



## Lock 14

*Georges Simenon , Robert Baldick (Translator)*

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One rainy night a canal worker stumbles across the strangled body of Mary Lampson in a stable near Lock 14. The dead woman's husband seems unmoved by her death and is curt and unhelpful when Maigret interviews him aboard his yacht. But gradually Maigret is able to piece together their story--a sordid tale of whiskey-fueled orgies and nomadic life on the canals. Can the answer to this crime be found aboard the yacht? Or is the murderer among the bargemen, carters, and lockkeepers who work the canal?

### Lock 14 Details

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## From Reader Review Lock 14 for online ebook

### Kenneth says

This Inspector Maigret mystery is set on and around a French inland canal around 1930 (about the time this one was written), at a time when a lot of the barges using these inland canals were powered by horses pulling them from towpaths alongside the canal. A woman's dead body is discovered in a stable by two carters (men who worked with the barges) who had been sleeping in the stable that night nearby. How did she get there, and why? Inspector Maigret is called down from Paris to investigate and the story takes off. Another great mystery which helped Georges Simenon consolidate his reputation as the great French mystery writer of the mid-20th century.

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### Nancy Oakes says

I think a 3.5 on this one.

Sometimes when I've finished a book and have all the relevant information in my head, I can't help but to feel sorry for the villain, and that's certainly the case in this second novel in Simenon's Maigret series. This one is set along France's Canal latéral à la Marne, where two kilometers from Dizy stands Lock 14 and the nearby Café de la Marine, where "the rhythm of life ... was slow. " For a few days, life here is interrupted with the discovery of a body, which brings Maigret to investigate. If you don't want plot continue reading; if you don't mind a brief synopsis without spoilers, you can find it here at my reading journal.

Once again, thanks to Simenon's real-life observations and his wonderful writing, we find ourselves steeped in atmosphere from the beginning -- rain, gloom, mud and life on the river. The canal is filled with barges, some motorized, while some depend on horses and their carters to get them through. Life along the river here is beautifully described, so that you get the rhythm and flow of it throughout the story.

*The Carter of La Providence* is a slow burner, and while Maigret follows the details of the case, it will once again be his knowledge of human nature that will solve it. There are a number of potential suspects and motives, but as I said, once the case was solved, I couldn't help but feel sorry for the murderer, and I think it would take someone with a heart of stone to feel otherwise.

certainly recommended, but there are better books to come.

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### Jose Ignacio says

I've found something fascinating in this book that I wish I could give it the highest possible rating. Regrettably, I believe I won't be able to state my reasons. Possibly what I appreciated most of this book is the atmosphere that Simenon is capable to re-create in the story, everything on it sounds genuine. We can come to realise that Simenon had experienced life in the canals by which he himself had sailed. The book in itself is difficult to class as a detective novel, the author unveils much more than a clue in the very title but, this doesn't prevent us at all from enjoying its reading. Nonetheless, I don't think it to be the best choice for those who would like to start getting familiarised for the first time with our author and his character.

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## **pierlapo quimby says**

Atmosfere, ambienti e caratteri resi con maestria e sintesi.

Le vicende umane dei protagonisti assumono, via via che ci si avvicina all'epilogo, sempre più rilievo e, come sempre accade in Simenon, prevalgono sulla soluzione del giallo.

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## **Tony says**

Simenon, Georges. LOCK 14. (1931). \*\*\*\*. As you may have guessed by now, I came across a real treasure trove of Simenon novels in a used bookstore. There are quite a few left on my pile, so bear with me. In this novel, one of his earlier ones, Simenon has his protagonist, Chief Inspector Maigret, investigate a murder that happened along one of the canal locks. The woman who was killed (strangled by a set of strong hands) was the wife of a British Count who had been sailing on his yacht through the canals, heading towards his usual vacation site. When the husband learns of the murder, he seems fairly aloof and unconcerned about the whole thing. This was put to Maigret as the typical reaction of a Brit. The Count explained that his wife to come and go as she pleased, so that even though she disappeared from the boat two days earlier, he hadn't thought it necessary to report it to the police. The Count maintained a retinue on his boat of a Russian, who manned the boat and took care of it, a servant, Willy, who waited on the Count and his every needs, and a young lady who was his mistress. He was used to having parties on his yacht at most stops and inviting local women up for drinks and dancing. All of this raised Maigret's suspicions. Soon after, the Count's servant was found in the canal – also strangled. Now the plot thickens. Maigret realizes that he must broaden the search for the killer to include a number of barge people as well, as soon as he could come up with a reasonable motive. This is new territory for Maigret; he's away from the streets of Paris, among a class of people very different from those he knows. He discovers, however, that people are pretty much the same everywhere, and that the usual motives apply to all of them. Recommended.

