grasps intuitively, that the human condition is, in Millar's eyes, often an utter and wasteful tragedy...

"Life was short and sweet, I thought, sweet and short." And yet people ruin it with their obsessions and stupidities.

This one is simply a gem. Read it.

Bill Kerwin says

A young girl from a good background becomes involved with a mysterious Frenchman at the country club, and her ex-fiancee hires Lew Archer to discover if the Frenchman is an impostor. Soon the Frenchman seems to be connected to an earlier death labeled as a suicide, and then the bodies begin to pile up. As usual, Archer must discover what happened in the past in order to understand the evil which continues to ruin the lives of the young here and now.

I like this book very much, but it finally disappointed me because I did not believe the murderer to be capable of these crimes. As usual, though, Macdonald's plot is well planned, the clues and motives fairly presented, and the revelation prepared for.

Still, it is an interesting novel. I particularly liked the character of the "Frenchman" Morel, a Gatsby-like figure chasing a distinctly West Coast version of the American Dream.

Mike says

After reading three Lew Archer novels in a row and in order of writing, I can honestly say that I hope to do it again. It was a very interesting exercise as I wrote in one of my last two reviews. Kenneth Millar (pen name Ross Macdonald) was a virtuoso. "*The Chill*", "*The Far Side of the Dollar*" and "*Black Money*" are all intricate, character-driven, detective stories, but except for the constancy of Archer, each couldn't be more

different. Sure the author re-used themes, but he did so with great care to avoid a rut that would make his books stale and his sales dry up. I haven't been disappointed, yet.

Each of these three books was written in the mid-sixties by which time Mr. Macdonald had found his "style" and had established Archer's key traits and behavior. I've seen "The Chill" ranked as one of his absolute best novels and I don't dispute that. It has great characters, great action and a plot that kept the reader surprised (described on the cover as the most intricate in an American detective story ever.) I gave it a 4-4.5 rating. But here's the thing: I think I like "Black Money" better. Now, I haven't gone looking for other review or rankings, so maybe that's not such a surprising statement. All I can do is describe why I think this book is a great read.

The story starts off slowly; it's a mundane investigation to discover who and what a wealthy foreigner is. Why do we care? He's stolen away the girl that a young man has been infatuated with for years. A simple tale: they grow up together as neighbors and the boy wants to marry the girl next door. Simple, that is until the author begins to type. Archer uncovers a web of intrigue, money, sex, and personal entanglements that stretch back decades. In the end, the resolution is simple: no one is what they seem, the wealth is illicit, and the boy probably won't get the girl given the final act. So, there you have it a simple start, a simple end and no loose ends to speak of. What could be simpler?

All facetiousness aside, this is some of the best plotting and writing that I have ever read. I can't say for certain that the plot in "Black Money" is any more complex and convoluted as that in "The Chill" or "The Far Side of the Dollar" but the story resonated with me more than "The Chill". I think that the scope here is bigger: small town intrigue amongst "the betters", illegal gambling profits, international money-laundering and banking, and a roster of conflicted characters to act it all out. The "Frenchman" is one of Macdonald's most interesting vilians. He's a self-created man who gets embroiled in the story because of his own human failings. Although working for and as a criminal, he's got it made, except for one small obsession which begins our tale and is his and many others undoing.

Coupled with the roller-coaster of plot and character motivations is the usual sharp and inventive prose. It doesn't take much to uncover a particularly good passage. Literally one can flip open a page or two and find something worth quoting. For example, I opened up to page 86 and found this:

"I left him rooting enthusiastically among the dusty cartons on his shelves, and drove back into the foothills. This was the direction the wind was coming from. It rushed down the canyons like a hot torrent, and roared in the brush around the Bagshaw house. I had to brace myself against it when I got out of the car."

Or try this passage from page 38:

"He lived in the adjoining harbor city, in a rather rundown tract whose one obvious advantage was a view of the ocean. The sun, heavy and red, was almost down on the horizon now. Its image floated like spilled fire on the water."

