



# **The Art of the English Murder: From Jack the Ripper and Sherlock Holmes to Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock**

*Lucy Worsley*

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## **The Art of the English Murder: From Jack the Ripper and Sherlock Holmes to Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock** Lucy Worsley

Murder -- a dark, shameful deed, the last resort of the desperate or a vile tool of the greedy. And a very strange, very English obsession. But where did this fixation develop? And what does it tell us about ourselves? In *The Art of the English Murder*, Lucy Worsley explores this phenomenon in forensic detail, revisiting notorious crimes like the Ratcliff Highway Murders, which caused a nationwide panic in the early nineteenth century, and the case of Frederick and Maria Manning, the suburban couple who were hanged after killing Maria's lover and burying him under their kitchen floor. Our fascination with crimes like these became a form of national entertainment, inspiring novels and plays, prose and paintings, poetry and true-crime journalism. At a point during the birth of modern England, murder entered our national psyche, and it's been a part of us ever since. *The Art of the English Murder* is a unique exploration of the art of crime and a riveting investigation into the English criminal soul by one of our finest historians.

## **The Art of the English Murder: From Jack the Ripper and Sherlock Holmes to Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock Details**

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Author : Lucy Worsley

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## From Reader Review The Art of the English Murder: From Jack the Ripper and Sherlock Holmes to Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock for online ebook

### Chris says

This isn't quite as good as the Judith Flanders book which Worsley does draw on. That said, however, it is either a good companion volume or a good place to start depending on which order you are reading them in. In fact, if the Flanders' book looks too daunting, this one, shorter, is good enough to be read in lieu of. If you have read the Flanders book, there is supplemental information here, and while Worsley does focus on more of the cases, since she is focusing on fewer, there is more information. There is a little more focus on the impact on literature as well as the view of women. The writing style is engrossing.

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### Margaret says

An excellent look at the English attitude to murder, both real and fictional.

Some lovely background on the Detection Club.

Learned some very interesting little pieces of trivia like the fact that E. W. Hornung, the creator of the gentleman thief, Raffles, was the brother-in-law of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Well worth a read by anyone interested in crime and the golden age of detective fiction.

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### Leslie says

This is a print companion to a TV series which was shown in the US on PBS. I will watch / read anything from Lucy Worsley.

The title is a bit misleading because the author actually begins long before Jack walked the streets of Whitechapel. We get a bit of history of policing, punishment and the horrific Regency murders, Ratcliff Highway murders <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ratclif...>

It is quiet interesting to read about the evolution of the mystery novel and the Penny Dreadful. This is a book that doesn't require you to read from cover to cover but can dip in and out of at your convenience.

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### Bettie? says

Description: *Murder - a dark, shameful deed, the last resort of the desperate or a vile tool of the greedy. And a very strange, very English obsession. But where did this fixation develop? And what does it tell us about*

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*ourselves? In The Art of the English Murder, Lucy Worsley explores this phenomenon in forensic detail, revisiting notorious crimes like the Ratcliff Highway Murders, which caused a nationwide panic in the early nineteenth century, and the case of Frederick and Maria Manning, the suburban couple who were hanged after killing Maria's lover and burying him under their kitchen floor. Our fascination with crimes like these became a form of national entertainment, inspiring novels and plays, prose and paintings, poetry and true-crime journalism. At a point during the birth of modern England, murder entered our national psyche, and it's been a part of us ever since. The Art of the English Murder is a unique exploration of the art of crime and a riveting investigation into the English criminal soul by one of our finest historians."*

Although this sent me off researching fuller versions of incidents mentioned, the worth of The Art of the English Murder itself had little allure.

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### **Nikki says**

A Very British Murder is an extremely readable, sometimes gossipy survey of the development of crime/mystery literature in Britain, up to the Golden Age of Sayers and Christie. It examines why people loved a good murder story, and what kind of murder story they wanted, while also reflecting on some of the real murders that occurred and the anxieties surrounding them.

I especially enjoyed Worsley's sympathy for Sayers and Christie, and her defence of Gaudy Night against a male critic's boredom about it. Quite right, too!

It's not deep lit crit, or a totally in depth micro-history, but there's interesting stuff and it's entertainingly written.

Reviewed for The Bibliophibian.

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### **Charlotte Holmans says**

Loved it! Brilliant brilliant brilliant!

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### **Kaethe says**

How did we come to a place where crime is entertainment? It's a really good question. Short answer: as the odds of certain risks (murder) go down, fascination with it goes up. Well, Worsley wrote a whole book explaining it better than that, and a very entertaining book it is, tracing the rise of newspapers, fictional detectives, the golden age of crime writing. I particularly enjoy the history of policing and detection, but it's all good.