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## **Ivonne Rovira says**

Sir Walter Lampson, a retired English colonel who served in India, and his wife Mary have a very modern marriage, each openly with a lover. But, despite his supposed free-thinking ways, when Mary Lampson turns up dead in a stable, Sir Walter is the top suspect; he remains so when Willy Marco, Sir Walter's general factotum and Mary's lover, is found dead a day later.

While this second Maigret novel of Georges Simenon has also been published under the title of *Lock 14*, my favorite title under which it has been published in translation is *Maigret Meets a Milord* because that title highlights the subtle class satire evoked therein. I shall never forget the scene between the snobbish and pretentious chief magistrate who, dazzled by Sir Walter's title and pedigree, makes an utter fool of himself. While Simenon was vehemently apolitical, he painted a comic picture of two aristocrats — one French and one English — coming to an understanding despite “the recent unpleasantness.”

Maigret novels aren't for fans of non-stop suspense thrillers, nor for readers expecting intricate puzzles. Instead, the persistent Maigret uses psychology and an understanding that criminals are people like anyone else. Fans of Miss Jane Marple or Chief Inspector Morse might want to explore Simenon novels for their next favorite series.

## Alexander Inglis says

It was inevitable that I would finally break down and buy one of the Penguin ebooks of the truly gifted writer Georges Simenon who created one of the 20th century's most memorable detective characters, Maigret. One of Simenon's first Maigret tales is *Lock 14* and is reissued in a translation by Robert Baldick. (The French title, "Le Charretier de la 'Providence'" is arguably a better title as it refers to the barge workers central to the story; but it has also been issued in English as "The Crime at Lock 14", "Maigret Meets a Milord" and "The Triumph of Inspector Maigret", each title becoming less and less relevant. But I, too, digress.)

Simenon's stark prose, and dark settings many of us never encounter -- in this case the barge workers along the Marne river in France around 1930 before modern shipping replaced them -- is wonderfully bleak. I think it's raining almost the entire story, with mud everywhere. In the opening pages, a woman, otherwise tastefully dressed and ready for cocktails, is found half buried in a stable under some hay; two barge workers, into their cups before retiring, slept beside her all night without discovering the corpse. As Maigret attempts to unravel the mystery, barges -- including perhaps a murderer -- are passing the scene daily as they progress through the lock system of the river.

It's not a long read but it is compelling and every page digs us deeper into this rough and shabby world dangerously balanced on the edge of disaster that could strike at a moment's notice. It isn't until a second body turns up that Maigret begins to turn the clues into a vision of what might have happened and how events long past have come to haunt the present. Highly recommended.

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## Shane says

I wondered whether I was reading a police report about a murder when I began this book. The incongruous title of the book also indicated that this was not a whodunit but a whydunit.

In rather pedestrian prose the author seems focused on stagecraft: where was everyone at the time of the murder, and on the minutia in events taking place around a canal lock. This fixation is partially explained by the fact that Simenon was fond of boats, and spent six months in 1928 (around the time this book was written) navigating the rivers and canals of France, and thus had a commanding knowledge into such activities.

The plot is uneven. The murderer is introduced midway into the novel, which consequently veers the action in a new direction. Some characters like the English boater, Sir Walter Lampson, are well drawn, while others, including the murderer, the lock-keeper and the victim are not. It appears that Simenon began with trying to recapture his former life on the canals, then threw in a murder to spice things up and injected his detective Maigret into the story for company, and then, like the proverbial boat on uncharted waters, followed these threads to see how things would pan out, introducing the murderer, new characters, and new situations as he sailed along the plot's choppy waters. A great deal is spent on analysing the psychology of the murderer and on what led to the crime—Simenon hallmarks.

