



## Death of a Murderer

*Rupert Thomson*

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## **Death of a Murderer** Rupert Thomson

Robert Thomson—"a true master," according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*—now gives us his most powerful work yet: the story of a woman who, even after her death, inflames an entire nation, and of the man who comes under her spell.

Having spent decades in prison for crimes gruesomely familiar to everyone in England, this murderer has finally died of natural causes but is no less notorious in death than she was in life. Billy Tyler, a career policeman, has been assigned the task of guarding her body—to make sure, he's told, that nothing happens. But alone on a graveyard shift his wife begged him not to accept, Billy has occasion to contemplate the various turns his life has taken, his complicated thoughts about violence in himself and society, the unease that distances him from marital disappointment and a damaged daughter, and, finally, why it is that this reviled murderer, in the eerie silence of the hospital morgue, seems to speak to him directly and know him more fully than anyone else. In this dark night of the soul, his own problems and anxieties gradually acquire a new and unexpected significance, giving rise to questions that should haunt us all: Whom do we love, and why? How do we protect our children? And what separates us from those we call monsters?

A gripping revelation of crime, of punishment—and of what we desperately seek to hide from ourselves.

## **Death of a Murderer Details**

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Author : Rupert Thomson

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## From Reader Review Death of a Murderer for online ebook

### Samuel says

A bleak, chilling and unflinching exploration of the sickening depths of human nature. Not exactly cheery but unsettlingly truthful in its examination of the darkness within us all. Personally, the whole central concept of the novel - the ghost of Myra Hindley - would've worked better on its own as a short story as the surrounding scenes are exasperatingly banal and largely unnecessary. On the contrary, perhaps my fascination with the blonde-haired battle-axe probably says more about me than it does about the novel. This is one to read at night, maybe around Hallowe'en time. When it gets frightening, it's really arse-clenchingly, knicker-soilingly frightening, mainly because we know a lot of it really happened.

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### Nancy says

Surveillance of a morgue housing a murderer of children leads a police officer to examine his own life and mistakes he has made. This contemplation leads to a kind of redemption. During his night's stint in the morgue, Billy Tyler, the police officer, feels as if the murderer is speaking to him directly. The book explores crime and punishment with a good dose of fear and the supernatural thrown in.

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### Ulf Kastner says

Rupert Thomson probably felt the need for a change of pace and scope in his writing and as a result produced a tauter and more elegant tale than I've come across in any of his previously published novels.

The police constable protagonist appears to have reached a perpetual crossroads in his life which, in characteristically male fashion, he finds himself ill-equipped and ultimately unable to traverse. The situation that serves as the backdrop for his reflection on his own life provides a heightened level of significance, perhaps a kind of theatricality that comes with the legendary notoriety of the person whose corpse he must guard for a 12-hour graveyard shift. There are several moments that put his normalcy in relation to the dead murderer's perceived lack thereof without resorting to banality.

To me this book wasn't as compelling a page turner as my favorite books of Rupert Thomson's, which may have been a result of the largely introspective nature of the tale where his other novels offered driving plots and larger casts of contrasting characters. I'm nonetheless very pleased with the result as I like for this author to branch out and try his hand at different things.

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### Barnaby Hazzard Morris says

Much narrower in focus than Thomson's other novels, giving him far more room to breathe the lives of his characters; to describe their inner and outer lives in concentric detail. Because their concerns are so relatable, you disappear as easily into their thoughts as if they were your own, and you confront the same moral and existential dilemmas as they do.

I love the convoluted plotting, casts of odd characters, and off-kilter atmosphere of the rest of Thomson's oeuvre. He is my favourite author (which probably goes some way to explaining my rating). But in doing something totally different here, and still finding time for his trademark pithy turns of phrase, he's shown me that he's an even better writer than I thought.

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## **Brigi says**

Buckle up, kids, because I think this review will get long.

My uni has a street library (you know one of those things from where you can borrow books, put in books you don't need anymore or just want to share etc), and although I don't have a lot of free time, I got this novel. It's cool how they also have ones in English, and I really liked the title.

So I didn't know anything about the novel or author when I took the book. I thought it would be your typical crime novel, and oh my god, how wrong I was! I started out hating on Billy, because he seemed like your typical bored-of-marriage cop who blamed everything on his wife. After 20 pages I thought that if his attitude didn't change, I'd take the book back.

And then the flashbacks started happening, and I was captivated. This book basically narrates the events of less than 24 hours, and actually nothing huge happens, but there's always a tremor travelling in your body, expecting for something incredible to happen.

Let's talk about the protagonist, Billy. He's a cop with modest ambitions. He started becoming interesting when I discovered that he used to have a crush on his childhood friend, Raymond. At this point I was screaming internally, because OMGAGAYCHARACTERFUCKYEAH. So it turned out that Billy is a closeted bisexual (never expressed like this, but it was made clear that he's attracted to men and women; in fact I found his interactions with men much more interesting).

