



The Galton Case

Ross Macdonald

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Almost twenty years have passed since Anthony Galton disappeared, along with a suspiciously streetwise bride and several thousand dollars of his family's fortune. Now Anthony's mother wants him back and has hired Lew Archer to find him. What turns up is a headless skeleton, a boy who claims to be Galton's son, and a con game whose stakes are so high that someone is still willing to kill for them. Devious and poetic, **The Galton Case** displays MacDonald at the pinnacle of his form.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

The Galton Case Details

Date : Published (first published 1959)

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Author : Ross Macdonald

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Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Noir, Detective, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

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From Reader Review The Galton Case for online ebook

Darwin8u says

"The apparent facts, if you like. I'm not a philosopher. We lawyers don't deal in ultimate realities. Who knows what they are? We deal in appearances."

? Ross Macdonald, The Galton Case

Ross Macdonald definitely dances down the same literary streets as Hammett and Chandler. This hardboiled detective novel, the 8th in the Lew Archer series, feels like it was written in one continuous sitting (that is a good thing).

'The Galton Case' has a naked narrative intensity that is well-supported by its witty dialogue and California Noir setting. Macdonald is one of those authors who is so spare, bare, and muscular with his prose that it is hard NOT to be impressed by the clean, minimalist architecture of his writing. If Proust was edited by Hemingway, liked bad girls (well OK, sometimes Proust liked bad girls) and wrote hardboiled novels, he'd be Ross Macdonald.

Tim Orfanos says

?σως, το καλ?τερο μυθιστ?ρημα του McDonald με 'δυνατο?ς' διαλ?γους και στοιχειωτικ? ατμ?σφαιρα - Μια ?ξυπνη παρουσ?αση της 'σκοτειν?ς' πλευρ?ς της Αμερικ?ς των τελ?ν της δεκαετ?ας του '50 - Το πιο γρ?γορο σε ρο?, και στην εξ?λιξη της πλοκ?ς βιβλ?ο του MacDonald (1959).

Το στοιχε?ο που κ?νει εντ?πωση απ? την αρχ? ε?ναι οι ?ξυπνοι και δημιουργικο? δι?λογοι μεταξ? των ηρ?ων. Ο αναγ?στης ?ρχεται αντιμ?τωπος με την στοιχειωτικ? ατμ?σφαιρα που κυριαρχε? στα σπ?τια των χαρακτ?ρων και, ειδικ?, στη μυστηρι?δη ?παυλη της κυρ?ας Γκ?λτον. Μπορε? συχν? να αναρωτηθε? αν οι ?νθρωποι στοιχει?νουν τα σπ?τια ? αν τα σπ?τια στοιχει?νουν τους ανθρ?πους.

Κ?νουν εντ?πωση τα 3 βασικ? θ?ματα με τα οπο?α καταπι?νεται ο MacDonald εδ?, δηλ. με το φαιν?μενο της πλαστοπροσωπ?ας, την αποξ?νωση των ζευγαρι?ν στις μεγαλουπ?λεις, και τη δρ?ση επικ?νδυνων συμμορι?ν στις Η.Π.Α., κυρ?ως, τη δεκαετ?α του '50.

Γ?νεται ?νας μοναδικ? αποτελεσματικ?ς συνδυασμ?ς hard-boiled στοιχε?ων με στοιχε?α αστυνομικο? μυστηρ?ου, το οπο?ο προσδ?δει μια ιδια?τερη γοητε?α στο ανατρεπτικ? φιν?λε. Μεγ?λο ατο? στην πλοκ? και οι εν?οτε 'σκοτειν?ς' περιγραφ?ς της θ?ας και των εξοχικ?ν περιοχ?ν της Καλιφ?ρνια.

Ο ντετ?κτιβ Λιο? ?ρτσερ ποτ? δεν ?των πιο δραστ?ριος και αινιγματικ?ς!

