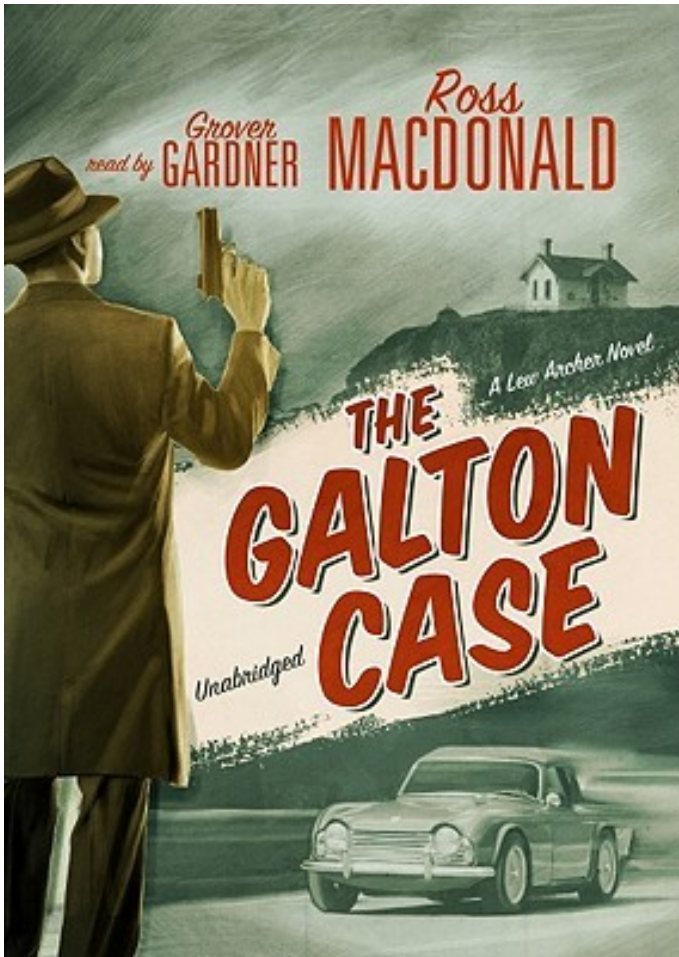

Ross MacDonald

Galton Case (Lew Archer #8)



Title: Galton Case (Lew Archer #8)

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Description

The Barnes & Noble Review

In 1959,

Ross Macdonald published what is generally considered his breakthrough novel, *The Galton Case*, a complex, psychologically acute account of the search for personal identity, and of the destructive power of the unresolved past. Macdonald ultimately established himself as one of three dominant forces in the development of the modern private-eye novel. The other two, of course, were [Dashiell Hammett](#), who virtually invented the form, and [Raymond Chandler](#), who brought wit, attitude, and a highly evolved sense of language, elevating detective fiction to a whole new level. Macdonald -- the pseudonym of California-born novelist Kenneth Millar -- was the direct literary descendent of these two titans, and he worked comfortably within that inherited tradition for a number of years, producing several excellent, if generic, novels featuring private investigator Lew Archer. (Archer, incidentally, was named after Sam Spade's partner, Miles Archer, who is murdered in the opening pages of [The Maltese Falcon](#).)

The Galton Case was Macdonald's 13th novel, and his 8th entry in the Lew Archer series. It also represented his first fictional attempt to engage certain sensitive areas from his own unresolved past. Foremost among these was the sense of abandonment that resulted from his parents' divorce, which occurred when he was four years old. In the aftermath of that divorce, the young Ken Millar lived a fatherless, rootless existence that left him troubled, vulnerable, and emotionally scarred. Using the distancing device of the detective story -- which he once referred to as "a welder's mask enabling both writer and reader to handle dangerously hot materials" -- Millar/Macdonald created, in *The Galton Case*, a classic mystery that contains within itself a thinly veiled spiritual autobiography.

As the novel opens, Lew Archer has just been hired by Gordon Sable, a Santa Teresa lawyer, to track down the long-lost son of his wealthiest client, the imperious Maria Galton. Her son, Anthony Galton, had disappeared more than 20 years before, following a bitter family argument over the suitability of his new, and very pregnant, wife. Now that she is old, frail, and close to death, Maria Galton is determined to reconcile with her son, and to locate the grandchild she has never met. Archer, certain that too much time has passed and that his chances of success are slight, reluctantly agrees to investigate.

