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Dear Professor McAleer, I should have answered your letter sooner, but I have been half-drowned in a main draft of the third of my 'Melin' books, and — as if it had been a review of something of my own — was half dreading reading that silly Julian Symonds' article, and putting off doing so. Now I have just read it, and all I can say to you is, try to forget it. This is easier said than done, I know, because these things hurt, and even when one recognises the motivation, and knows the judgment is false, they still hurt, and there is no redress. Or so one thinks, but the redress is simply that you know, and the public (who is buying it) knows, that you have written a good book. You also know that Rex Stout was an incomparably better writer than the pathetic and jealous Symonds (or any of the quibby merchants he admires), and that this is the motivation of the review, and your success — Rex's hurts his Symonds far, far more than any ephemeral words of his can hurt you.

It is typical of the man that he

singles out Rex Stout's 'sery' novels as 'among the best.' I only read one of them, How like a god, and it was not in the same street as The Doorbell Rang or A Family Affair, or indeed any of the lucidly-written, mature work. It is also nonsense to say that his style was not comparable to, say, Ross Macdonald. To my eye & ear, R M's style is derivative, strained, and totally predictable. You feel him trying. Rex Stout's style was — is — flawless.

Ah, well, you don't need me to tell you that! But do, please, ignore the man's opinions, even if you can't quite ignore his spite. I have met him; he is a boor, and a second-rate writer, and has no sense of style — I mean, he would not know good English if he saw it. The highest compliment Julian Symonds can pay to any book is to dislike it.

Does that make you feel better? Believe me, everyone I know rates the wretched little man as I do. Forget him. You did a good job. Have a happy Christmas. Love ever

Mary Stewart