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**Review of Martha Grimes. Fadeaway Girl. New York: Viking Penguin, 2011.**

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Review for EGADS! Journal

Martha Grimes. *Fadeaway Girl*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2011.

*Fadeaway Girl* follows *Hotel Paradise* (1996), *Cold-Flat Junction* (2001), and *Belle Ruin* (2005) in Martha Grimes's Emma Graham series taking place in Maryland. As in the rest of Grimes's fiction, including the twenty-two novels involving Scotland Yard's Richard Jury, the protagonist attempts to solve a crime. Like modernist writers of the twentieth century, Emma uncovers detail after detail but understands that the truth is "hard bought" (5). Throughout the novel she considers, "Sometimes I wonder, How can you tell the difference between what's real and what's not" (41). The book jacket features a design of Coles Phillips for *Life* magazine in which a maid dressed in black with white collar, cuffs, and apron peeks through a keyhole. All that can be seen of her back against the black background are the back of the collar and the apron strings tied in a bow. Thus, in the picture it is impossible to see the whole truth.

Grimes, a former college English teacher, connects the crimes Emma uncovers with literary classics. *Belle Ruin*, the previous novel, features Emma's brother's production of a comic version of Medea's story, a production frequently referred to in *Fadeaway Girl*, which concerns a mother's vengeance against her philandering husband, a crime against a four-month-old baby. The connection with the unmentioned Oedipus tragedy seems even more relevant as the abandoned child survives to search for his father. The novel also alludes to *Macbeth*'s witches with "By the pricking of my thumbs / Something wicked this way comes" (272). Emma calls the La Porte area "Tragedy Town" because of the wickedness she uncovers within the seemingly cursed Devereau family. Another work referred to repeatedly in the novel is Robert Frost's poem "Good-by and Stay Cold." Frost tells apple trees that their danger comes not from too much cold

but from too much warmth, the implication being that it is safer not to expect too much from life. Considering her own experience of life, Emma reflects approvingly on the first line of Frost's poem, "This saying good-by on the edge of the dark—" (55), a line suggesting pain, sorrow, death, and grief. Knowing the last line of Frost's poem, "But something has to be left to God" (318), Emma visits a church and compares this poem with the lyrics in a hymnbook, lyrics that tell "all about hope and victory" (317). Emma, who is neglected by her hard-working mother and who focuses on and investigates old crimes, finds more truth in Frost's poem than in the hymn lyrics as she does not feel she can leave much up to God. Grimes's Emma Graham mysteries are not simple detective stories but deal with the themes associated with high tragedy and *belles lettres*.

*Fadeaway Girl* leaves the whole truth still unknown, "The Girl" unidentified. Grimes fans who love the Emma Graham novels can hope for more. Though this novel lacks the page-turning action of earlier novels in the series, it touches profound issues and appeals to readers with literary tastes.