Simenon wrote seventy-five novels and twenty-eight short stories on his character Maigret alone, not counting the many other books he wrote under two dozen pseudonyms. He wrote up to 80 pages a day. With such a prodigious output one has to excuse the pedestrian prose—here was a journeyman writer who had

become an industry unto himself and had caught the zeitgeist for crime fiction, a classical James Patterson. Why worry about beautiful prose, let's just worry about the what, the how and the why, and churn them out as fast as hands can write and brains can conjure plot, seems to have been his operating principle.

My one regret, after hearing so much about Maigret, was that I didn't get to form a lasting impression of him unlike that other famous Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, or his English counterpart, Sherlock Holmes. There was none of the eccentricity that made those other detectives larger than life; Maigret came across as a dull and dutiful cop doing his unpleasant job of solving murders.

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### **Daniel Polansky says**

I picked this up thinking it was one of Simenon's gritty, miserable noirs, only to discover with some modest disappointment that it regarded another investigation his implacable, largely silent ogre Maigret. Since I actually don't really care in the slightest about the internal plot mechanisms of mysteries, I find procedurals kind of tedious, which makes me not a very good judge of whether or not this is a good book. The stuff about the grand canal system was kind of a hoot, though, he's got an admirable sense of place.

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### **Mary says**

Brilliant mystery.  
Atmospheric weather and wonderful characters.  
Had me guessing and will be reading more of his novels!

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### **Graham says**

What is so wonderful about Simenon is the economy of his writing. This is a short book (152 pages, not the 192 that Goodreads seem to think), but there is plenty of atmosphere, character, psychology and plot. He is particularly good at openings. Here, in three pages, he has established the scene on the rain-soaked Marne canal with Dickensian atmosphere, described the workings of the canal which will be crucial to the story, and introduced the finding of the body which will provide the puzzle for Maigret. It is the oppressive, hard-working, hard-drinking life of the canal that Simenon evokes so powerfully. He himself had a boat on which he explored the canals of France, Belgium and Holland in 1928. This novel was first published in 1931. The poverty and camaraderie of the community of bargees and their wives is very well described.

One of the several English titles this book has gone under was *Maigret Meets a Milord*, and a leading figure here is a retired English colonel from the Indian Army, Sir Walter Lampson. Initially he is something of a comic caricature, but he grows in depth and sinisterness as the novel progresses. There is a satirical scene at an inquest, where the local magistrate, himself an aspiring aristocrat absurdly proud of the 'de' in his name, is so impressed by the Englishman that he does not feel it necessary to detain him, even though it is his wife who has been murdered and Sir Walter is inevitably under suspicion.

Maigret himself is more active than in many of the novels. Here he cycles 50 kilometres "without once stopping for a beer".

As with many Simenon novels the question of culpability and guilt is ambiguous. The suggestion is that severe psychological damage may lead any of us into committing acts that we would otherwise not contemplate.

Simenon is the crime writers' crime writer, in the hackneyed phrase, admired by almost all of them, and one

can see why. Each novel seems to be a concise masterclass in the genre.

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### **Federico says**

Questa volta é andata molto meglio, nonostante sia solo il mio secondo Maigret ho iniziato a prendere confidenza con lo stile dell'autore.

Seppur breve questo testo mi ha veramente sorpreso, grande caratterizzazione dei personaggi e trama sempre ad alti livelli, se non si arriva alle ultime 5 pagine difficilmente si riesce a risolvere il caso.

Ora sono pronto per il terzo volume!!!!

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### **Columbus says**

This is the 2nd book in a series of about 75 in the Inspector Maigret series by Belgium writer, George Simenon. I didn't like this one very much at all. The writing is good enough but the mystery and plot itself is rather mundane and boring. The setting in all or the majority of these books is Paris and its environs with a rather sophisticated group of characters. My intention was to read the entire series but it's not starting off too well. The books are rather slim, this one is only 154 short pages so you can very well read it in one sitting, but I would say don't trouble yourself. I'm going to give it one more try with the third in the series and if that one is like the first two then I'm giving up.

