



Build My Gallows High

Geoffrey Homes

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The Film Ink series presents the novels that inspired the work of some of the most celebrated directors of our time. While each novel is first and foremost a classic in its own right, these books offer the dedicated cinephile a richer understanding of the most illustrious films of American and European cinema. Retired private eye Red Bailey is happier than he's been for a long time. Living in Nevada, bothered by nobody, he runs a little gas station, gets in a lot of fishing, and might even be falling for a local girl. Then, out of the blue, his past comes back to haunt him. Blackmailed into doing just one more job, he's forced to revisit the life he fled—in particular, the seductive Mumsie McGonigle. It's not long before Bailey realizes that a trap has been set for him. The novel, scripted by the author, went on in the hands of Jacques Tourneur to become the cinema's most celebrated work of "film noir," starring Robert Mitchum, Kirk Douglas, and Jane Greer.

Build My Gallows High Details

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Author : Geoffrey Homes

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From Reader Review Build My Gallows High for online ebook

Nancy Oakes says

I think the only thing keeping it from being a perfect read for me are the long, often tedious and repetitive scenes among the gangsters in this book, but otherwise, it's nearly perfect. I haven't seen the movie based on this book ("Out of the Past") yet, but it's on tonight's schedule.

This book is chock full of betrayals, double crosses and murder making for a hell of a good straight crime read, but it can certainly also stand on its literary merits.

PI Peter "Red" Markham and his partner Jack Fisher have taken on their last case together. They are called to the home of Whit Sterling, who hired them to find his missing girl, Mumsie McGonigle and the fifty-six thousand dollars she ran away with. The case takes Markham to Mexico, where he locates Mumsie who swears she never took the cash -- only enough to get by on. Unfortunately, as it turns out, Red falls hard for Mumsie. He still has to report to Sterling, though, so the two of them return to California, where Markham gives his client the news that he couldn't find her. When he thinks he's in the clear, the two of them move to a little cabin up near Lake Tahoe, planning to stay there "until the snow flies," then move on to Reno so that Red can open an office there. As plans go it's a good one, but that particular future just isn't in the cards. Flash forward ten years into the future and Red Markham has become Red Bailey. He's left the PI business behind for a gas station that he owns in little Bridgeport, California, and has an entirely new life. He spends his time off fishing, and has fallen for a much-younger little blonde named Ann. But underneath his quiet life in this quiet town, Red is just biding his time waiting for his past to catch up with him, which it does in the form of a summons to Reno. From there, Bailey is sent to New York to do a job, and he has no choice but to comply. It's only after he gets there that he realizes that he's been duped -- and that there may be no way out.

Past the initial setup, once the trap has been sprung, *Build My Gallows High* is the story of Red trying to find a way out the snare that has been very carefully set for him. It moves in and out of the past, as well as back and forth between the small Northern California town of Bridgeport and the streets of New York, making its way back to Red's current situation as he tries to take control of things and clear himself. It's extremely well crafted -- double crosses and betrayals abound as the figurative noose around Bailey's neck gets tighter with each turn of events. If the novel rested entirely on its plot, it would be a very good read, but there's much more to it than simply story. For example, there is such a keen sense of place here as the author moves back and forth contrasting hard, edgy New York -- its streets filled with young hooligans, cabbies who ply their trade and know when to keep their mouths shut, and gangsters who have no qualms about killing -- with the natural beauty of small Bridgeport, with its flowing streams, quiet fishing spots, tree-lined mountains and people living a good and wholesome life.

What I find the most interesting about this book, though, is not so much the action, but rather the focus on the characters. Without the time or space to go into them all, the standouts begin with Bailey, who's just been waiting for the day the past comes knocking on his door to reclaim him and who knows that the decisions he's made in the past will circle back to haunt him some day. He is the poster boy for "if only," thinking about how to get out of his present dilemma so that he and Ann might just be free to start the new life both of them really want, one that he's constantly deferring because he lives in this constant state of purgatory. Then there's Caldwell, the local Bridgeport game keeper, who is in love with Ann and has dreams of the two of them together in his cabin in the woods -- he also makes a decision that may come to haunt him as well -- but it's a moral one he feels he must make. Ann is a quiet beauty, blonde, small, willing to please and trying to do what's right by everyone, but there's a very strong-willed woman underneath her quiet veneer. She is

contrasted with the two femme fatales of this book -- Mumsie and another woman named Meta Carson (in New York), both seductive and charming, but each as deadly as the other.

Build My Gallows High is such a fine example of true noir goodness that it's easy to recommend it to anyone who is into the genre but hasn't had the good fortune of reading this book yet. It is as dark as dark can be, and reveals that present and future are both inextricably bound by the choices we make. The more I stop and think about it, the more it grows on me, and the more in love with this book I become.