Library copy

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## Susan says

This book has been written to accompany a television series of the same name and does, as a consequence jump around a little in subject matter. The book begins and ends with discussion of an essay - the first being, "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" by Thomas De Quincey and finishes with an appraisal of "The Decline of the English Murder" by George Orwell. This is not really about crime, as such, although many crimes are discussed - it is about how, especially since the nineteenth century, the British began to "enjoy and consume the idea of a murder."

De Quincey's essay uses the 1811 Ratcliffe Highway Murders as it's theme. Lucy Worsley takes us through the way crime was dealt with and the importance of the Ratcliffe Murders as a faceless, urban murder, which caused shockwaves throughout the country. In this book she looks at how murder became entertainment; involving sensational journalism, the theatre, tourism and detective fiction. The founding of an organised police force is discussed, the use of detectives, notorious crimes, 'Penny Bloods' (the forerunner of crime fiction) and forensic science. She also looks at crime fiction, from Dickens, to Sherlock Holmes and through the Golden Age of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L Sayers.

It is fair to say that this work does have some limitations; it is a little unfocused and tends to rely on the notorious and shocking, in a way which will probably have more impact on the screen than on the page. However, if you have an interest in true crime or crime fiction, then you will surely enjoy this. Lucy Worsley is an excellent writer and her enthusiasm for history and personal charm is enough to make this a worthwhile, fascinating and, keeping with her theme of an enjoyment in murder, an entertaining read.

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## Leah says

### From melodrama to noir...

Lucy Worsley has set out to trace the roots of the British obsession with murder – as consumers, rather than participants. She makes the case that the fascination with murder corresponded to the increasing urbanisation of Britain during the nineteenth century which, because neighbours no longer knew each other as they had done in a more rural age, meant that murders could be much harder to detect. And what could be more thrilling than knowing that a murderer might be on the loose? Combine that with the rise of affordable printed material, such as the Penny Dreadfuls that became available during the Victorian era, and suddenly the commercial potential of murder, real or fictional, was huge.

The book is light in tone and an easy, enjoyable read. Worsley also presented a companion TV series (which I didn't watch) and the book is written in an episodic format, presumably to tie in with that. Much of the material will be familiar to anyone with an interest in crime fiction or true crime, but the format draws interesting parallels between the society of a given time and how that influenced the type of crime fiction that was being written. She takes us through the major real-life cases of the Victorian age, such as the Road Hill House murder or the Maria Manning case and shows how these were reflected both in stage melodrama and in the early crime fiction of Dickens, Wilkie Collins et al. We see how the rise of the detective in real-life began to be mirrored in some fiction, while the early failures of the police to solve crimes left the door open for the rise of the fictional amateur sleuth. Of course, Worsley talks about Holmes and Watson in this context, but she also casts her net more widely to discuss sensation writers such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and early fictional female sleuths and how they reflected and to some degree challenged the Victorian view of women in general.

As she moves into the twentieth century, Worsley largely pulls away from true crime to concentrate on the fictional. She discusses the Golden Age authors in some depth, giving almost mini-biographies of some of them, particularly Dorothy L Sayers. She argues (as others have done) that the Golden Age puzzle with its fairly defined rules developed as a response to the horrors of WW1 and fed into a society that wanted something a bit cosier than the blood-curdling melodramas of the past. She discusses how class and gender were represented in these novels, but keeps the tone light – though it's clearly well-researched, this book never reads like an academic study.

After the Golden Age, Worsley rushes through hard-boiled fiction and today's appetite for the noir and the serial-killer, but this last chapter is really just a post-script. Her position seems to be that the mystery novel declined as a form after the Second World War, to be replaced by the more violent thriller genre – true to an extent, but the huge market for cosies suggests to me that there's a bigger appetite for 'traditional' murder mysteries still than I felt Worsley acknowledged. And there are still plenty of police procedurals that at heart are the descendants of the Golden Age, where clues and character are still more important than blood-soaked scenes of violence and torture. Thank goodness!

An interesting and enjoyable read, which I would suggest would be an ideal entry-level book for anyone looking to find out more about the history of crime fiction and its links with society.

NB This book was provided for review by the publisher, Random House Ebury.

[www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com](http://www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com)

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## **Caidyn (SEMI-HIATUS; BW Reviews; he/him/his) says**

### **3.5**

While this was meticulously researched, the book really didn't pull through like I wanted. I think the author should have kept out the "From Jack the Ripper and Sherlock Holmes to Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock" part of the title. Why? Because Jack the Ripper was mentioned in passing, Sherlock Holmes got maybe 10 minutes of material, and Agatha Christie and Alfred Hitchcock were more after mentions.

