

The Philadelphia Inquirer

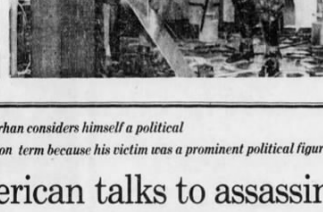
people

8A Saturday, Sept. 27, 1980

Life among the desk set



This samurai knew where to hit Johnny Carson where it hurts — right in his TV desk. He demolished the specially made desk in one mighty blow as part of a "Shogun"-inspired skit Thursday on "The Tonight Show" because his wife had made romantic overtures toward Carson in the sketch.



Newsmakers

Dual role a nightmare for Loren

Sophia Loren says that filming her life story gave her "many headaches and nightmares," but she's glad she did it. The Italian film star, 46, in New York to promote the film and a fragrance named after her, said she found it "very difficult" to play both herself and her mother in the made-for-TV movie. Based on her autobiography, *Sophia: Living and Loving*, it will be broadcast by NBC on Oct. 26. Her dual roles made her anxious "because you want to always do things right," she said. She said she lived with her mother in Italy during the filming and discussed scenes with her at the end of the day. "Our relationship has always been wonderful," she added.

A record price

One of the hottest plays on Broadway is David Merrick's musical *2nd Street*, but if you want to see it you better be prepared to pay Fifth Avenue prices. Merrick has just increased the cost of an orchestra ticket on both weekends and week nights to \$35, a record. When the show opened last month, the seats went for \$27.50. Two weeks later, the price went to \$35, which was the top price for some long-running shows.

Stay away, singer told

Singer Jerry Lee Lewis has been ordered by a Memphis court to stay away from his estranged wife, Jean, who has accused him of beating her. Mrs. Lewis, 38, who has filed for divorce from her husband of almost nine years, also asked for part of Lewis' income and custody of their daughter, Lori Lee, 8. Last week, Mrs. Lewis was granted a month's allotment of food stamps after testifying that she had no income and her assets, including a \$200,000 house in east Memphis, have been placed under a lien by the IRS.

Country lament

Once named country duo of the year, Jim Ed Brown, 44, and Helen Cornelius, 36, have toured together for five years. Now they are splitting up. She says, "As far as I'm concerned, it's a foolish mistake." In January, Mrs. Cornelius divorced her husband of 20 years. In February, Brown's wife of 19 years filed for a divorce. "I felt that we were a strong team," Cornelius said, "and that in spite of personal problems, we could continue to work together. Jim Ed doesn't think it's possible. I think it's sad. I admit him and regret that this has happened."

Nelson, Paycheck sued

The promoter of a twoday Willie Nelson-Johnny Paycheck concert that didn't come off has filed a \$12 million damage suit against the entertainers. Don (Whitey) Taylor asked \$2 million compensatory damages, \$10 million punitive damages and a trial by jury. Taylor said he had contracted with Nelson and Paycheck for appearances at the concert Aug. 9 and 10 in rural Franklin County, Va., where expected crowds of thousands became a trickle of several hundred when word quickly spread that the main attractions weren't coming. The tingers canceled after hearing that Franklin County Sheriff W. Q. Overton had suggested his department with state troopers, state liquor agents, a helicopter, police dogs and an armored car in preparation for the concert. He also vowed to enforce liquor and drug laws, indicating that he would arrest Nelson if he drank onstage.

—Bill Thompson

Spy-novel author now can afford his champagne tastes

By Sue Chantain

NEW YORK — Ken Pollett used to drink what his fellow newspaper reporters drank. On the South Wales Echo and the London Evening News, where he eked out a living in the early 1970s, that was most likely to be wine.

These days, after his evening bath and before dinner at his rambling French villa, the young Welsh writer enjoys a glass of champagne. It's usually Louis Roederer Cristal, which retails for about \$70 a bottle in this country, but it's always champagne.