Jim says

There is huge disagreement among film buffs, scholars, the general public, and marketers about what is and isn't film noir. (I'm of the more selective school that says that a film isn't noir just because it's in black-and-white and it's about crime. To me, noir, in a vast oversimplification, means one thing about the protagonist: he's screwed. If your hero survives or wins the girl and solves the case, then there's a good chance it's not film noir. But, as I said, there's a lot of argument about that.)

One thing no one seems to argue about, one film everyone seems to agree is not only film noir but the quintessential film noir is *OUT OF THE PAST* (1947). Everything people do agree on about noir is in this film, and in it just about perfectly. It's in my top ten films of all time list, and lots of other people's, too.

OUT OF THE PAST is based on the novel *BUILD MY GALLOWS HIGH*, by Geoffrey Homes (a pseudonym for Daniel Mainwaring). It is as noir as the film, at least. Its plot is roughly the same, but it is a bit more tangled, more intricate, with a pair of antagonists who were combined in the film. The main character, Red Bailey (Jeff in the film), is a former private investigator caught up in the wreckage of a ten-year-old case, with revenge and a femme fatale of the first order dogging his heels. Homes writes poetically, yet with Hemingwayesque strength. The book is no longer than it needs to be, but is rich and evocative. If you've seen the film, the book will strike you as having been perfectly captured in the film, even with the plot adjustments. The same sense of place, of topography, of architecture fills the book. It's a wonderful book, now in my top ten favorite crime novels.

Willem van den Oever says

Hidden between the high Nevada mountain slumbers a quiet town called Bridgewater. Retired private eye Red Bailey wastes his days away fishing and mending his gas station, until one day a man shows up at his job and introduces Red to one final job to solve. An assignment that started ten years ago with a suitcase filled with cash and a beautiful woman on the run for a powerful mobster. There was no way Red could've brought the affair to a successful ending then and he'll have to be as cunning as he ever was to escape with his life this time around.

The novel '*Build My Gallows High*' is known nowadays mostly because of the brilliant if unfortunately little known movie '*Out of the Past*' from 1946. Having said that, '*Build My Gallows High*' is a tragic murder mystery that works perfectly well in its own right. At its core it's a detective novel in the likes of Chandler and Cain, with its short, sharp and fast pacing and dialogue. All the archetypical characters are here; the antihero with a troubled past, the femme fatale and the villainous puppet master hiding in the shadows. But here, the P.I. hardly stalks around alleyways in some big metropolis on the west coast - most of the action

takes place in the secluded village of Bridgewater with its roaring mountain creeks and high peaks turning red as the sun goes down.

This backdrop accentuates ‘*Gallows*’ romantic nature. There is obsessive love to be found within these pages, regret and hope for a better future. It seems all too clear from the very first pages that its plot is doomladen and whatever victories may arise during its plot course are only all too short and bittersweet to be thoroughly enjoyed. There is the righteous warden fighting for the love of a young woman, who has lost her heart to the old detective. Relationships evolve that couldn’t possibly work, yet those involved are willing to put their lives on the line because they so deeply care about each other. It’s during those glorious moments where the story rises above its tired genre required murder plot, when the relationships and dynamics between the characters take front and center stage. And make ‘*Build My Gallows High*’ something unique to be treasured.

Jesse says

A total bummer of a pulp mystery, and I can only attribute the high star ratings on this site as the residual memories of the elegance and literary wit of the classic film noir that was adapted from it, 1947's *Out of the Past*. It's telling that all three of the enthusiastic quotes adorning the cover of this edition are taken from reviews of the film, and have nothing to do with the novel itself.

Homes constantly allows the plot to stray into long chapters dealing with peripheral characters who are hardly distinguishable from each other (I had a difficult time keeping them all straight--they all have similarly terse, one-syllable names like Guy, Slats, Lou, etc--and finally gave up when I finally realized they don't add much to the plot anyway), and there's a lot of focus on the good-girl Ann and her dogged suitor, small-town Jim. But at least there's the presence of Kathie, one of the most infamous *femme fatales* in all of cinema to compensate, right? Well, no--she barely makes an appearance here, and to add insult to injury, is named Mumsie McGonigle, which has to be the most ill-conceived name for a *femme fatale* ever.

So how did Homes, which is actually the pen name for Daniel Mainwaring who is credited with the film's screenplay, manage to transform his pigs ear of a novel into the silk purse that is the screenplay of *Out of the Past*? As it turns out, some archive detective work in the 90's by film scholar Jeff Schwager revealed that Mainwaring's screenplay was deemed completely unsuitable and discarded (the same goes for an additional draft by James M. Cain), and that the screenplay used in the film was actually by an obscure studio writer who went by the name of Frank Fenton. All of the elements that are most loved about the film's screenplay--the incomprehensibly sophisticated twists, the witty quips, the character of Kathie--only surface in shooting scripts after Fenton was assigned the project. He was never credited, however, and Mainwaring happily took all credit for the lauded screenplay (I read an interview with him from near the end of his life and he discusses it as if it was all his own creation).