Πρ?κειται για ?να 'διαμαντ?κι' της Παγκ?σμιας Αστυνομικ?ς Λογοτεχν?ας.

Βαθμολογία: 4,2/5.

(Αν δεν μου θυμίζε σε 2-3 σημεία τη 'Γαλάζια Φλόβα' του Βάιον, θα βαζαζα παραπομπή: 4,6/5 ? 9,2/10).

Nancy Oakes says

Twisty little book, for sure, with an ending that I wasn't expecting. More when I get back on Monday.

Eric says

Fantastic. MacDonald clearly steps out from the shadow of Raymond Chandler with this book. Less cynical and conflicted than Chandler's Philip Marlowe, Lew Archer fits the template of the jaded private eye, but with a more resigned, is-what-it-is outlook on life and corruption. The writing style is less dense and elaborate than Chandler's, but still effective in its bleak starkness. A great novel, not just a great detective novel.

F.R. says

For a writer, reading Ross MacDonald can be an intimidating experience destined to cause vast amounts of envy. The simplicity and yet stark beauty of his prose; the sheer perfect poetry of his descriptions; the way he can do so much with just a few lines of dialogue – like his one time friend and mentor, Raymond Chandler, MacDonald is able to lift genre fiction to a place where it becomes literature.

The Galton Case sees MacDonald's private eye, Lew Archer, investigate a twenty year old missing person case. It's not a perfect book by any means, the ending is too rushed with perhaps one twist too many; but for the most part, reading it is to marvel at a talent quite brilliant.

the gift says

later addition: crime fiction as comfort reading? well something like that, great plot, promises and cynicism both reversed, play the game. it has been some time since the first reading, but it definitely holds up. raymond chandler approvingly claims dashiell hammett brought crime out of the salon and down to the streets... i would suggest macdonald brought crime into the living room...

first review: this is a bourgeois fairy tale, mistaken identity, mistaken childhood, of being a prince or a pauper, this is my favorite feel-good archer investigation. deceptive, absurd, extensive, years conspiracy and then cynicism of all good detectives strained, broken, revealing the improbable final twist, a resolution more psychological than criminal.

Greg says

This is one of the best plotted mysteries in detective fiction I have ever read! The writing is very clean and elegant to with some excellent turns of phrase for genre fiction!

William says

The first half of the book is terrific, and the twist in the middle is good, just what you'd expect from a top detective story.

Unfortunately, the pacing slides and as we approach the conclusion, the writing becomes almost a laundry list of rushed explanations, as if MacDonald were bored with this book.

And I was not surprised by the ending at all, sadly.

Update: His book "Find a Victim" is worse, but with some moments of brilliant prose.

Mike says

I read my first Lew Archer novel just a couple of weeks ago and was very impressed. "The Galton Case" reinforces all of the good things that I said previously; "Ross Macdonald" could write extremely well. The prose is distinctive, powerful and sensuous. Where else does the detective get hired (page 9) because an old friend claims, "...I trust you to handle this affair with some degree of urbanity"? Urbanity! It wasn't a common expression in the 40s, 50s or any decade. And how about this lush paragraph, on page 12?

"Sable made a signal for a left turn. I followed him between stone gateposts in which the name Galton was cut. The majestic iron gates gave a portcullis effect. a serf who was cutting the lawn with a power-mower paused to tug at his forelock as we went by. the lawn was the color of the ink they use to print the serial numbers on banknotes, and it stretched in unbroken smoothness for a couple of hundred yards. The white facade of a pre-Mizener Spanish mansion glared in the green distance."

"The color of the ink they use to print the serial numbers on banknotes" - as soon as I read that phrase I knew that I would be including that paragraph in this review. Macdonald uses vocabulary and language to make his prose expressive in a way that puts most other writers to shame. (The next paragraph correctly employs the words, "porte-cochere" and "caduceus".)

