

Entertainment

Behrend Professor completes second fiction novel

J. Madison Davis publishes "White Rook," a mystery novel about white supremacy

by Lea Gotch
Collegian Staff Writer

When J. Madison Davis graduated from the University of Maryland, he went to work as a zoning inspector outside of Washington D.C. This was a job in which he had to wear clip-on ties in order to avoid being strangled by unhappy zoning violators.

This was definitely not the occupation that Davis was cut out for. He is first and foremost a writer, and has recently published his second mystery novel, *White Rook*.

It is hard to imagine such a soft-spoken, witty person deciding to write a novel about white supremacists, the subject of *White Rook*.

Davis explained that the inspiration for the novel came from previously living in Virginia and Mississippi. Also, the subject of white supremacists and racial tension has been in the news frequently during the past few years, he said.

"I don't know if there is a resurgence of racial violence in the country or if it just never left. But there's no doubt that it is around," said Davis

White Rook was built on the premise that we try to make our world fit into our fantasy of how things are "supposed to be."

Davis said that when people are dissatisfied with how things are, they need someone to blame, so they pick a race or religion or some other group.

Davis explained that people have a tendency to try to make others fit into common patterns. "The fantasy of how life should be comes out of 1950's movies," said Davis. "Small town America

is really not idyllic at all."

Dr. Davis' diverse interests have led him to several different careers. He has earned degrees in anthropology, Writing Seminars, and English.

He has published numerous works of non-fiction including *Conversations With Robert Davies*, *Critical Essays on Edward Albee* and the critical study *Dick Francis*. He has also published over 30 short stories.

Davis' first mystery novel, *The Murder of Frau Schutz*, was chosen for an Edgar Allan Poe Scroll Award as one of the five best first novels of 1988.

Davis has traveled to many places in the US, Canada,

estimated that it took one-and-a-half years to write *White Rook*.

Although he originally planned to be a classical archaeologist, Davis earned his degree in anthropology. "I was interested in the different ways people around the world deal with living," he explained.

After graduation came the zoning inspector position. "I was bored, so I went to Johns Hopkins to pursue writing," said Davis.

He received his Master's degree in Writing Seminars, then went to teach at a community college in Cumberland, Maryland. After moving to Mississippi, he earned his PhD in English at the University of Mississippi.

Davis is modestly impressed with his widespread recognition. "I meet people from all parts of the country that know who I am and it's strange," said Davis.

What does the future have in store? "I have ideas right now for two more mystery novels and possibly a sequel to *White Rook*," said Davis.

He is in the process of writing a third mystery novel, which will be completed in several months. Tentatively titled *Bloody Marke*, the book is a portrait of a Yugoslav war criminal.

Davis explained that he knows a great deal about Yugoslavia and the country's people due to the fact that he nearly married a Yugoslavian woman.

One thing is certain, he will continue to write. "I wouldn't quit; it's the best thing in the world," said Davis.

"The fantasy of how life should be comes out of 1950's movies. Small town America is really not idyllic at all."

- J. Madison Davis

Yugoslavia and Spain to give lectures and readings.

He has taught Modern Art, English and Shakespeare here at Behrend since 1979.

Writing is a process that may take years, Davis explained. Most of the first year is spent planning and rearranging the novel. When it is finally written, the book must be sent to a publisher, and revisions may be required. Davis

(see book review on page 6)



J. Madison Davis: His latest novel, *White Rook*, exposes the world of white supremacy

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