

# Who Shot Lord Erroll?

## WHITE MISCHIEF

By James Fox.  
Illustrated. 299 pp. New York:  
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By PETER QUENNELL

**M**Y friend Cyril Connolly, as readers of "The Unquiet Grave" know, had a deeply inquisitive, restlessly inquiring mind and was always happiest when he had discovered a new problem that he could carry around with him and ponder at leisure. Some of these problems obsessed him for several years and the last and longest — sadly, he did not live to reach an entirely satisfying solution — concerned a fantastic murder mystery that dated back to 1941. Connolly first began to examine it early in the 1960's, and during that whole decade, James Fox writes in "White Mischief," it continued to "dominate his thoughts." Besides digging up every book or article that had the smallest bearing on the drama, he collected a mass of notes, diagrams and brief biographical jottings that illustrated different aspects of the story. When he died in 1974, he bequeathed them to Mr. Fox who had worked with Connolly at The Sunday Times of London and who had once prepared a journalistic survey of the case with him.

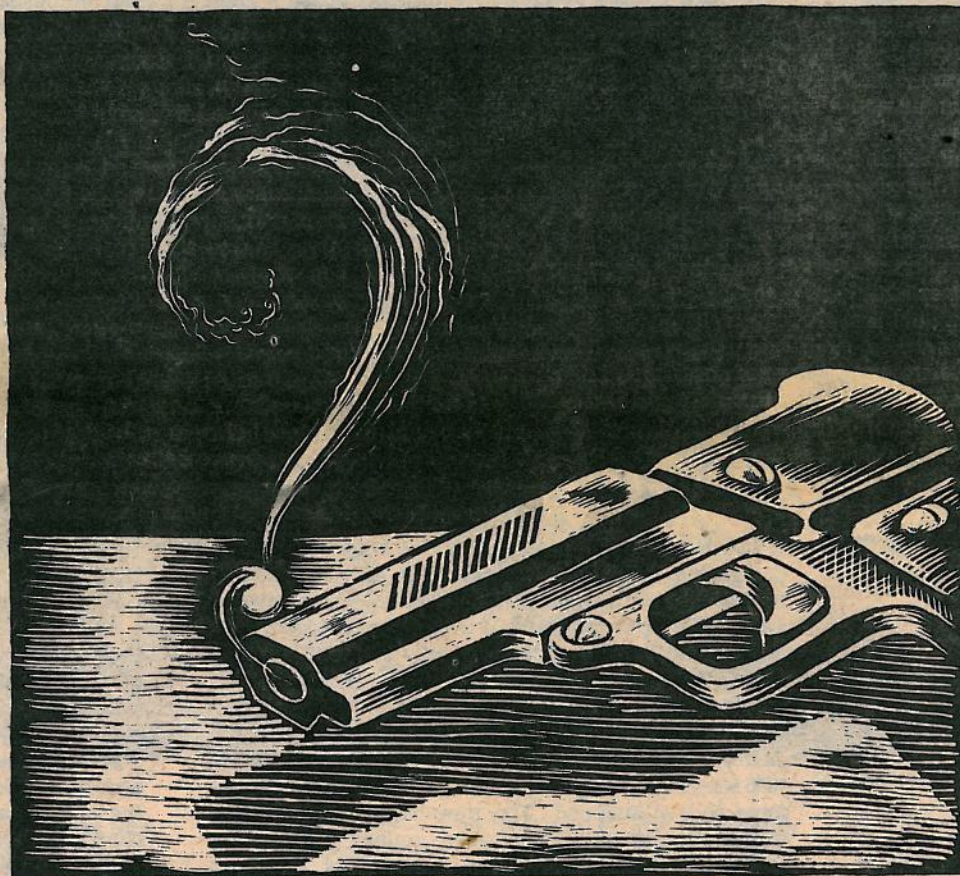
A strange and ghastly tale, it had first caught Connolly's attention, not only because he had more than once visited and had always admired and loved the Kenyan White Highlands east of Mount Kenya and directly north of Nairobi where the murder took place, but because at Eton, their old school, he had frequently observed the victim, "Joss" Erroll, then a handsome and arrogant, attractive youth. The crime was committed near a country house in the Highlands between 2 and 3 A.M. on the morning of Jan. 24, 1941, soon after Erroll had left the company — amicably, it seemed — of his beautiful, 27-year-old mistress, Lady Diana Broughton, and her 58-year-old husband. He was discovered just off a road junction, shot through the head, in the car he had been driving. Evidently he had been shot at close range — there were black-powder stains around his left ear — and his body had tumbled into the footwell of the car. The police had no difficulty in identifying the body as that of Lord Erroll, who was a famous local personage and, since 1939, Assistant Military Secretary for the Kenya colony.

He had other distinctions. Josslyn Hay, 22d Earl of Erroll, was Hereditary High Constable of Scotland and, "by precedence, first subject in Scotland after the Royal Family." However, once he had migrated to Kenya in 1928 with his first wife, a celebrated charmer of the day who was eight years older and considerably richer than himself, he quickly made his mark as the 20th-century equivalent of a ruthless Restoration

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rake. "To hell with husbands" was said to be his motto. Possible motives for his murder were, if anything, a little too numerous.

Not that adultery or fornication were disapproved of in principle by the inhabitants of "Happy Valley," the part of the White Highlands where Erroll and his friends had settled. Many other fugitives from post-war Europe had gathered there since the 1920's. Some of them went there to farm seriously: They raised livestock and grew coffee, wheat and flax. Others acted as part-time "verandah-farmers" and many who were young and well-heeled went to Kenya chiefly to amuse themselves. The marvelous Kenyan landscape and its strangely exhilarating atmosphere often have a rather curious effect upon the European temperament; and Erroll and most of his personal coterie were determined hedonists. They behaved recklessly. "What a set," Cyril Connolly noted above a list



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he made of local characters.