"I've been trying to make up my mind between a 1948 Dom Perignon," he observed, cradling out yet another cigarette in the crystal ashtray that was part of his elegant beige and white suite at Manhattan's Sheraton Hotel. "And I do think the Roederer's best."

Pollett can afford to continue the nightly luxuries. In the last two years, he has produced two best-selling spy thrillers. One of the *Rebecca* and *Triple* A third, *Key to Rebecca*, published this week, may surpass them both.

All of which, according to his publishers, has made him the youngest millionaire author in the world. For Pollett, 31, who wrote his first novel at the age of 23 to pay for a car-gate bill, his sudden success is not only professionally gratifying but also a terrific fun, he announces with a broad grin.

A few luxuries

Besides nightly champagne suppers and the acquisition of a French villa in St. Jacques de Croix, he has bought a Jaguar for himself and a Mercedes coupe for his wife, is renovating a loft in New York's Greenwich Village at a home-away-from-home, has his suits made on Saville Row and is able to indulge in a particular sartorial whim that had to be ignored in his days as a journalist. "To a little into for shirts," he confessed, fingering the fine cotton fabric of the pink one that he was wearing. "I must have over a hundred now. . . it's terrific, just terrific."

Despite a mistake that adds a few years, Pollett still looks younger than his 31 years. He has rosy skin, a long, narrow face, and warm brown eyes under deeply arched brows. His curly brown hair, a visitor remarks, is much longer than it was when his publicity photographs were taken. "I'm feeling a little more relaxed these days," he responds with a chuckle.

It has not been a relaxing day so far. The full ashtrays and a certain gleam in his eyes attest to the fact that this is his fifth interview of the day, not counting one radio and one television appearance. His lawyer and architect are waiting impatiently for a word with him before he catches a flight to Cleveland for yet another promotional appearance, and then it's on to Chicago, Los Angeles and Toronto.

"They've got me booked into a place called Sebring in Cleveland — it sounds like a motel," he remarks with some distaste, scanning his schedule.

Part of success

But even the lawyer's visit — Pollett is being sued for alleged plagiarism in connection with *The Key to Rebecca* — seems unable to dampen his spirits for long. "You make money, and a lot of people decide they want a chunk of it," he said with a shrug. "That's a problem of success, and I should be so lucky."

His first novel, a mystery about drug dealers, netted him \$2,500 — a 1000 advance for the necessary car repair, and \$2,000 after that.

"It encouraged me to continue," he said. "I figured if I could write better books, they might give me even more money — and they did."

He wrote several novels, mostly mysteries, under various pseudonyms.

Personality



Ken Pollett

Pollett in the next few years, more or less as a paying hobby. Then, in 1978, he wrote *The Eye of the Needle*, a tale about a German spy in England who discovers the plan of deception for the Normandy invasion and tries to get out of the country with the information.

Typical reader

It took him just three months to write, but the novel was spectacularly successful, selling more than 5 million copies and winning the Edgar Award for best mystery novel of 1978. The movie version, starring Donald Sutherland, is scheduled for release next summer.

"I'd been learning a number of things that just jelled with that book — pacing a story properly, choreographing the tight scenes in action, and making sure that the climaxes were long enough," he said. "I know it would be bigger than anything I'd done before. But in my wild dreams, I didn't think it would be quite this big."

In 1979 came *Triple*, about an Israeli attempt to steal strontium to manufacture atomic bombs. It was on the New York Times best-seller list for 34 weeks; now CBS-TV is considering it as a four-hour miniseries.

His latest, *The Key to Rebecca*, is based on a true tale of a German spy in wartime Cairo who sent information to Field Marshal Erwin Rommel using a secret code based on Daphne du Maurier's novel *Rebecca*.

It took him a year to write *Key to Rebecca*, his days of completing a novel in three months with almost no rewriting seem gone for good, he confesses with a sigh. "I'm constantly giving the tendency to make every scene overly brief," he said. "If I didn't watch myself, I'd continually be turning out 30,000-word books. And nobody wants to read a book that short."