Contrary to expectations, he gets immediate -- and astonishing -- results. First, he discovers the existence of a decapitated skeleton that appears to be the mortal remains of Anthony Galton. At the same time, he meets an orphaned young man -- "John Brown Jr." -- whose quest for identity forms the psychological heart of this novel. Brown bears a striking resemblance to the deceased Anthony Galton and possesses a birth certificate indicating that he just might be the long-lost Galton heir. Archer, wary and only half convinced, presents the young man to his putative grandmother, who welcomes him with

open arms and pronounces the investigation over.

But, of course, it isn't over. The Galton family physician, who is himself unconvinced of Brown's legitimacy, hires Archer to look into the young man's background. This new stage of the investigation takes Archer on a journey through John Brown's past, carrying him from California to Ann Arbor, Michigan, and from Michigan to Canada, as he searches for proof of what he now believes is a carefully constructed act of imposture. Along the way, his investigation intersects with an apparently unrelated murder involving Gordon Sable and his emotionally damaged wife, with the violent depredations of a Nevada gangster, and with the long-buried secret behind the 20-year-old murder of Anthony Galton. In the final pages, all of the elements, past and present, come together in a climactic revelation, and John Brown Jr.'s traumatic history stands fully, painfully revealed.

The Galton Case created a kind of template for the 10 Lew Archer novels that would eventually follow. That template, which describes a process roughly analogous to that of psychoanalysis, invariably involved a number of common elements: a troubled family, torn apart by a combination of internal pressures and external events; a crime (or crimes) of violence; and an ancient, festering secret whose resolution is essential to the process of healing, and to the ultimate resolution of present-day dilemmas. This primal drama, embodied for the first time in the story of John Brown/John Galton and his search for his personal heritage, represents Macdonald's major contribution to his chosen genre. More than any of his predecessors -- including Hammett and Chandler -- he understood both the complexities and the vulnerabilities of human psychology and brought that understanding to bear in a unique, irreplaceable series of novels that broke new ground, that broadened -- and deepened -- the emotional territory available to the writers who followed in his wake.

(Bill Sheehan)

Bill Sheehan reviews horror, suspense, and science fiction for Cemetery Dance, The New York Review of Science Fiction, and other publications. His book-length critical study of the fiction of Peter Straub, [At the Foot of the Story Tree](#), has been published by Subterranean Press (www.subterraneanpress.com).

Insightful reviews

Steven: 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!

Kenneth: This was the first Ross Macdonald book I read and it's still one of my favorites. The true test of a great detective novel is whether you can reread it -- and I've reread this one four or five times. I agree with another poster here -- Macdonald is one of the best American novelists of the 20th Century, period, regardless of genre, and Chandler doesn't even come close. Required reading for anyone who loves real noir fiction.

Darwin8u: 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 and bare 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.

- Robert Farwell / Edward Jones library / Mesa, AZ 2014

Gabriel: The Galton Case truly stocks many genes with its ancestor, The relocating Target, the 1st Archer book. This one makes use of a similar constitution and a similar deepest eye, however the difference this is that The Galton Case applies James's "lucid reflector" technique to Archer, yielding anything some distance faraway from Chandler's neon-tube metaphors and half-serious gangster slang. Instead, it yields anything a lot towards the "literary novel" (read: "psychoanalytic novel") of the final 80 years. count on Chandler, come away disappointed: the twists are telegraphed and never in any respect bent, and the language is as tame as a housecat at meal time. Macdonald's inner most eye attitude could be visible as a framing device, and a truly potent one at that: here, for once, is an efficient excuse for placing jointly those details right into a "story," and an social gathering for touching on them. yet he does not then get shut sufficient to his framed tale to bare greater than details-- that is all Archer has to move on, so that is all we get. This has the very odd, virtually alienating, impact of rendering what can be mysterious (but nearly by no means is)-- the activities of his characters-- truly mysterious. And Macdonald makes sense adequate to take advantage of his plot to show the highlight on that mystery. This novel exists in one of those DMZ, the place at the one hand, we have now a reflector who's basically in "solving" the case, and, at the different hand, a author who's attracted to attending to the ground of his characters' psychology, checking out "why" humans act the best way they do. the explanation that this novel works in any respect is that that author is an effective sufficient author that he places his reflector's boundaries sooner than his personal concerns.

Ian Kirkpatrick: "The Galton Case" is the 1st Ross Macdonald novel i've got read, however it won't be the last. I nonetheless get a buzz from learning an writer whose paintings strikes me.