Indeed, to judge from "White Mischief," a somewhat surprising set they were. Among them, for example, was Erroll's ex-favorite, a beautiful American heiress married to a French grandee. In 1927, on a journey home from Kenya, she shot her English lover in the stomach at a Parisian railway station; having been acquitted of attempted assassination by a sympathetic French court, she later married him, but then she left him after three weeks because he had thrown a cocktail into her face and the cherry had stuck against her veil. She returned to Kenya and during the year of Erroll's death she was still a conspicuous member of the "Happy Valley" circle. Having already been nicknamed "the fastest gun in the Gare du Nord," according to gossip reported by Connolly and Mr. Fox, she did not escape suspicion when Erroll met his end.

So much for the social setting of the crime. The tragedy itself began to take shape in November 1940

with the appearance on holiday of an ill-matched couple: Sir John Henry Delves Broughton, a rich English horse-racing man, known to his friends as "Jock" (who had previously visited Kenya and bought some property there), and his second wife, Diana, one of the most conspicuously attractive women of her prewar generation. The processes that engender a tragedy are often said to be inevitable. In this case they may not have been inevitable, but one might have predicted that, once Lady Diana and Erroll had come face to face, a strong attraction might immediately spring up between them. Many years later she recalled that "I had an extraordinary feeling"; she knew that she was "suddenly from that moment the most important thing in his life." She had been married less than a month, but, as she and Erroll danced, and before they had definitely admitted their love to one another, he asked her: "Who's going to tell Jock? You or I?"

When Broughton was told, he accepted the situation with alarming equanimity. Six weeks before their marriage, he had promised his future wife that, if she found she loved a younger man, he would give her a divorce. On the night of the murder, in the presence of Erroll and two other friends seated at their dinner table, Broughton proposed a curious and chilling toast: "I wish them every happiness, and may their union be blessed with an heir. To Diana and Joss." Later he added: "It was the most extreme gesture I could make." It was early the next morning that two native passers-by discovered Erroll's body.

Broughton was accused of murder, but he secured an acquittal with the help of a brilliant South African advocate, an expert in the so-called science of ballistics, whom his wife had shrewdly hired. After his acquittal, however, she refused to rejoin him and he wandered back to England where he received a rather cool welcome and at length committed suicide. To go much further than this would be to spoil the dramatic effect of James Fox's closing chapters.

In them he describes the elaborate methods that enabled him and Con-

nolly to establish Broughton's guilt (even though Connolly believed the murderer might have had an accomplice). Among the last entries in Connolly's notebooks was a passage entitled "The End of the Trail," his record of a meeting in 1971 with a middle-aged woman whose name and address he had learned by chance through a London picture gallery; Broughton was an old friend of her family and her kind supporter during her unhappy childhood.

On the day of Erroll's death, when she herself was only 15, she had caught sight of some details that she acknowledged were suspicious but she "told Connolly that she didn't want anything she said to be used against Broughton. She had been very fond of him because of their shared love of horses and of his kindness to her" in the past. Connolly then temporarily abandoned this promising trail which Mr. Fox took up again some nine years later in Africa: "I was perplexed, I said, that Connolly had headed his notes of

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# Kenya Murder

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his interview with her, 'The End of the Trail.' Juanita laughed at that. Then she said quickly, 'There is no mystery. He did it. I can tell you that now. He told me himself the following day. They'd been laughing at him. He wanted to unburden himself. . . . He told me about the gun, which he said he had thrown into the Thika Falls.' "

**T**RAGEDY predominates in "White Mischief." It is the tragedy of a weak man driven to commit a crime not merely by the loss of a woman he adored but also by the ridicule it brought him: Day after day anonymous messages were dropped into Broughton's letter-box at the smart Muthaiga Club, reminding him that there was "no fool like an old fool." In addition, Erroll's insolent bonhomie was no doubt a crowning insult. Although, by all accounts, Broughton was a kind, good-humored man, he

had a curiously divided nature; in England he was known to have committed certain ingenious financial frauds, such as arranging for the theft of his family portraits and his wife's pearls after heavily insuring them. "He'd rather make £10 crookedly than £100 straight," observed his old chum Lord Carnarvon.

"White Mischief" has also a comic side. The author's description of the interviews he and Connolly arranged for the purposes of their long investigation, and of the bizarre characters who drifted in and out of their net, often makes delightful reading. Of course, Connolly seems to have done his best to combine the research work with gastronomy; "oysters, partridges, claret," he recorded at one point in his casebook. Grotesquely amusing, too, are the glimpses the book gives of bohemian life in Happy Valley. It is nowadays, I understand, a com-

paratively prosaic place, even though the climate of the White Highlands remains as stimulating as ever. Few of the characters in Mr. Fox's book are still on earth. Yet there is one distinguished exception, to whom Mr. Fox pays great tribute: a slender, elegant, 70-year-old woman with penetrating "ice-blue eyes," the former Lady Broughton, now Lady Delamere, a large landowner and highly respected citizen of the one-time Kenya Colony. ■

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## *Author's Query*

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For a biography of Adella Hunt Logan (1864-1915), a native of Sparta, Ga., and a graduate of Atlanta University who was a Tuskegee Institute pioneer and an activist in the Woman Suffrage movement, I would appreciate hearing from anyone with letters, documents, photographs, memorabilia or personal reminiscences.

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