But even if I was ultimately disappointed, I'm not sorry I read this. In the end, it merely made me love the film all the more.

Algernon says

From the summit you could see Tahoe far below - the whole blue waste of it sleeping in the sun. Hills walled it in, walled in the broad meadows to the south. Here and there like teardrops were other tiny lakes. As always, when he looked down on the big lake, he felt his spirits lift. You didn't amount to anything and what happened to you didn't matter. He glanced over at Guy, brooding over the wheel of the Cadillac and said, 'Do you ever mourn for the wasted years?'

'For Christ's sake! Guy said, turning his attention momentarily from the winding road.

'If I'm hanged I'd like to be hanged from a sugar pine,' Red said. 'A good high one.'

Red Bailey wants to spend his life quietly, tending his gas station in small town Bridgeport and fishing alone in the High Sierras. The errors of judgement and the rash decisions that Red has made in the past come back to haunt him though and to drag him back to the underworld of gambling, fast guns and even more lethal women.

Red hangs out his fishing pole, kiss his nubile, blonde, wholesome local sweetheart Ann goodbye and heads to Vegas to find out what kind of ghost has come **Out of the Past**

Her name is Mumsie McGonigle as she's as different from Ann Miller as you can possibly get : red-headed with a matching fiery temper, about as reliable and truthfull as a poisonous snake, vengeful and selfish yet still as breathtakingly beautiful as the first time Red has laid eyes on her, in another lifetime ...

He's get over it, he knew. He'd be lonely for a while, lonely for a myth. And Mumsie? With that wad of money she should be very happy. Money was something you could hold and count. Love? Hell, you could pick that up in a Mexican cafe when you needed it.

The backstory is told in flashbacks from the time when Bailey worked as a private investigator searching for a gangster's moll who shot her boss and run to Mexico with a bag full of his money, followed by a series of crosses and double crosses that lead up to the current offer that Red Bailey cannot refuse and a new set of betrayals and double crosses in New York. It builds up to a frankly muddled and often confusing plot, the only clear point being that it is impossible to run away from your past, and that sooner or later you have to pay the price.

The doomed protagonist, the femme fatale, the convoluted story - these are all trademark ingredients of the classic noir novel, and the original movie adaptation with Robert Mitchum is so well done and so well known it almost overshadows the source material by Geoffrey Homes. For a moment I was tempted to laugh when I came across a name like Mumsie McGonigle, but then I had before my eyes the fallen angel face of Jane Greer, almost as fascinating as the portrait of Gene Tierney in "Laura", and I became as much of a sap for love as Mitchum under the sun of Acapulco.

What the novel has to offer to the fans of the movie is a slightly better portrait of Ann Miller, as the archetype of the 'good' woman, as the promise of redemption in a more honest lifestyle. And the second, complementary contrast between the corrupting decadence of life in the big city and the liberation of the wide empty spaces of the mountain ranges. Here's a short, but poignant cameo of street life in New York city:

The hockey players had departed, but Forty-Eighth Street wasn't quiet. Women yelled at each other across the narrow way or screamed at their offspring. The offspring paid little heed. Two girls traded witticisms with a man in a delivery truck. A crap game was in progress on the sidewalk in front of a small grocery. The woman who ran the place stood in the door watching the boys roll the cubes against a brick wall.

See the opening quote for the alternative and for an explanation of the different title of the original novel.

My recommendation is to try both, the movie and the book, as one of the finest examples of what noir is all about and how good it can get.

Tom says

Great crime noir classic. Published in 1946, it still holds up brilliantly. Geoffrey Homes is the pen name for screenwriter Daniel Mainwaring, who authored *Out of the Past* (see book cover for still of Jane Greer and Robert Mitchum), the classic b/w noir film based on his own book. I think *Out of the Past* is one of the best movies ever made - it certainly is the best noir film. Both book and movie are so good that it doesn't matter which you read/watch first. Mainwaring also co-penned the screenplay for the remake *Against All Odds*.

Jose Moa says

The arquetipical femme fatale .The book as good as the movie by Jacques Tourneur.

Ray says

This book was written by Daniel Mainwaring a screenwriter using the name Geoffrey Homes. Mainwaring adapted this for the screen as "Out Of The Past". I was curious about the book because I enjoy his screenplays. If you associate film noir with pulp crime fiction of the 1940's, you'll find this a bit more complex than standard crime novels. The film comes across better but the book offers greater detail. It struck me funny that the phrase "pale blue eyes" is repeated a few times and I think of the Lou Reed penned song with that title. Mainwaring wrote the screenplays for some other crime film favorites, "The Hitchhiker", "Baby Face Nelson" , "The Big Steal" and "The Tall Target". Like other crime/noir screenwriters, he also wrote westerns and military themed screenplays.