Really, this was about murder and the Victorian times. How it evolved from the impoverished to the middle class, the morbid fascination with it, and how literature changed to reflect the times. So, that's what it was about. Post-war was glossed over, and the focus was really on Victorian times with Worsley citing things more like papers and the public hangings, or side shows, or Madame Tussaud's instead of focusing on literature as we think about it today. Literature was, again, more of a side note. She really focused on Wilkie Collins. So, if you haven't read his major works, **DO NOT READ THIS BOOK**. Worsley spoils the plot line for three of his most famous books, and I had only read one of them while planning to read the other two.

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## **Amy Sturgis says**

Parts One and Two of Lucy Worsley's book ("How to Enjoy a Murder" and "Enter the Detective") cover much of the same material I do when teaching my graduate courses "The Gothic Tradition" and "Sherlock, Science, and Ratiocination." While the information presented wasn't new to me, I appreciated the excellent organization and thoroughness of Worsley's investigation. About the time I would think, for example, "Next up should be the Road Hill House Murder and its influence on novels like *The Moonstone*," there the

expected chapter would be.

Part Three, "The Golden Age," was equally well thought out, and Worsley's analysis gave me some welcome new insights about the "dead end" of the interwar detective novel before British genre authors followed their U.S. counterparts into the hard-boiled, noir style of storytelling. On a personal note, Worsley's balanced and insightful analysis helped me finally to articulate why I can read Wilkie Collins or Arthur Conan Doyle all day long, over and over again with relish, while the works of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers leave me cold.

I especially admired Worsley's elegant use of two essays - Thomas De Quincey's "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" (1827) and George Orwell's "Decline of the English Murder" (1946) - as the framing works between which her intellectual history unfolds.

Beautifully done.

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### **Tweedledum says**

Lucy Worsley romps through 100 years of detective fiction with typical enthusiasm and energy. The first half of the book was much more detailed than the second which felt rather rushed, nevertheless I enjoyed Worsley's potted history being a fan of crime fiction and found that there were many ideas new to me. The ending felt rather abrupt as though Worsley had run out of time to write more but overall I found that the book was quite a page turner in it's own right and made me want to revisit many of the greats of crime fiction including Wilkie Collins and Dorothy Sayers with fresh eyes.

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### **Natalia says**

I absolutely loved it, and I adore Lucy Worsley.

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### **Jo Chambers says**

This book formed the basis of a short TV series presented by Lucy on the history of the British crime novel. Lucy Worsley is one of my favourite historians, she is always so enthusiastic and engaging, with a wonderful sense of humour and great insight. The book traces the development of the British crime novel from its beginnings in the Georgian Sensation novels and fascination with real life crimes, through the Victorian crime novels -Wilkie Collins, Arthur Conan Doyle, and into the Golden Age of classic detective novels in the 1920s and 30s -Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers et al. Lucy concludes that we can learn a lot about contemporary society from the crime books we read. The cosy crimes of the interwar years were a reaction against the horrors of the Great War, for example. This was a fascinating read about the history of my favourite book genre!

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## Melora says

A quick, entertaining history of English murder as popular entertainment. The author, Lucy Worsley, takes as the beginning of the presentation of murder packaged for public consumption the essay of Thomas De Quincey, "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts, 1827. She traces the popular appreciation of murder from here on through Madame Tussaud's Waxworks; the "Penny Blood" booklet; Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins; the Ballad (and puppet show) of Maria Marten; the cases of Dr. William Palmer, Madeleine Smith, Florence Bravo, and others, as newspaper drama; Robert Louis Stevenson and Jack the Ripper; Sherlock Holmes and forensic science; the Golden Age writers, Christie, Sayers, Allingham; and, finally, Dashiell Hammett, Graham Greene, and Alfred Hitchcock. And that's just a quick survey – she actually covers a lot more. Worsley examines changing public attitudes towards crime and law enforcement, particularly from the Georgian period, where she begins, through the Victorians. I found the history of the police and detective forces, developing from the older system of constables and watchmen, particularly interesting.

Worsley's manner of citing the work of other authors of books on English murder, often Judith Flanders and P.D. James, struck me as a little odd (a bit "research paper-ish") until I realized that it was actually a function of this book having been written in conjunction with the production of a television series, "A Very British Murder." She brings in the work of other writers in the same way she brings in guest "experts" on the television show. It wasn't really an issue, and I'd be glad to see the television series if it were available (some of the ballads, puppet shows, and dramas she describes would be interesting to see!). While this book does not focus exclusively on detective fiction, it includes a nice survey of English detective fiction through to the "hard-boiled" period, and I found it a fun and instructive read.

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