

A GOOD OBJECTIVE STORY

(a.k.a. "The Rewrite Man")

The rewrite man was writing the death
Of a miserable Skid Row whore
From the after effects of a drinking bout
Some two or three weeks before.

The facts were simple, dull, and brief
And he had it almost done
When suddenly came the raucous voice
Of James H. Richardson

"On that murder case," the Great Man said
"You can give it lots of play
Go into the mystery angle too
For we're short of news today."

The rewrite man gave a startled cry
At the mention of mystery
And round-eyed, turned to the desk and said
"Were you addressing ME?"

"Of course," said the man; his voice grew thick:
"Some merciless sadist slew
This innocent child of East Fifth Street
Though he probably loved her, too."

"Get it in your lead that a ghastly smile
Was pitiful on her face
And in saying how she was slain, hark back
To the Peete and Denton case."

"And somewhere high in your story tell
Of the marijuana ring
That made this maid of the 7th grade
A wretched, besotted thing."

"Oh yes, in your opening sentence quote
MacArthur on the Flag
Ignore the coroner calling her
A syphilitic bag."

"Write wistfully of the cocktail glass
That broke as her body fell
The artist will alter the photograph

Of that gallon of muscatel."

"Mention a wilted yellow rose
To tincture it with romance
And refer somewhere to an evening gown
Forgetting that she wore no pants."

"The barroom bum she was living with
We'll call her mystery man
And try to mention the Japanese
And the Communists, if you can."

"Get excited about the drama here
Of passion and crime and greed
Write a good objective story and
Get all of this in the lead."

"Give me a take as soon as you can
I want to give it a look
But don't start in till you've got the facts
And hold it to half a book."

The rewrite man with a ghastly leer
That the Great Man didn't see
Started again and finished at last
At twenty-five after three

The climax came the following week
He was gratified to get
The prize for the finest writing to
Appear in the overset

It served the bastard right, of course
As philosophers will note
For being a rewrite man at all
When he could have cut his throat.

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=jhistory&month=0207&week=a&msg=qAiJcdchDX1j61%2bMAdUy3Q&user=&pw=>>

Now, for some "facts" and background:

1. From John Ludwigson, <http://nasw.org/users/jludwigson/objstory.html>

I was given this literary gem by an assistant city editor at The Plain Dealer, the a.m. paper in Cleveland, Ohio, ca. 1965 when I was the newspaper's science writer. It is reproduced here **exactly as I received it**, although I can't quite reproduce the feel of the thermal copy paper it was on...but that was high tech at the time!

On posting this in October 1999, I asked if anyone knew who the original author might be. It was not until July 2002 that someone took me up on it. In fact, this summer two people have written to offer historical information and several others have contributed time and effort.

It seems the original author was **John Reese**, then (ca. 1947) a city hall reporter at the Los Angeles Examiner (a Hearst p.m. paper). He apparently was inspired by the travails of reporter Jim Murray and others who worked for James H. Richardson, the Examiner's city editor, a man lovingly described by Murray as "...a one-eyed, iron-lunged, prototypical Hearst city editor, a tyrant of the city room." The original poem, entitled *The Rewrite Man*, can be found on page 126 of Murray's autobiography: *Jim Murray: An Autobiography*. (or, on the dust cover: *Jim Murray, The Autobiography of the Pulitzer Prize Winning Sports Columnist*) Macmillan, New York, June 1993, ISBN: 0025881515.

Richardson's own view of things—and a gripping account of his very interesting life—can be found in *his* autobiography: *For the Life of Me, memoirs of a city editor*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1954, Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 54-10503. The book is way out of print, but may be found in used bookstores online and elsewhere. And, for the record, as far as I have been able to find out, Richardson never worked in San Francisco.

Further comments are still most welcome. Write to: [John O. Ludwigson](#).

2. My email to John Ludwigson (we were in touch about this):

Dear John:

Great job! Thanks.

A couple of notes:

1. You replace "The Peete and Denton Case" with "The torso murder case." I wonder why.

Tracy Wood's original posting on July 6 had "The Peete and Denton Case." You'll recall that I researched that, and found that it's very plausible, in fact helps to date the poem (my post of July 8).

"The torso murder case" has to be "The Black Dahlia" case of 1947. Richardson discusses it in his autobiography, but to no real conclusion -- the Examiner was sent a letter about it by, maybe, the murderer, so the paper, and therefore JHR, was involved, slightly.

Louise Peete was executed in 1947 as well. And "The Black Dahlia" case might have been known as "the torso murder case" very early

on, say in January or maybe February. You'd have to check the Examiner files to be sure.

2. I got and read JHR's autobiography over the summer. It really is not a good book! A sappy childhood beginning, a long bout with alcoholism, a couple of failed marriages, plus failure as a father, and then some adventures with crooked politicians. It's of interest as the self-serving autobiography of a Hearst-type tyrant, of course.

Anyway, this latter point is of little importance. I'd be interested to hear your reasoning about my first point, though.

Again, thanks for all the work!

Grover Furr
Montclair SU

3. And now, that post of mine from July 8, 2002! You will find it at: <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=jhistory&month=0207&week=b&msg=6EPCBq7S9NwBzeTNQhMmsQ&user=&pw=>

I've also looked up "the Peete and Denton case." It happened in 1920, Louise Peete murdering her husband Jacob Denton. But it was back in the news in 1945, when the same Louise Peete, out of prison, was put on trial for yet another murder, for which she was executed in 1947. This tends to support Tracy's surmise that the poem dates to "just after WWII", when Richardson would also have been City Editor for the L.A. Examiner.

On "the Peete and Denton case", see

http://216.239.39.100/search?q=cache:PwoF9_2nJGoC:www.serialhomicide.com/cases.htm+%2BPeete+%2BDenton&hl=en&ie=UTF-8

(Yeah, it's a long URL, but it works). **[NOTE: It doesn't work any longer; the author is trying to sell a CD of all his cases and so isn't giving them away - GF 03.04]**

Once again, Tracy -- great job.

Grover Furr

4. To find out more about "The Black Dahlia" murder case, in the investigation of which James H. Richardson's *Los Angeles Examiner* was peripherally involved (see the end of his autobiography, cited in No. 1 above), go to <http://www.bethshort.com/dahhome.htm>