What really destroyed me was when I realised that I liked this guy, because he reminded me of Jim Gordon from the TV show Gotham. And then I argued that if Billy is Jim, then Raymond is Oswald Cobblepot, because Raymond dragged Billy into ambiguous and dangerous situations, but Billy of course liked it. I think I'll stop now, or I'll go on till forever about their relationship. ~~My mind is just deprived of the amazing Jim/Oswald interactions in Gotham.~~

There was also something about the style of the book that was very interesting and engaging; the wisdom, the sharp images it evoked. The flashbacks were integrated extremely well. This tension I mentioned earlier intensifies at the end, where - I'm not going to lie - I was incredibly worried that Billy was going to have an accident. It was intentional from the author, there was a chapter that ended with something like "the lights were shining in his eyes, and then it was dark". Fucking hell, I thought he had an accident, 30 minutes before getting home and reconciling with his wife.

So I don't know if my brain was just muddled by the cold and medicine and that's why it felt like the book's black threads enveloped me completely, but I thought it was a really great read, and I already ordered Rupert Thomson's next novel.

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## **Lauren (Northern Plunder) says**

**This review was first posted on Northern Plunder, if you want to see more reviews please [click here](#).**

What started off as a book that had a bit of promise, turned into a drab story of any ordinary man who's marriage is going down the drain a little.

I couldn't finish this book as it was boring and couldn't keep my attention but I have skimmed through everything after reading half of it hoping something would stand out and make an impression on me, unfortunately nothing did and my life would have been much better if I'd never picked this book up.

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### **Jennifer (JC-S) says**

‘It’s like what you did has got worse with the passing of time -‘

In November 2002, Police Constable Billy Tyler is assigned twelve hours of night duty at a hospital mortuary in Suffolk. His job? To guard the body of a notorious murderer. While the murder is not named in the novel, it is clearly the notorious child-killer Myra Hindley. Billy’s job is to guard the body, to ensure that nothing happens. Billy’s wife Sue does not want him to accept the assignment. She is frightened of what might happen in the presence of such evil.

Billy sees the job as just another assignment. He is to guard the mortuary, to make a note of all who enter it during the course of the night. The body itself is locked away, and Billy does not have a key. During the twelve hours, he will have two breaks in his duty.

As the night passes, Billy becomes more aware of the dead woman’s presence. He is also increasingly aware of his own anxieties - about his marriage, and about his disabled daughter Emma. Billy also remembers some of his own past actions as silence surrounds and weighs down on him. During the night he is visited by the ghost of the dead woman. He sees her, he smells her cigarette smoke, and he is questioned by her. And those questions lead him into places in his own past which cause discomfort.

Once started, I found this novel very difficult to put down. It is not about the murderer and her crimes, it’s about the man who finds himself guarding her corpse. It’s about the (almost inevitable, surely) self-examination that becomes part of such duty during the night. Staying vigilant in such surrounding in such circumstances enables (or does it require?) a greater degree of self-awareness. Or does it? Will Billy’s life change as a consequence, or will the issues he considers recede (back) into the background once his duty is over?

Perhaps I’ll read this novel again, when I’ve had an opportunity to think more about Billy’s life and less about the murderer. This is one of those novels which is complex and uncomfortable, beautifully written and confronting.

Jennifer Cameron-Smith

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### **Natalie says**

The school librarian recommended this to me and although I was reading another book at the time I couldn’t resist starting it. It about a policeman who is sent to guard the body of Myra Hindley in the morgue although cleverly the writer never mentions her name once in the book. It was a compelling and creepy book, had to

finish it. Not my usual type of book but I enjoyed it and it was very well written.

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### **Becca says**

This was a quick read, albeit an inappropriate choice for Christmas Day. It's about a police officer who spends 12 hours guarding the body of notorious British murderess Myra Hindley. It's contemplative and very low on action. It was quiet and well-drawn and raised a lot of good questions about the human concept of evil and about how easily anyone could cross the line. I felt that the ending was a bit of a let-down, although it's probably much more realistic for the character to go home without resolving his questions than to have all kinds of revelations.

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### **Coos Burton says**

4,5

La idea de que el libro girara en torno a Myra Hindley, popular por ser la asesina más odiada de Inglaterra, me resultaba terriblemente atractiva. Para mi sorpresa, el libro no trata sobre ella, ni tampoco sobre su caso (al menos no de forma directa). Sin embargo, su cadáver es el desencadenante de una serie de pensamientos hórridos que el protagonista va a tener una noche, mientras hace guardia en la morgue para cuidar el cuerpo de dicha asesina para evitar que caiga en manos de los miles de periodistas que buscan tener acceso exclusivo al mismo.

No es la novela macabra y sangrienta que imaginaba, es mucho mejor, y sin recurrir a lo explícito, se inclina ampliamente hacia lo psicológico, lo sugerente y lo supersticioso. El verdadero horror en este maravilloso policial se encuentra al desenterrar lo más oscuro del pasado que sigue embrujando el presente, y aquello que quita el sueño. Una muy buena novela, recomendadísima.

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### **Sarah says**

Hmmmm.....

It's not the normal sort of book I would pick up to read, but I decided to give it a chance.

While there is no specific mention of the name of the person / murder who has died, it can be guessed pretty quickly who is being referred to.