**Note:** I picked this book up because I read in a European newspaper that if you enjoy Patricia Highsmith's sociological/pathological thrillers you'd like Simenon's Maigret series. Well, I absolutely love, love, love Highsmith - did I say love her...but, so far Simenon -- Uhhh, no.

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### **Nadia says**

It's a rear occasion when murderer tends to be more likable than his victims. The problem with Maigret is that he doesn't show how his mind work.It's a black box for the reader. He also doesn't always share what he find out. It's a little bit annoying.

I liked Vladimir very much although he wasn't very talkative. :)

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### **Nandakishore Varma says**

This is my first Maigret, and it failed to wow me in the same way that English mysteries do. There is no dramatic murder, the group of suspects who all have equal motives and opportunities, the red herrings thrown all over the place and the final suspenseful chapter when the sleuth tears away the mask from the face of the most unlikely suspect with the panache of a magician producing the proverbial rabbit from the hat. Yes, yes, I know it never happens in real life - but I do not read mysteries to experience reality; I just want to escape for a few hours into my loved realm of imagination.

Which is why the book rated only three stars from me: it is a highly subjective rating.

The story is set on the Marne Canal, where a woman's body is discovered in a stable of a canalside inn in

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Dizy. It is the wife of an English Lord, Colonel Lampson, travelling on the barge the *Southern Cross* in the company of his wife, his mistress, his friend Willy Marco and the seaman Vladimir. The colonel's boat is a virtual "den of vice", and the milord is a lecher and a drunkard. Willy also has a dubious past, as do the others on the vessel - every one of them is a potential suspect. As the narrative progresses, Maigret cycles miles and miles back and forth along the canal, digging up one clue after another in true bulldog fashion (even though he's French!) until the picture is pieced together.

As a police procedural, I would call this story excellent. Also, the final denouement is also quite believable and satisfying. Simenon's knowledge of canal life also helps in providing a veneer of veracity.

But I will not be reading another Maigret soon. Give me my English lord done to death in an isolated country house while a veritable criminal conclave is flocking under his roof; also the eccentric detective, the beautiful adventuress, the shady butler, the mysterious foreigner and the multitude of clues and unbelievable coincidences.

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## Jeffrey Keeten says

**"There are all kinds of bolt-holes. Some have the smell of whisky, eau de Cologne, a woman and the sounds of gramophone records...."**

She didn't look like the type of woman who would be found dead in a stable. She is dressed very well; one might even say with sophistication. She is draped in expensive jewels. She is very pretty. One can't imagine she was frolicking with a stable boy. She looks like the type of woman who does her lovemaking on silk sheets with a glass of champagne close to hand. Her lover would be a man of pedigree, and if he happens to lack the proper family tree, then certainly he must be a man of means.

And yet here she is dead, hastily, ineptly buried in the straw. The ghastly finger marks around her neck indicate a crime of passion. Certainly, it wasn't robbery.

Detective Chief Inspector Maigret of the Flying Squad is assigned to investigate the murder at the canals in Epernay. He is considered by many to be the Sherlock Holmes of French mysteries, but where Holmes relies on reason to solve his cases, Maigret relies on intuition. They both like to smoke pipes, and both routinely solve cases that are considered baffling to others. While Holmes is rail thin, Maigret is chubby due to his fondness for gourmet foods. If other detectives, or in the case of Holmes his friend Watson, are trying to help with a case, they soon learn that it is best to observe and wait to be told how they can best be of assistance. Puzzles are best left to the grand masters.

I have this vision of Maigret walking along the canal with his bowler hat pulled down tightly over his eyes, a pipe clamped between his teeth, and his hands shoved deep into his pockets. He is lost in thought as he ponders the slender clues the case has given him.

As Maigret tries to penetrate the close knit community of bargemen, boaters, and the small villages that service their needs, he must tread lightly, or his efforts will be thwarted by a wall of silence. Simenon, the creator of Maigret, was an avid boater. He writes about these canal communities and brings them to life with his sparse, insightful prose. They feel so authentic because Simenon is writing what he saw as he passed through these places with his own boat.