And while both "The Wycherly Woman" and this book share much of the same process and "atmosphere", neither is a copycat of the other. Each offers a different emphasis on character motivation, psychology and the whole hard-boiled schtick. Lew Archer is an American, action-oriented, slogging-through-the-sewers type of detective, but he has instincts and flashes of brilliance that lift him above the twists and turns of the plot and the actors. Although understated, his powers of observation equal those of Holmes and often other characters notice how quick-witted and observant he is. More often than not it gets him in hot water with allies, officials and enemies. Showing that they are often as observant as he is.

These novels are not written so cryptically as to prevent the reader from stumbling along with Archer to the correct solution. One can figure out the true criminal before the puzzle is laid bare, but nothing is given away for free. Knowing exactly why the person acted is more deeply buried than who. Despite the well-turned phrases, these books are fast-paced and captivating. As I wrote in my previous review, I find it hard to believe that I had not read a novel by this man before. I am eagerly looking forward to my next "fix".

Cbj says

The whole novel is like one big con job. On the reader. Ross Macdonald is a great con artist. He distracts the reader with over the top similes (a blonde in a pink robe gleamed like a mirage) and hilarious tongue in cheek dialog (I am captain Nemo, I just came ashore from a hostile submarine) while he spins an utterly preposterous plot that would put some Bollywood screenwriters to shame.

A rich woman on her death bed wants to reconcile with her long lost son (a naive but talented writer) who married a woman from a different class. World weary (she had blue white hair and a look on her face you dont see too often anymore, the look of a woman who hasn't been disappointed) and philistine detective Lew Archer is put on the case by Gordon Sable, the old woman's lawyer.

Archer the first person narrator is an intense observer of people and nothing escapes him - especially sadness and failure. He also has a roving eye for women and looks at them as nothing but objects of sex. The humor is a mix of the sarcastic and the subtle (face like an unfinished sculpture). I also liked the descriptions of small town American buildings, motels and landscapes.

It is a great yarn that stumbles briefly when Archer is kidnapped and given a beating by thugs - it somehow came across as a token fistfight or action scene in a movie. Otherwise, this would have been a 5/5.

Evgeny says

A wealthy couple disowned their only son who was too liberal for them. Twenty years passed and the guy seemed to disappear from the face of the Earth. Now his dying mother wanted to have reconciliation with him so she hired Lew Archer through her attorney for seemingly hopeless lost person search. Archer actually did not even have time to agree to the job before the first dead body dropped by to say hi.

My biggest complaint about the previous book was the actual lack of investigation by Archer. This time the guy really earned his money. It has already become an everyday routine for him when somebody takes his car using a gun as a very effective persuasion tool. This time is not an exception. He also got beaten up a couple of times, pretty bad even by his own standards (bad guy always love to use him as a punching bag).

As I already mentioned this is a big improvement over the previous book which was so weak that is almost made me reconsider my decision to read the whole series. This one brought back my faith in the series. Even though I did not like the way the novel ends it still deserves 4 stars.

TL;DR version of this review: last book

This book:

Larry says

Ross Macdonald wrote about money, family, and betrayal in twenty Lew Archer novels. Archer, a retired police sergeant, works as a private investigator in Southern California in the late 40s through the early 60s. This book sees Archer searching for a wealthy family's outcast son, missing for over twenty years. Hired by the family lawyer, whose thug of a house man is murdered shortly after Archer is hired, the family's for which Archer now works is every bit as unpleasant as the one that hired Philip Marlowe worked for in "The Big Sleep." When it became clear (in something of a flukey way) that the house man had some kind of unsavory connection to the town in which the missing man was last seen, Archer swings into action to examine the connection.