For such a small book which ordinarily wouldn't/shouldn't take long to read, I often found my attention drifted towards other books which I finished before this one.

The book centres around one character PC Billy Tyler, he has been brought in to watch over the body of a dead murderer in a hospital, before the funeral directors come in the following day. The events of the book occur over one night, which generally involves going back over memories from his life and the temptations and choices along the way. I don't know..... I really don't think it flowed particularly well.

I would have to agree that this book perhaps sold more copies due to the misleading image on the front.

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### **Rob says**

This is the first book I've read by Rupert Thomson but most probably it's not going to be the last. Most likely he has experienced something similar to this - guarding or watching over a dead person in a morgue during the night. It's unlikely that anybody could describe the experience so vividly unless he has actually undergone it. The smell that permeates the room, the faint noises that is amplified by the silence of the night, one's imagination running riot until you never quite know what is real and what is imagined. All of this contributes to introspective thoughts and musings about life in general.

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### **Mary MacKintosh says**

I had to push myself to read the first half of this book, and then I was finally 'in' enough to glide on to the conclusion. The main character is more intelligent, more reflective than I would expect a man who settles into 'a policeman's lot,' but that is what makes the book compelling. Who do you love, and how?

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### **Maciek says**

My introduction to Rupert Thomson was *The Insult*, which is really a quite brilliant book - compelling, unique and memorable, unlike anything else that I have read before. I've been wanting to read another book by him for quite a while - he's one of the few writers from whom I'd like to read their whole body of work.

*Death of a Murderer* is set in Suffolk in 2002, and focuses on one November night in the life of Billy Tyler, a policeman and an every-man whom none of us would be able to single out from a crowd. By all accounts Billy is an ordinary copper living an ordinary life, without any special adventures on the job, until one evening he's called to perform an unusual duty - he's to guard the body of a notorious serial killer until it is cremated, and prevent any possible attempts at vengeful vandalism or scavengers seeking souvenirs. although the serial killer in question is never named, Thomson doesn't really try to make a big secret of her identity - Britain's most hated woman is Myra Hindley. Working together with Ian Brady she kidnapped, tortured and killed four children in what became known as the Moors murders. Hindley's instantly recognizable mugshot is the cover illustration of the original British hardback.

Those seeking a thriller will likely end up disappointed, as not only the killer has already been caught, identified and prosecuted, but has also since died from natural causes. Billy has to spend twelve hours with her dead body - but the killer continues to affect those around her even after death. People believe that even the presence of her body can bring about bad omens; Billy's wife Sue begs him to stay home and call in sick, believing that he puts himself at a real risk. But Billy refuses her pleas, insisting that it's his job and duty to follow. The mortuary is empty except the most basic staff, and Billy will be alone with the dead body on a graveyard shift.

Although he initially planned to use the time to catch-up on amassed paperwork, Billy soon finds himself swept by other thoughts. The loneliness and isolation of the morgue pressed against him, forcing him to confront his own personal demons, griefs and regrets - he thinks of how he courted Sue before they got

married, and how their marriage never developed the way they both would like to. He thinks of the lost opportunities and arguments that begun to characterize their marriage, how they never traveled to India, or Thailand. He thinks of their baby girl, Emmma, born with the Down syndrome, and worries about her - who will take care of her when they won't be able to? Throughout the night Billy remembers his past, and people who populate it - the beautiful but cold Venetia, for whom that pure lustful love which he never felt again in his life; his once best friend, Raymond, who played a cruel game with him under the guise of friendship; another former friend, Trevor, whom he met again after many years and who confessed an intimate secret to him - and his own reaction continued to haunt Billy for all these years. The presence of the killer's dead body in a locker just meters away from him begins to be overwhelming, and forces Billy to wonder about the woman's nature and character, and challenges his convictions about life which he thought were solid.

This is a very quiet and subdued novel, not very similar to *The Insult* and its outlandish plot and hallucinogenic narrative. It focuses entirely on one man in a room with a single dead body, but manages to present entire lives through retrospection; it might not work for every reader, but it did work for me. I might not return to it soon or at all, but I'm glad that I read it and look forward to reading the rest of Thomson's oeuvre.

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## Jen says

Ok, so this book intrigues me. The premise: a woman jailed for torturing and murdering children dies, and a police officer has to guard her body for 12 hours. The entire book takes place during this time period, with his wife freaking out about his assignment and his general exhaustion with her making him accept. The plot: during his stint at the morgue, he revisits a life of love and pain (some of which is highly troubling). The author draws vivid portraits, and I wish I could revisit the main character and his daughter. The writing is simple yet intricate--I found myself yawning at the description of a yawn. The resolution: how can there be one, with a set-up like this? Much like McEwan's *Saturday*, it's more a day in the life, or, in this case, a memory in the life. Also like McEwan, I can't wait to read more from this author, of whom I'd never previously heard.

Pick this up. It's not a difficult read, although the sliding in from past to present continually startled me. It's part ghost story, part treatise on the vulgarities of human behavior, part meditation on what it means to love. I like the story, and would give three stars, but I'm happy to have a new author to explore, thus the fourth.

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