I have no idea how long he lingered over each book (although the seem to have come out about one per year). Did such images come naturally to him, or did he begin with something more mundane and return to edit in these lyric or lush descriptions? I'd like to believe that he thought in these technicolor and tactile "3D" ways and simply chose the best words to tell the reader what he saw and felt.

Although I don't recall quoting any dialogue, I must confess that is only because these descriptive passages are so alluring. The dialogue is what I would call "appropriate". Rather than long speeches, we get the give and take of a detective pursuing information with those around him and those he seeks out. The actual sentences tend to be short, with only a few strung together even in the longer expositions. The bulk of the information comes from the perspective of Archer as narrator. There we see what the character says and how Archer responds to it.

An example of a longer interview is on page 57:

"Where was Martel born, Mr. Stoll?"

"I have asked myself that question. He claims to be Parisian, Mrs. Bagshaw tells me. But from what little I heard of it, his French is not Paris French. It is too provincial, too formal. Perhaps it is Canadian, or South American. I don't know. I am not a linguist scientist."

"You're the next thing to it," I said encouragingly. "So you think he might be Canadian or South American?"

"That's just a guess. I'm not really familiar with Canadian or South American French. But I am quite sure Martel is not Parisian."

I thanked Stoll. He bowed me out.

Even without knowing the rest of the scene and their earlier conversation, one can see how Macdonald adds depth to the dialogue when needed, but does it in a similar way as he did when describing the approach of sunset.

If you are a fan of detective fiction, this book and every other Archer story is a rare treat. If you are just a lover of good writing, then I urge you to read these books. You won't be disappointed. This book easily deserves a "4.5".

Leslie says

One of the better books in the Lew Archer series!

Evgeny says

It begins as a story told countless number of times starting from the dawn of the history of humanity: boy meets girl, boy falls in love with her, and a tall dark mysterious stranger appears and takes the girl away from the boy. In this case the boy happens to have some spare money to spend on a private investigator who is none other than Lew Archer. The former is sure the tall, dark, and mysterious Frenchman is a phony. While he knows it would be impossible to get the girl back, he still wants to prevent her from making a big mistake, so Archer is to expose a supposedly false Frenchman. Seemingly harmless investigation soon takes a very dark turn - again and again:

When it comes to classic noir one of the staples of the genre is to have a bleak depressing ending. From the

top of my head I can think of only one exception to this: Red Harvest by Dashiell Hammett. While its ending cannot be qualified for Happily Ever After by any stretch of imagination, at least it is *somewhat* optimistic. Following this criteria this book most definitely fits into noir. It has the most depressing ending of all the books in the series so far. If you think you know how it ends before reading let me assure you: this is Ross Macdonald book we are talking about which means you will not be able to predict what will happen due to a usual high number plot twists, red herrings, etc.

While this novel is not as good as eleventh installment of the series (The Chill) which I consider to be the best, it still holds very well on its own. The rating is **4 solid stars**.

Jared Shipley says

My first Ross Macdonald book. A top-notch detective story with an elaborate plot, hard-boiled protagonist, and all the elements of great crime fiction. In Lew Archer, Macdonald creates a funnel for the audience to peer into the lives of the inhabitants of high-class, 1960's Southern California with an objective eye, while Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe is more subjective, loading the prose up with his own viewpoints and opinions of the other characters. Archer views everything just the way the audience does, without any assumed knowledge of the personalities or personas of the people he deals with. It is easy, however, to get lost in this book with the barrage of new characters being introduced roughly every fifteen or twenty pages, same with Chandler, but it all ties together to form a brilliantly crafted, twist-filled story that is actually plausible. While I tend to prefer the romanticism of Chandler, Macdonald proves that he belongs among the greatest authors of hard-boiled crime fiction.

Joe says

Ross Macdonald believed that "Black Money" was his best book. While I don't necessarily agree, I can definitely understand where he is coming from. "Black Money" is Macdonald's version of "The Great Gatsby." It's all about unfulfilled dreams, hopes, and promises.

