

The Giveaway

The Clay Blackburn Story

Owen Hill • Foreword by Jonathan Lethem

Clay Blackburn—poet, book scout, and sometimes detective—cruises the mean, and sometimes not so mean, streets of Berkeley. With his accomplices, a soldier of fortune, a “defrocked” FBI agent, and a smooth and sexy con man, he lives a life of bisexual sensation with a little crime solving on the side. As such, Blackburn is a sly, witty, and more or less reliable raconteur of the last thirty something years of the Bay Area’s radical bohemia and bookselling. And in the tradition of Ian Rankin’s *Edinburgh*, and Jean-Claude Izzo’s *Marseilles*, bears uncomfortable witness to Berkeley’s descent from countercultural paradise to neoliberal inferno.

This omnibus collection collects the novels *The Chandler Apartments* (2002), *The Incredible Double* (2010), and the previously unpublished *Mayakovsky’s Bugatti* (2025), and includes the Blackburn short story “Righteous Kill” (2021).

“Yet the more we get to know him, the more we’re persuaded Blackburn is a Pure Product of Berkeley. He’s not only queer, but a queer sort of all else he declares himself to be: a queer sort of detective, a queer sort of Communist or Anarchist, and beyond—a queer sort of gourmet, ethical thinker, cat owner, and—for certain—a queer sort of narrator.”—Jonathan Lethem, from the Foreword

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Owen Hill is the author of three crime novels, two books of short fiction, and many collections of poetry. He coannotated and edited *The Annotated Big Sleep* (Vintage Crime), and coedited *Berkeley Noir* (Akashic Books). He was a buyer at a secondhand bookstore for many years, and now is a union organizer for the Industrial Workers of the World. He lives in Oakland.

Jonathan Lethem is the author of numerous books including *The Fortress of Solitude* and *Motherless Brooklyn*, as well as more recent best sellers, *The Feral Detective* and *The Arrest*. Several of his novels have been made into major movies, and his shorter works can often be found in the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, and many other venues. One of the MacArthur “genius” grant winners, Lethem is well known and widely respected for his vivid literary style, sardonic humor, and deep understanding of American culture.

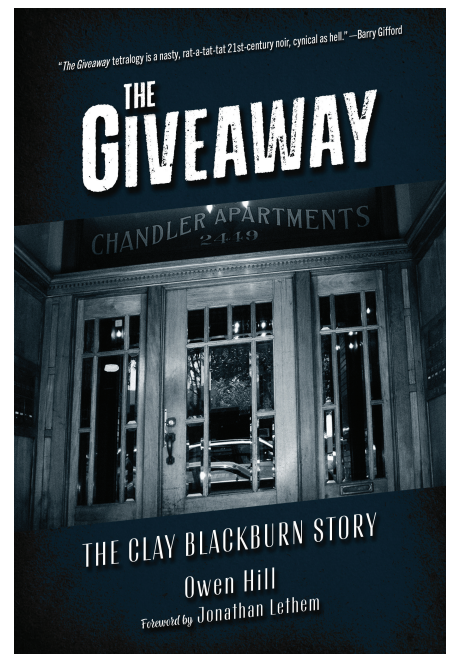
ACCOLADES

“*The Giveaway* tetralogy is a nasty, rat-a-tat-tat twenty-first-century noir, cynical as hell, which is where most of these characters live, or try to. Nobody is happy or satisfied, adrift as they are in their squirrely, self-contained universe, having given away the Big Chance without realizing it. Sometime detective Clay Blackburn is one of them but he’s squirming to escape, and like the fatalist crime writer David Goodis, Owen Hill is wise to the perverse pleasures derived from watching people squirm.”

—Barry Gifford, author and poet

“Subtle and evocative, the compelling mysteries contained in *The Giveaway: The Clay Blackburn Story* feature a gumshoe-poet’s keenly observed forays behind the fabled façade of the Bay Area. A journey of reveals only a transplanted Southern Californian like Owen Hill, wry insider and outsider, could pull off.”

—Gary Phillips, author of *Ash Dark as Night*



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