Archer isn't as flashy as Marlowe or Sam Spade, nor as jaded, but his low-key observations about the people he encounters have a fair bit of bite to them, and Macdonald's prose is both smooth and dialogue-driven. The nature of California's moneyed classes are always under examination, and in much deeper ways than Chandler and Hammett provided, though the books seem more dated in some ways than those of Chandler and Hammett. There is a letter included in the appendix to the recent Library of America volume that includes "The Galton Case." In it, Macdonald defends his craft against that of his rivals, making it clear that he considered himself to be a better writer than either Chandler or Hammett. Having read less of Macdonald than Chandler and Hammett, I'll wait to judge.

Leslie says

A very good entry in the Lew Archer PI series with an extra twist at the end.

Steven Godin says

L.A Private eye Lew Archer takes on a case for the Galton family to try and find Anthony Galton missing for more than twenty years, he doesn't have high hopes and thinks it's a waste of time but follows through anyway on bits and pieces of information that first sends him to San Francisco to pick up a trail, where we go from here is classic detective fiction territory with a complex plot to rival Chandler or Hammett, the mystery/suspense of a Hitchcock movie and a mixed bag of characters where nothing is ever as it seems. Call me old fashioned but it was also nice to be transported back to a time without the gizmo's and gadgets of the modern world where any investigating would have been a hell of a lot harder than the CSI generation of today. Riveting stuff!

Harry Kane says

Some authors I read for the plot. Some for the characters. Some for the atmosphere. And some for the prose. Simenon is for atmosphere. Ross is for prose. Like many others I'm reading the Archer books chronologically, starting with the first one. There are many signs in the first books that Ross Macdonald is a phenomenon, but generally it was like a more insecure Chandler, surrounding himself like an octopus with ink with too many strained metaphors and far too poetic descriptions. Not as much as say Koontz or Charles Grant, but still a bit throwing off.

And then comes the Galton Case. The year is 1959, the book is the eighth installment in Lew Archer's saga, the author is 44, and has been a published novelist for 15 years. I started reading the first chapter and immediately a prose orgasm made me twitch in spasms of joy. Then again, a paragraph later. Then again, and again, and again. No false notes here. No insecurities. This is Fitzgerald at his best meets Hammett at his best, and the post-Freudian undercurrents are so well handled that they no longer distract but add to the prose punch. Only people more or less well read in the field catch the Reichian references now, otherwise they are just excellent literary devices.

What can I say? I understand now why Peter Straub has been trying for this prose level his whole career. And I'm gratified that before he grew too old, Straub managed to produce such a book - *A Dark Matter*. I'm also gratified that Ross Macdonald peaked far before reaching an old age. I intellectually know that chances are that every next Archer book will not be like the Galton Case, that there likely will be more dud installments, and maybe an overall post-peak decline by some point, but emotionally I hope very much that this impeccable prose-weaving level will come up many more times in Mr. Macdonald's books.

Quotes:

The Listening Ear was full of dark blue light and pale blue music. A combo made up of piano, bass fiddle, trumpet, and drums was playing something advanced. I didn't have my slide rule with me, but the four musicians seemed to understand each other. From time to time they smiled and nodded like space jockeys passing in the night. The man at the piano seemed to be the head technician. He smiled more distantly than the others, and when the melody had been done to death, he took the applause with more exquisite remoteness. Then he bent over his keyboard again like a mad scientist.

The tight-hipped waitress who brought my whisky-and-water was interchangeable with nightclub girls anywhere. Even her parts looked interchangeable. But the audience was different from other nightclub crowds. Most of them were young people with serious expressions on their faces. A high proportion of the girls had short straight hair through which they ran their fingers from time to time. Many of the boys had longer hair than the girls, but they didn't run their fingers through it so much. They stroked their beards instead.

Another tune failed to survive the operation, and then the lights went up. A frail-looking middle-aged man in a dark suit sidled through the blue curtains at the rear of the room. The pianist extended his hand and assisted him onto the bandstand. The audience applauded. The frail-looking man, by way of a bow, allowed his chin to subside on the big black bow tie which blossomed on his shirt front. The applause rose to a crescendo.