The woman, dead in the straw, was part of a yachting party which included her husband, the colonel, his mistress Madame Negretti, a Russian boat captain named Vladimir, and a young man named Willy, who is

one of those people who attaches himself to rich people by the warmth of his personality and the delicate nature of his wit.

As the image of the woman emerges, along with the rather unseemly characteristics of her companions, she certainly isn't who she first appears to be. As the orgies, drinking, and hedonistic lifestyle of herself and her companions come to light, Maigret finds it more and more difficult to feel respect for the victim. She was careless with her person.

**Regardless, there is a murderer, and they must be found.**

As he investigates, Maigret meets colorful people, such as the woman with the ample bosom who is trying to feed her barge crew while Maigret asks his nonsensical questions. *"She spoke with a singsong intonation almost as strong as a southern accent. But she wasn't at all bothered. She waited. She seemed to be protecting the two men with the fullness of her brazen flesh."*

Isn't that great? **"The fullness of her brazen flesh."** I can just see Maigret, flustered, trying to formulate questions while his eyes dip and linger. The embarrassment of seeing the knowing smirk wrinkling the lips of the woman because she knows the power of her female wonder.

The book is full of interesting word choices and fascinating observations.

I also like this description of the carter's hands: *"But it fell back again weakly, gnarled, calloused, spotted with small blue dots which must have been the vestiges of old tattoos."* The evolution of hands, right? Those hands have done many things. They have experienced various traumas that have changed the topography of the skin.

**Hands tell the story of our lives.**

There are 85 novels featuring Maigret and numerous short stories, so even though they are each about 150 pages, together they form quite the canon of devotion to the character. I've read that, just as Arthur Conan Doyle tried to kill off Sherlock, Simenon also tried to dispose of his famous character, but found the hue and cry was too much to withstand and wisely resurrected Maigret. Doyle also caved under the pressure.

**Some creations must live forever.**

It is always a pleasure to spend some time with Maigret. I also enjoy Simenon's stand alone novels, which tend to be grittier and more noirish than the Maigret series. One I recently reviewed is *The Widow*.

Simenon's are perfect for travelling. I always find it a comfort to stick at least one Simenon book in with the stack of reading companions I choose for each trip. This book is best read with coffee, strawberry jam, and a fluffy croissant.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>  
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

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**F.R. says**

There's a gentle rhythm to 'The Carter of La Providence'. It's not the same kind of gentleness one finds in a Miss Marple novel, as it's nowhere near as cosy as that. But this murder mystery on the water ways and

locks of France comes with its own peaceful rhythm, like water lapping on the edge of a dock at dawn. A murder takes place in a world with a slower pace of life, and even though the crime is brutal, the world just keeps making its own quiet way.

Initially it seems that the discovery of a dead body in a remote lock, where everybody present seems to have an alibi, is the introduction to a locked room mystery. But Simenon doesn't really follow that path. Instead he gives us one of his ruminations on morality, mortality and the corrosive effect of lies, betrayal and broken love. The taciturn and unemotional Maigret acts as ballast, unflappable at the centre and prompting the other characters to pepper him with disjointed monologues, which are as beautifully revealing as they are artificial.

If there's a difference between this and the contemporaneous classic British school of crime fiction, it's a frankness about death and sex. Christie would never treat a corpse as shabbily as Simenon does (or prolong a character's death to such a painful extent); while the mere thought of an English aristocrat travelling Europe having what's really a drunken non-stop orgy, would be enough to straighten Hercule Poirot's moustache.

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### **Aloke says**

My first Inspector Maigret and second Simenon. I previously read "The Widow" which also happens to be set near a canal. I thought they were both great. It's a neat trick to clearly evoke places and characters so economically.

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### **Peggy says**

Good book! Short, easy, satisfying read. Excellent puzzle and solution.

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### **The Reading Bibliophile says**

Simenon, c'est toute une atmosphère. Ici, c'est le monde des mariniers fluviaux, des charretiers de péniche et des éclusiers au début des années 30. Quel coup de maître !

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