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Rex Stout, Creator of Nero Wolfe

DANBURY, Conn. (AP) -- Rex Stout, who made a lifelong career out of chronicling the feats of the fat, orchid-growing, gourmandizing detective Nero Wolfe and his sidekick Archie Goodwin, died yesterday at 88.

Although Wolfe was as fictional as the address of his Manhattan brownstone in the West 30's -- his street number would have put him in the middle of the Hudson River -- to millions of murder-mystery fans Wolfe was as real as Sherlock Holmes.

Wolfe's creator died at the hillside home he built here in 1930 -- making sure it was over the line from New York so he wouldn't have the ultraconservative Hamilton Fish as his representative in Congress.

So what did I get?" he asked sadly a few years ago. "Clare Boothe Luce." Stout apparently found the Connecticut congresswoman almost as far removed as Fish from Stout's own liberal philosophy.

In more than 40 novels, Wolfe was almost always aloof from politics, making exception to let Archie air his feelings on former President Nixon and the Watergate affair in his last adventure, the best-selling "A Family Affair."

But author Stout was noted -- aside from Nero Wolfe novels -- for his tendency to jump into a variety of political issues.

An early "one - worlder" and antifascist, Stout pursued his ideas to the lecture platform and the halls of government.

Since 1941, when he was master of ceremonies of the "Speaking of Liberty" radio program, Stout had prompted the idea of world government.

A Quaker who spoke out for an early entry into World War II and against a soft peace for Germany, Stout also was active on the "Voice of Freedom" and "Our Secret Weapon" radio programs during the war and headed the Writers War Board from 1941 to 1946.

He also was president of the Society for the Prevention of World War III and chairman for more than 20 years of the Writers Board for World Government.

In a highly publicized dispute with writer Dorothy Thompson, Stout resigned from his post with Freedom House, but later was reconciled -- after Miss Thompson quit as president of Freedom House -- to become its treasurer in 1957, a post he held for many years. Stout, who wrote more than 55 books, claimed each Nero Wolfe took 39 days to write and that he never rewrote or even reread them.

Stout is survived by his second wife, the former Pola Weinbach, and two daughters, Barbara Selleck and Rebecca Bradbury.