Bill Kerwin says

This is the first great Lew Archer novel, and it has all the important Ross Macdonald themes: money, family betrayal, a masquerade, and a crime in the present linked to a crime in the past.

There are two things that make this novel great. The first is that, in diction, style and plot structure, it is as carefully realized as any poem. Every line of dialogue, every bit of description, contributes to the beauty of the whole. It is almost without flaw: for me, the only memorable blot is a slightly clunky last line. (Although there may also be a weird breast metaphor or two. I wouldn't be surprised. I have long since trained myself to ignore these typical Macdonald lapses.)

The second thing that makes this book great is the ending, unusual for any mystery novel but particularly surprising for Macdonald. After all the tragic events, it ends with joy. And the result is not a cheap melodrama with a crowd-pleasing conclusion, but a genuine tragi-comedy, like Shakespeare used to make.

Do not miss it. This is a classic of the genre.

Jessica says

If you don't especially like the Ross Macdonald novels you keep reading, don't give up because eventually you will find one you really enjoy! For me it was this.

While it wasn't at all the main point, a lot of this book seemed to be about how it sucks to be a woman. It did an amazing job of showing a changing California, and I loved seeing this view of my home state in a transitional stage before my own day. Plus an awesome plot that kept ahead of me without dirty tricks and Archer in top form. Good times.

Joe says

This may be my favorite Lew Archer novel yet. The plot is complex without being convoluted. The prose is sparse yet elegant and beautiful. The protagonist is flawed yet fascinating. The villains all have understandable motivations and feel REAL.

This book has some real stakes for Archer and without spoiling anything he is forever changed by the time the book is done.

Some complain about this one having a few too many twists but Macdonald earned every one of them. This was has the holy trinity of noir: Murder, Regret, and Family. I love these books and this author.

Quotable quotes:

"You can't make a Hamlet without breaking egos. But let's not talk about me."

"She waited until I was practically standing on her feet; then she yawned and stretched elastically. She had

wine and sleep on her breath. But her figure was very good, lush-breasted and narrow-waisted. I wondered if it was for sale or simply on exhibition by the owner."

George K. says

Τελευτα?α φορ? που δι?βασα βιβλ?ο του Ρος Μακντ?ναλντ ?ταν τον Μ?ρτιο του 2014, εν? και γενικ? Αμερικ?νικα αστυνομικ? νου?ρ των δεκαετι?ν του '50 και του '60 ε?χα επ?σης καιρ? να διαβ?σω. ?πως ?ταν λογικ?, μου ?λειψε πολ? το εξαιρετικ? και μοναδικ? στιλ του συγγραφ?α, που μπορ? να πω ?τι ε?ναι στο ?διο επ?πεδο με τον μαιτρ του ε?δους, Ρ?ιμοντ Τσ?ντλερ.

Η υπ?θεση Γκ?λτον ε?ναι μια ?κρως μπερδεμ?νη ιστορ?α απ?της και εγκλ?ματος, με τον ψ?χραιμο και ?νετο Λου ?ρτσερ να αναλαμβ?νει να βγ?λει μια ?κρη. Μια πλο?σια ηλικιωμ?νη κυρ?α, με αρκετ? προβλ?ματα υγε?ας, ψ?χνει τον γιο της που χ?θηκε σε νεαρ? ηλικ?α πριν απ? ε?κοσι χρ?νια. Κατ? την ?ρευνα, ο ?ρτσερ θα βρεθε? μπλεγμ?νος σε μια ιστορ?α με μοιχε?ες, φ?νους, π?σης φ?σεως εγκληματ?ες και, φυσικ?, με ?να κ?ρο οικογενειακ? μυστικ?. Η ζω? του θα κινδυν?ψει μια-δυο φορ?ς, θα βαρεθε? να κ?νει ταξ?δια με αεροπλ?να, εν? θα βρεθε? αντιμ?τωπος και με πειστικο?ς ψε?τες...