It all starts with a young man who hires Lew Archer to investigate a young man who he suspects of not being who he claims to be. From there it snowballs into a tale of murder, lust, and heartbreak. Macdonald strips away a lot of his sentimentality in this and keeps the characters pain right near the surface and the story is all the richer for it. Archer himself seems particularly lonely and directionless without his case to solve. I really like that Macdonald has continued to age Archer and the story with the changing times. This came out in 1966 and you can really feel the changing times start to effect and alienate Archer. I look forward to seeing how this series progresses with its narrative, character, and tone.

Quotable Quotes:

"What you do to others you do to yourself. It's the converse of the golden rule."

"The orchestra was playing again, and through the archway I could see people dancing in the adjoining room. Most of the tunes, and most of the dancers, had been new in the twenties and thirties. Together they gave the impression of a party that had been going on too long, till the music and the dancers were worn as thin as the husks of insects after spiders had eaten them."

"The lobby of the hotel was the mouth of a tourist trap which had lost its bite. There were scuff-marks on the furniture, dust on the philodendrons. The bellhop wore an old blue uniform which looked as if he had fought through the Civil War in it."

"She pouted and frowned a little with her thin painted-on eyebrows. She didn't frown very hard because that gave girls wrinkles and besides I might kill her and she didn't want to die with a frown on her lovely face."

"Still holding on to my hand she rose and towed me out onto the dance floor. Round and round we went, with her hair slipping down into both our eyes and her breasts jouncing against me like the special organs of her enthusiasm."

"Clearly she had troubles, and a wise man I knew in Chicago had said once and for all: 'Never sleep with anyone whose troubles are worse than your own.'"

Jim says

This is an excellent entry in Ross Macdonald's series of novels about private eye Lew Archer. This one has elements of Macdonald's recurrent theme of dark family secrets, but it spreads its concerns a little broader than that. Archer is hired to find out the truth about a man who has swept a wealthy young woman off her feet. As always with Macdonald, guilt and the fear of shame play a heavy role in matters. Macdonald isn't as colorful a writer, generally, as his two colleagues atop the heap of private eye fiction, Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, but he never fails to tell a compelling story. This is a good one.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 3* of five

2018 UPDATE still no news and nothing is not good news now.

An antique now, a re-read launched because Ethan and Joel Coen are set to write a screen adaptation. I seem to be alone in this, but I liked their film *Hail Caesar!*.

The novel's dated as heck. Lew Archer's no patch on Travis McGee in the sexism arena, but it's still jarring to 21st century-tuned ears. It's barely noticeable by the standards that the fiftyish Lew would know.

The easy ones were nearly always trouble: frigid or nympho, schizy or commercial or alcoholic, sometimes all five at once.

I admit that I flinched a bit at this. It was a different time indeed.

Macdonald's takedowns of consumerism and vapidly in US culture still ring true, and his damn-close-to-magical-realism coincidences are, for all the strain they put on one's credulity, a huge heap of fun to read. I hope the film's for real and not a victim of the recently sold-off Random House Studios' paltry output curse. (The less you do, the less anyone lets you do.) Since this Lew-Archer-franchise idea has been in play since 2011, it's a sad reality that a year having passed with no news indicates stalled development again. C'mon

Fremantle Media! You know how to get movies made! Hop to it!

WortGestalt says

Ich mag ja die Figur des Privatdetektives Lew Archer, der Mann ist kein Schwätzer, sondern schreitet zur Tat, beziehungsweise zur Befragung, ganz direkt, hier und da ein wenig überlegen, nicht unfreundlich, aber auch nicht gerade kameradschaftlich, immer stringent und irgendwie eine Autoritätsperson. Erinnert mich immer ein wenig an Don Draper, die Hauptfigur aus der TV-Serie "Mad Men". Nur das Lew Archer weniger trinkt. Und die Frauengeschichten vermutlich eher zwischen seinen Romanauftritten erledigt. Ansonsten dominiert in "Schwarzgeld" der Zeitgeist, die 60er Jahre in Kalifornien zwischen der konservativen älteren Generation und der nach Freiheit strebenden jüngeren Generation, das ist hier der Unterton der Geschichte, die sich im wesentlichen um Reichtum und Armut dreht, moralisch wie monetär.

Carla Remy says

A typically satisfying Ross Macdonald mystery.