Macdonald's paintings spans from the mid-forties to the early eighties, yet many critics suppose that this novel, initially released in 1959, marked a shift right into a deeper and extra complicated phase. Macdonald used to be usually in comparison to Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. certainly his detective Lew Archer owes his identify to Sam Spade's murdered colleague Miles Archer in Hammett's seminal paintings "The Maltese Falcon". but Archer is a really diverse personality to both Spade or Chandler's Philip Marlowe. He could be as hard-boiled, but underneath his difficult external he by some means has extra in universal with a therapist conventional detective. In Macdonald's palms he frequently makes an preliminary wisecrack a few personality that foreshadows a miles deeper truth. "The Galton Case" is a shockingly advanced and literary detective story. Archer is employed by way of a dour attorney to track Anthony Galton, lacking for over 20 years and inheritor to the Galton fortune, held through Anthony's demise mom who seeks a reconciliation. Is Anthony alive or useless and is a guy claiming to be his long-lost-son genuine or an imposter? Archer has to choose his method via a forged of disparate characters, such a lot of whom aren't as they first appear. The plot is deliciously advanced and has extra purple herrings than a Baltic trawler. This isn't an easy "whodunit" yet a superbly layered paintings about identity, greed and the ability of myth. It owes as a lot to the Oedipus archetype, classical tragedy and Freudian research because it does to the culture of Hammett and Chandler. It additionally contains a few strong and undying writing. One word that might stick with me for a very long time happens whilst Archer opens a lifeless man's suitcase. "Its contents emitted a whiff of tobacco, sea water, sweat and the subtler indescribable odour of masculine loneliness." Definitely now not your normal detective novel.

Harry Kane: a few authors I learn for the plot. a few for the characters. a few for the atmosphere. and a few for the prose. Simenon is for atmosphere. Ross is for prose. Like many others i am studying the Archer books chronologically, beginning with the 1st one. there are numerous symptoms within the first books that Ross Macdonald is a phenomenon, yet more often than not it was once like a extra insecure Chandler, surrounding himself like an octopus with ink with too many strained metaphors and much too poetic descriptions. no longer up to say Koontz or Charles Grant, yet nonetheless a piece throwing off. And then comes the Galton Case. The 12 months is 1959, the e-book is the 8 installment in Lew Archer's saga, the writer is 44, and has been a broadcast novelist for 15 years. i began analyzing the 1st bankruptcy and instantly a prose orgasm made me twitch in spasms of joy. Then again, a paragraph later. Then again, and again, and again. No fake notes here. No insecurities. this is often Fitzgerald at his top meets Hammett at his best, and the post-Freudian undercurrents are so good dealt with that they now not distract yet upload to the prose punch. in basic terms humans kind of good learn within the box trap the Reichian references now, otherwise they're simply very good literary devices. What am i able to say? I comprehend now why Peter Straub has been making an attempt for this prose point his entire career. and i am gratified that sooner than he grew too old, Straub controlled to supply this kind of ebook - a gloomy Matter. i am additionally gratified that Ross Macdonald peaked a long way prior to achieving an previous age. I intellectually understand that likelihood is that each subsequent Archer ebook aren't just like the Galton Case, that there most likely may be extra dud installments, and perhaps an overall post-peak decline by means of a few point, yet emotionally i am hoping a great deal that this impeccable prose-weaving point will arise many many extra instances in mr. Macdonald's books. Quotes: The Listening Ear was once packed with darkish blue mild and faded blue music. A

combination made of piano, bass fiddle, trumpet, and drums used to be enjoying whatever advanced. I did not have my slide rule with me, however the 4 musicians appeared to comprehend each other. At times they smiled and nodded like area jockeys passing within the night. The guy on the piano looked to be the pinnacle technician. He smiled extra distantly than the others, and whilst the melody were performed to death, he took the applause with extra beautiful remoteness. Then he bent over his keyboard back like a mad scientist. The tight-hipped waitress who introduced my whisky-and-water was once interchangeable with nightclub women anywhere. Even her components seemed interchangeable. However the viewers was once diversified from different nightclub crowds. Such a lot of them have been kids with severe expressions on their faces. A excessive percentage of the ladies had brief instantly hair in which they ran their hands from time to time. A number of the boys had longer hair than the girls, yet they did not run their palms via it so much. They stroked their beards instead. Another music did not live on the operation, after which the lighting went up. A frail-looking middle-aged guy in a dismal swimsuit sidled throughout the blue curtains on the rear of the room. The pianist prolonged his hand and assisted him onto the bandstand. The viewers applauded. The frail-looking man, in terms of a bow, allowed his chin to subside at the giant black bow tie which blossomed on his blouse front. The applause rose to a crescendo.

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