



A Shaw thing

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Graham Keal Daily Post



ON THE face of it, *Death In Holy Orders* looks like a case for Cadfael, the TV detective with the tonsure.

But with Derek Jacobi's inquisitive monk pensioned off in the '90s, the task of finding the killer amongst the monks and staff of St Anselm's Theological College falls to a regenerated Commander Adam Dalgleish.

And like a latter-day Dr Who, Martin Shaw has taken over as the confident but sensitive cop with the penchant for writing poetry, a role which Roy Marsden made his own over on ITV, solving complex mysteries based on the P.D. James stories almost every year from 1983 to

With the supply of books then exhausted, Marsden moved on to other projects - mostly in the theatre - and Anglia TV, who made the series, was swallowed up by Granada. So when the rights came up for grabs to a new novel, the BBC pounced. Martin is undaunted by the prospect of following Roy.

"Everything I do has to be a challenge, otherwise there's no point in doing it," he says, adding disingenuously "I don't think I've portrayed a detective before, although I was a Chief Constable in *The Chief*."

This conveniently airbrushes out Shaw's career-establishing stint in *The Professionals* in the late 70s and early 80s, where his crimefighter character Ray Doyle was a detective in all but name and was in any case an ex-CID man. But there are touchy subjects to avoid with Martin Shaw, and *The Professionals* is usually one of them.

As Dalgleish, Shaw is much more of a thinker than an action man - in the mould of a Morse or a Wexford, you might say, had not Dalgleish predated both of them in his earlier incarnation.

DALGLEISH'S most distinguishing characteristic is that he's a poet and he's artistic. He's one of the hardest characters I've ever had to play because, in the novels, he's an observer. He is the eyepiece through which the audience sees everything. This is quite hard to translate into a character on screen."

Indeed it is, and when Shaw seeks to exude a cerebral, quiet authority, he sometimes ends up simply looking smug. In the end though, the narrative pull of P.D. James' *labyrinth* 1998. thine plot is so strong that it really doesn't matter whether you are a Martin Shaw fan or not, or whether you preferred Roy Marsden's performance or not. You will still be itching to know whodunnit as the corpses pile up and the monks get their habits in a twist.

The two-part adaptation of P.D. James' latest published Dalgleish novel sends her most famous creation back to the monastic retreat where, as the son of a clergyman, he spent many happy summers in his youth. But a young ordinand (or trainee monk in layman's terms) has died after a large portion of Suffolk coastal cliff fell on his head, and his influential father thinks there are forces at work here beyond mere coastal erosion.

Robert Hardy gives a vibrant performance as Dalgleish's friend and childhood mentor Father Martin despite having to spend, at 77 years of age, two hours in make-up every day - to age himself sufficiently for the part.

Eminent theatre actor Alan Howard makes a rare TV appearance as Father Sebastian Morrell, the college's sharp-tongued warden, and former Neighbours heartthrob Jesse Spencer adds an unlikely but effective supporting role as young ordinand Raphael, whose mysterious past holds the key to the future of the college.

Add in a supporting cast including Julia McKenzie, Jeff Rawle (remember timid George in Drop the Dead Donkey?) and Hugh Fraser from Poirot and the line-up is almost complete. But apart from the obligatory twists, turns and red herrings, PDJ has also added something quite new for Dalgleish - a love interest, in the shape of svelte blonde Janie Dee as college tutor Emma Lavenham.

Janie is unfamiliar to TV audiences but has had a stunning stage career, particularly in musicals.

An acclaimed singer and dancer, Janie won an Olivier Award for best supporting actress in the West End revival of Carousel, then topped that when she swept the board three years ago for her performance in Alan Ayckbourn's play Comic Potential. Janie is now the only actress apart from Dame Judi Dench to have scooped all three major awards - Olivier, London Evening Standard and Critics' Circle - in the same year.

But her agent, presumably mindful of the higher fees commanded by TV actors, has been pressing her to do more television, and her role here is the first fruit of her branching out:

"I've always chosen things that get me excited and I badly wanted to do this," says Janie.

"That's the bottom line for me. The passion has to be there, If there's no passion, it won't work for me."

JANIE doesn't quite mean passion as in clinches with her leading man, but unlike his predecessor Shaw, 58, doesn't need a good wig to maximise his sex appeal and to make him a convincing partner to a much younger woman. Even so, he still thinks he is nearing the end of his sell-by date for this kind of diversion:

"I'm still being cast in the roles where there is a 'love interest'.

That's not going to be for much longer. There is definitely a shelf life with that kind of role and I think it's wiser and also more fun to start exploring character roles."

But although he would hate to admit it, Shaw's mature good looks still play a part in getting him cast as one of TV's top leading men. P.D. James herself coyly says as much when she admits her excitement at Shaw's casting:

"Physically he is a very attractive character - and one likes one's characters to be attractive," says the sprightly 83-year-old.

And whether Shaw likes it or not, Dalgleish's romantic liaison with Ms Lavenham may be set to continue. James has just finished yet another Dalgleish novel but is currently keeping a discreetly teasing silence on whether the love affair is set to be a continuing, successful one or not. If this latest TV adaptation is a success, we can all find out in the sequel. As for Martin Shaw, he is happily married to third wife Vicki Kimm, a TV presenter whom he met when she interviewed him for BBC1's long-lost daytime chat show Pebble Mill at One.

She was lucky - last time I arranged to interview him (for Judge John Deed) he stood me up repeat-

edly and I eventually had to inter-view his obliging co-star Jenny Sea-grove instead. As Shaw is first to admit, he is not fond of fame and can't see why anyone should want to interview him: "Being a celebrity, whatever that means, is something I dislike intensely. I don't like the cult of celebrity anyway. It has its uses but it's not the only reason people should give you work. You should work because you're good at it."

He has a point, but maybe Mr Shaw should just lighten up a little. Fame, for all its disadvantages, has brought him a beautiful Quaker house in Norfolk, a love of flying which he indulges in the open cockpit of his very own World War Two biplane, and such less than onerous perks as an all-expenses paid VIP trip to the Bahamas with Vicki to report for Wish You Were Here.

Had he stayed in his first job, in the sales department of a chemical company, Martin could have avoided fame permanently. Somehow, I don't think he would want to swap.

* DEATH In Holy Orders goes out in two parts on August 23/24, 9.05pm and 8.30pm

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