

'The Babysitter' morbid; typical detective story

By Scott Kleager

Detective fiction (or suspense fiction) is now one of the most popular genres in America.

book review

Like science fiction, detective fiction has sold so well because it's a good way to be entertained and an easy way to relax.

The Babysitter, by Andrew Coburn, is relaxing in a morbid sort of way. The characters look familiar as trite creations and include the police chief, the FBI men, the victimized couple who've had their baby kidnapped, the Mafia restaurant owner who knew the babysitter before she was killed and of course the totally deranged killer-kidnapper. The characters themselves are nearly transparent, reacting in an expected way to just about everything.

The wife of the victimized couple, for instance, is stereotypically "intuitive." Toward the end of the book when she, her husband and the police chief are unsuspectingly closing in on the killer and kidnapper, she says: "I feel closer to Paula now than when she was alive. . . . Do you feel that way?"

Babysitter bludgeoned

Like most works of this over-worked genre, *The Babysitter* starts out with a crime. Mrs. and Mr. Wright come home from a movie to find their babysitter bludgeoned to death on their living room floor and their baby daughter gone. They

find out the sitter was using a false name and gave the Wrights a false job reference, which they didn't check (isn't it always that way?).

From then on it's dirty laundry time with all the Wright's friends saying the wrong things, and coming more and more under the watchful eye of the FBI. One of Mr. Wright's co-workers, in fact, kills himself because his wife has found out, through the investigating agents, that he likes young college women that study under him. The college he taught for, and Mr. Wright teaches for, is the usual *Peyton Place*.

Cop 'kicks the bucket'

Finally, the parents find the killer-kidnapper with the help of the good-hearted, over-worked police chief, who has a fatal heart attack just before it all ends.

Although it sticks closely to the genre, *The Babysitter* does a few interesting things. Instead of just the dopey cops muddling things up, the author includes the dopey FBI and various ways in which they mess up things too. This aspect of the book neither helps nor hurts the plot in the end.

Amazingly enough, there's no protagonist in *The Babysitter*. It's a story seen through the eyes of everybody, and consequently, lacks a reliable point of view. One finds oneself mistrusting what everyone sees and says.

The Babysitter is detective fiction with no detective, a horror story that's not scary, a narrative with many small, confusing voices and a book that offers little except relaxation.

Illustrator draws children into world of art, fiction

By Mary Fastenau

All he needs are pen, paper and a smile. With those three elements a misshapen raindrop becomes a funny little bird, a wiggly cloud is transformed into a sheep or a lion, and a child, aged 5 or 60, acquires a host of new friends.

Jose Aruego, a leading illustrator, brought his pen, paper and smile to McPhee Elementary School, 820 S. 15th St., and then took his audience into a magical world of whimsical characters.

As he drew he explained, "This is what I do most of the time for the very young seven to nine and 15 to 50."

All of the books he illustrates are stories about animals because they are "much more interesting" than people. Each character is finished with a smile, evidence that he loves what he does.

He has not always been an illustrator but was educated as a lawyer, became disillusioned and left his home in the Philippines for New York City.

Still smiling

Thirty-seven books later, he is still in New York and still smiling as he shares his philosophies on drawing and life.

"In my books, I have to make sure I communicate," he said. He has made communication easy by the facial expressions of his characters.

"There are only four basic expressions," he explained with the help of his pen, "either you're happy or you're sad or you're angry or you're scared."

As he demonstrated his drawing techniques, he directed many of the questions to the third, fourth and fifth graders who had come from Western, Neb. to learn about the magical land in his books.

Students 'spellbound'

They sat spellbound, each clutching the

piece of paper that would contain Aruego's signature when they left. The adults also hoped for a signature, and had brought books for him to autograph.

Aruego has written seven of the books he has illustrated. Those works are characterized by few words and lots of pictures. One contains only two sentences, "Look what I can do" and "I can do it too."

His books often show his feelings about life. As an example, he gave a slide presentation of his latest book, "Another Mouse to Feed," which he described as a "very modern story."

The tale was about a mouse family with 32 children and a mother and father who had to work to support their offspring. Another mouse child arrived on their doorstep and they didn't have the heart to turn it away, so all 32 children got jobs to help their mother, who was a rollerskating instructor, and their father, who had three jobs.

Character recreations

Before his presentation began, Aruego had observed the art work of Betsey Pearson's second graders, who had tried to recreate some of his characters.

He appeared delighted at the attempts at artistic work and said with a smile, "These guys have personality."

Dee Story, elementary education professor explained that Aruego's personality was one of the reasons he was selected to come to Lincoln to give the presentation.

She explained that next year they hope to bring in another author, through the Nebraska Children's Book Award. This is a program which will begin next year when the children from across the state will vote on their favorite author and that person will be invited to Nebraska to receive an award.

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