Though his novels sell fairly well in Europe, "it's the American reader that has really made me," he said, adding that women make up a larger share of his market than is usually the case for spy novels. In fact, he lectures an American woman in her 30s as his typical reader.

"I'm not so much interested in the mechanics, the technology of spy thrillers, like (British author) Len Deighton," he said. "I'm more interested in the emotions, the fears and passions of the people who were involved, and that's more appealing to women, apparently."

When he's not writing or ordering more shirts, Pollett dabbles in the stock market, reads, wanders through the gardens of his villa and spends time with his wife, Mary, and his two children, Emanuele, 12, and Marie-Clare, 7. The family is enthusiastic about music and often "boots around" with a piano, a set of drums, two guitars, a banjo, and several other instruments, he says.

And, of course, like the spy Alex Wolff in his latest book, he drinks champagne. Every night.

Dr. M.T. Mehdi says that Sirhan Sirhan considers himself a political prisoner who is serving a longer prison term because his victim was a prominent political figure.

An Arab-American talks to assassin of Robert Kennedy



Sirhan Sirhan

By Yardenia Arar

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Sirhan Sirhan says a combination of liquor and anger over the anniversary of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war triggered his actions the night he assassinated Robert F. Kennedy, according to an Arab-American leader who interviewed Sirhan.

"You must remember the circumstances of that night, June 5. That was when I was provoked," Sirhan says in a transcript of an interview with Dr. M.T. Mehdi, president of the New York-based Arab-American Relations Committee. "That is when I initially went to observe the Jewish-Zionist parade in celebration of the June 5, 1967, victory over the Arabs. That was the catalyst that triggered the events that night."

Interview

of Monday's press interview with Mehdi, said yesterday that the Palestinian refugee also told him: "In addition, there was the consumption of liquor, and I want the public to understand that. The parole board has continuously neglected to consider that as a factor in mitigating of this case."

And Mehdi said in a telephone interview from New York, Sirhan believes he is in a new political prisoner who is serving a longer prison term than most convicted murderers in California because his victim was a prominent political figure.

Mehdi, a native of Baghdad who

was educated at the University of California, Berkeley, spent two hours Monday talking to Sirhan at the state prison at Solano, 300 miles north of Los Angeles, where Sirhan is serving a life sentence for the June 5, 1968, killing of Kennedy at the Ambassador Hotel after Kennedy's victory in the California Democratic presidential primary.

"It was the first time he was meeting with a fellow Arab who was sympathetic to his cause, not his action, so he was able to open up to me," Mehdi said.

Mehdi said he asked Sirhan why he had chosen Kennedy among all the American politicians who were "ready to sacrifice 1,000 Arab lives to get 1,000 Jewish votes."

In a book entitled *Kennedy and Sirhan* — Why? Mehdi compends that

both Sirhan and Kennedy were victims of Zionism, and in the interview Sirhan agreed. "We are Arabs. He more than I am it turned out, unfortunately," Sirhan said.

He said he was wary for the Kennedy family, but felt it should be necessary for the death of Kennedy by an American arms sold to Israel.

Asked whether he had any American heroes, Sirhan replied: "President Kennedy was my hero. Robert Kennedy was until he betrayed my opinion of him."

He said his quarrel with Robert Kennedy was political, not personal. "I have nothing but respect and admiration for all the Kennedys, but except for that single moment when he said that he was going to send armaments of death and destruction against my people. I am not going to

accept that, and never will I accept or acquiesce to it."

Sirhan was sentenced to death in 1969 for the Kennedy murder, but the sentence was subsequently reduced to life imprisonment.

By Nov. 3, 1984, when Sirhan is next eligible for parole, he will have served 16 years in prison, and Mehdi said the Community Release Board has admitted in letters that such a term is four years longer than the average for convicted first-degree murderers in California.

Mehdi, noting that Sirhan is a straggly student who has completed two years of college in prison, said he has made arrangements for Sirhan to return to any one of five Arab countries and is starting a drive to get Sirhan released.