Πολ? ωρα?α νου?ρ ιστορ?α -απ? αυτ?ς που με εξιτ?ρουν-, γεμ?τη μυστ?ριο, ανατροπ?ς και αποκαλ?ψεις. Καθ?ς η πλοκ? του βιβλ?ου ξεδιπλ?νεται, πολλ? μυστικ? βγα?νουν στην επιφ?νεια και τα πρ?γματα γ?νονται αρκετ? μπερδεμ?να, ?μως στο τ?λος ?λα αποκαλ?πτονται, ο συγγραφ?ας καταφ?ρνει να εν?σει ?λες τις τελ?τσες με μεγ?λη επιτυχ?α και ?νεση. Τα καλ? του βιβλ?ου (και κ?θε βιβλ?ου του Ρος Μακντ?ναλντ) δεν τα βρ?σκεις μ?νο στην πλοκ?, αλλ? και στην εξαιρετικ? γραφ?. Τι να πω; Τρομερ?ς περιγραφ?ς καταστ?σεων, ανθρ?πων και τοπ?ων, σχετικ? σ?ντομες και λιτ?ς, αλλ? απ?λυτα παραστατικ?ς και ?μορφες, εξαιρετικ? δι?λογοι, αληθιφανε?ς και πειστικ?, και φυσικ? ωρα?ο λεπτ? χιο?μορ απ? πλευρ?ς Λου ?ρτσερ.

Με λ?γα λ?για, πρ?κειται για ?να ?κρως απολαυστικ?, καλογραμμ?νο και ευκολοδι?βαστο αστυνομικ? νου?ρ, με ?λα τα καλο?δια του ε?δους. ?σοι λατρε?ουν τ?τοιες ιστορ?ες, δεν υπ?ρχει περ?πτωση να μην με?νουν ικανοποιημ?νοι απ? την συγκεκριμ?νη ιστορ?α, εν? σ?γουρα θα απολα?σουν και το μοναδικ? στιλ γραφ?ς του συγγραφ?α. Θα μπορ?σα να του β?λω ακ?μα και π?ντε αστερ?κια, αλλ? μ?λλον θα αδικο?σα ?λλα βιβλ?α, συν το ?τι μπορε? να ε?μαι ενθουσιασμ?νος αυτ? την στιγμ? επειδ? π?ρασε αρκετ?ς απ? τ?τε που δι?βασα Ρος Μακντ?ναλντ. ?πως και να?χει, το βιβλ?ο προτε?νεται ?νετα.

Gabriel says

The Galton Case actually shares many genes with its ancestor, *The Moving Target*, the first Archer book. This one uses the same structure and the same private eye, but the big difference here is that *The Galton Case* applies James's "lucid reflector" strategy to Archer, yielding something far removed from Chandler's neon-tube metaphors and half-serious gangster slang. Instead, it yields something much closer to the "literary novel" (read: "psychoanalytic novel") of the last eighty years. Expect Chandler, come away disappointed: the twists are telegraphed and not at all bent, and the language is as tame as a housecat at meal time.

Macdonald's private eye angle can be seen as a framing device, and a very effective one at that: here, for

once, is a good excuse for putting together these particulars into a "story," and an occasion for relating them. But he doesn't then get close enough to his framed story to reveal more than details-- that's all Archer has to go on, so that's all we get. This has the very odd, almost alienating, effect of rendering what should be mysterious (but almost never is)-- the actions of his characters-- actually mysterious. And Macdonald is smart enough to use his plot to turn the spotlight on that mystery.

This novel exists in a kind of DMZ, where on the one hand, we have a reflector who is interested only in "solving" the case, and, on the other hand, a writer who is interested in getting to the bottom of his characters' psychology, finding out "why" people act the way they do. The reason that this novel works at all is that that writer is a good enough writer that he puts his reflector's limitations ahead of his own concerns.