Debbie says

The original novella that the movie *Out of the Past* was based on. Short, sharp and to the point.

Melki says

Money was something you could hold and count. Love? Hell, you could pick that up in a Mexican cafe when you needed it.

This book epitomizes the noir genre. There's a tough-talking loner with a past, a femme fatale or two, and dead bodies lying around where they shouldn't be. Though there's nothing particularly groundbreaking here,

it's a fast and entertaining read.

Read for free - <http://www.scribd.com/doc/63561702/Bu...>

Michael Shou-Yung Shum says

The writing is terrible and the movie is far superior. Having said that, this is a great book to read aloud to your loved one.

Bayneeta says

Close to the movie (Out of the Past--a long-standing favorite) but not identical. Who would name the femme fatale Mumsie McGonigle? In the movie they wisely changed it to Kathie Moffett. Could hear Mitchum's voice throughout the book. What a voice, what a man!

Philip says

Of course I'm reading a 1946 first edition copy from Morrow, not the paperback reprint shown here...

BUILD MY GALLOWS HIGH became one of Hollywood's top Film Noir thrillers, OUT OF THE PAST, with unforgettable performances from Robert Mitchum, Kirk Douglas, and the under-rated Jane Greer as Kathie Moffat (in a performance that should have been Oscar-nominated: one of the great "bad girl" performances of all time).

I've already read this at least once, but picked it up again on impulse.

7/26: A fine, taut thriller, this was the last novel written by Daniel Mainwaring using the pseudonym "Geoffrey Homes" - RKO bought the film rights and Mainwaring spent the rest of his career writing screenplays, including the one for OUT OF THE PAST. While Mainwaring didn't modify the novel's plot in his screenplay (it might have been titled CROSS, AND DOUBLE-CROSS or FRAME, AND DOUBLE-FRAME), he did streamline the characters, eliminating two from the novel while at the same time combining them with two others to enlarge the roles and narrow the focus. In the novel Red Bailey (called Jeff in the film) doesn't tell Ann about his past until very near the end, whereas in the film he tells Ann about his past early on, when he's been summoned to meet with Whit almost ten years after the events he tells her of, which provide the impetus for the flashback sequence which details his first encounters with Whit and with Kathie Moffat (rather ridiculously named Mumsie McGonigle in the novel) – in the novel Red merely casts his mind back ten years to remember. The novel's policeman-turned-gambler Guy Parker was more or less merged with Whit Sterling, who isn't physically present much in the book, though as in the film it's his actions that get the story (or both stories) underway – in the novel Parker and Bailey knew each other in the past, so their backstory is missing from the film. In the novel Bailey's former PI partner Jack Fisher is accidentally shot in a scuffle with Bailey – in the film he's shot by Kathie, thus her homicidal trait much earlier than Mumsie's is revealed in the novel (the fact that she only wounded Whit is sort of a smokescreen for the real Mumsie/Kathie). Another hired killer named Slats was combined with Joe Stefanos for the film – in the novel it's Slats who tries to follow Bailey up into the wild hills and is killed by The Kid, who, as in the

film, 'hooks' him with a fishing hook and causes him to fatally lose his balance to fall amongst the rocks and water below). At the end of the novel Whit is killed by Stefanos, who is in turn killed by Mumsie McGonigle (who was renamed Kathie Moffat for the film, and given more screen time than she has in the novel) - the reason for Whit's murder by Stefanos isn't really clear, but Mumsie wanted the money Whit had set aside for Red (Jeff in the film) – Mumsie had by then hooked up with Guy Parker. In the film, Whit is killed by Kathie to ensure that she and Jeff can get away safely. In the novel Jeff is shot by Mumsie as he reclaims the money she'd taken – he's followed out to his car by an angry Guy, but "He didn't hear the gun when Guy shot him because he was dead." In the film Jeff has alerted the police that he and Kathie are leaving together, and as they approach a roadblock she realizes what he has done and shoots him before being killed by the police.

Mark Birchall says

A nasty little tale which is quite a complicated read . Must keep your mind on the book. Think I will try and catch up with the Mitchum film "out of the past" to see if I like it better. Not that this is anything other than totally noir but there are a few superfluous characters that you try to keep in your head only to find they aren't important in the greater scheme of things and also I read this straight after the vengeful virgin by Gil brewer that was just brilliant so it had a lot to live up to.

Frank Marzano says

Plot was a bit convoluted; the movie ("Out of the Past") greatly streamlined things.
