

A Review of *Murder in Miniature and Other Stories*

By

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Book: *Murder in Miniature and Other Stories*
Author: Leo Bruce
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Murder in Miniature and Other Stories is a collection of short stories written by Rupert Croft-Cooke under his pseudonym Leo Bruce. The stories were compiled by Barry Pike who also provides an introduction to the book that outlines Bruce's life and the characters that he created. Most of the short stories, which are all crime-related, were published in the London Evening Standard newspaper and magazines in the 1950's. For those who enjoy Bruce's short stories, *Murder in Miniature* is one of the first books that incorporates many of his works into the same collection. Twenty-eight of Bruce's short stories are included in the book which provides illustrations of criminal events from the perspective of both offenders and the law enforcement officers who investigate them. Most of the stories are quick to gain the interest of the audience and focus on sensationalized crimes such as murder, robbery, and kidnapping. Bruce does a masterful job in creating his characters and describing the English countryside in which the stories take place.

Ten of the total stories revolve around the character Sergeant Beef, a retired police detective who now solves crimes as a private investigator. These stories include: *Clue in the Mustard*, *Holiday Task*, *Murder in Miniature*, *The Doctor's Wife*, *Beef and the Spider*, *Summons to Death*, *The Chicken and the Egg*, *Blunt Instrument*, *I, Said the Sparrow*, and *A Piece of Paper*. Sergeant Beef is described by Bruce as an older English man with a red mustache and a round midsection who enjoys a cold beer, playing darts, and gardening when not investigating suspicious crimes. His stories are narrated by Beef's friend who is willing to accept his eccentricities and listen attentively to his stories as he asks one rhetorical question after another. The banter between Beef and his narrator provide many light hearted moments within the often dark stories. In the tales, Bruce has Sergeant Beef investigating a variety of mysterious events ranging from the disappearance of a prison warden to the murder of a circus star whose corpse literally falls onto Beef's lap while riding the train. The stories involving Sergeant Beef are some of the most entertaining and his attention to detail and ability to enter the mind of his suspects will keep readers both perplexed and intrigued.

Another interesting character who reoccurs in Bruce's short stories is Detective-Sergeant Grebe. Unlike Beef, Grebe is much more reserved and serious, yet he shares Beef's keen eye towards the truth and the ability to recognize when the facts do not entirely line up. Detective-Sergeant Grebe is involved in eight of the stories included in *Murder in Miniature* and although

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he lacks the comical relationship between Beef and his narrator Lionel Townsend, readers will enjoy the way which he approaches his investigations and the delicate and careful methods he uses to solve his mysteries. Grebe is featured in *Murder in Reverse*, *Woman in the Taxi*, *Person or Persons*, *Blind Witness*, *The Marsh Light*, *A Stiff Drink*, *Into Thin Air*, and *A Case for the Files*. Readers will find Grebe reminiscent of a “Joe Friday” detective whose sharp intelligence and meticulous eye for detail allow him to see the facts and quickly identify the offender.

The remainder of the ten stories in the collection involve characters who are unique to each tale and are not part of a series. These stories include: *On the Spot*, *A Letter of the Law*, *A Glass of Sherry*, *The Scene of the Crime*, *The Nine Fifty-Five*, *The Wrong Moment*, *A Box of Capsules*, *Deceased Wife’s Sister*, *Riverside Night*, and *Rufus—and the Murderer*. Several of the stories follow a similar formula to Beef’s and Grebe’s tales by narrating the story from the vantage point of a law enforcement officer. On the other hand, a number of the stories differ in that they are told from the perspective of the offender or from a neutral third party. Although the stories diverge in their narrators or points of view, they share the common theme that no crime is perfect and that a criminal most always makes some type of mistake that will lead to their apprehension. Yet, one story in particular, *On the Spot*, which recounts a police officer’s plan to carry out a crime of his own, does not follow this pattern and readers may feel a sense of injustice in the conclusion of the tale.

Murder in Miniature and Other Stories includes a series of tales that herald back to the beginning of the detective novel genre. Each of the stories is cleverly written and is the perfect length to keep the interest of the audience. Bruce does a wonderful job of creating several twists within each story to keep the reader on the edge of their seats until the guilty party is brought to light or given their just desserts at the end of the tale. Several of the stories end quite abruptly and will leave the audience pondering the ending long after the story has been completed. Those readers who enjoy solving puzzles will take great pleasure following along with the stories and attempting to reveal the guilty party before they are known to the victims or investigators. Unlike the crime novels and stories from the present day, no complex technological devices or crime labs are needed to solve these mysteries. Instead, the detectives follow clues and use their experience and knowledge of the deviant mind to bring the criminals to justice.

Instructors of criminal justice or criminology courses will most likely find *Murder in Miniature* not applicable for the classroom setting. However, the book may be useful in courses that discuss popular culture and criminal justice as an illustration of early crime-related fictional literature. Those individuals who take pleasure in reading crime mysteries and detective-style books will truly enjoy *Murder in Miniature and Other Stories* and will find the short tales both entertaining and intriguing.