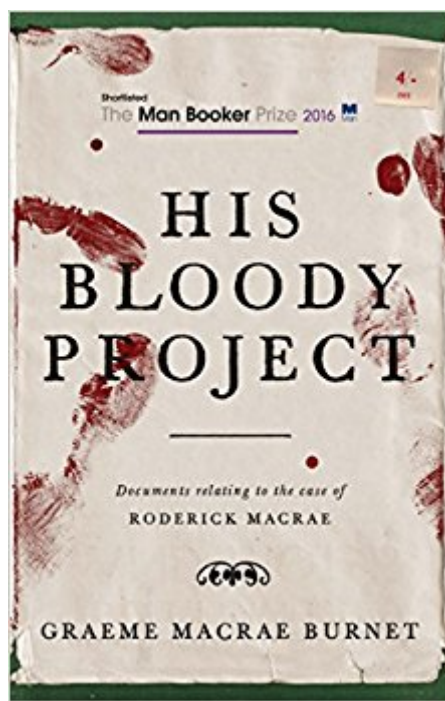


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His Bloody Project



Synopsis

LONGLISTED for the MAN BOOKER PRIZE 2016. The year is 1869. A brutal triple murder in a remote community in the Scottish Highlands leads to the arrest of a young man by the name of Roderick Macrae. A memoir written by the accused makes it clear that he is guilty, but it falls to the country's finest legal and psychiatric minds to uncover what drove him to commit such merciless acts of violence. Was he mad? Only the persuasive powers of his advocate stand between Macrae and the gallows. Graeme Macrae Burnet tells an irresistible and original story about the provisional nature of truth, even when the facts seem clear. His Bloody Project is a mesmerising literary thriller set in an unforgiving landscape where the exercise of power is arbitrary.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

4.5 stars. I first became aware of this book when the Man Booker long list was announced. I would like to try to read as many of them as possible and started with this one. For the first two thirds of the book, I wasn't quite sure why it was nominated for such a prestigious award. It was thoroughly enjoyable and I would have highly recommended it for that reason alone. It also provided an interesting twist on the crime novel in that it is written entirely in document form - police interviews with the villagers who knew the murder victims and the accused, medical examiner reports, a memoir purportedly written by the accused, an account by a preeminent criminal psychologist who interviewed the accused, his father and villagers and, finally, a report of the trial. The author also managed to write all of these various documents in voices that were true to the period. There were also interesting insights into classism, family dynamics, and the dynamics between residents in a small village. Then the last third of the book happened and I was blown away. Those bits of the story

that had niggled at your brain from earlier on that weren't properly addressed came into play. One is left with questions regarding the justice system, the death penalty and criminal insanity - particularly, in this instance, the diagnosis of it and what it would mean for the individual (either hanging or a life, likely spent in an asylum). Class issues are raised in this section as well. It was here that I really saw what the Man Booker judges did as well as gained a better appreciation of the earlier parts of this book. This doesn't mean that I feel it should necessarily win the prize (I won't make any such determination yet), but I can see why it was nominated.

In the spring of 2014, I embarked on a project to find out a little about my grandfather, Donald 'Tramp' Macrae, who was born in 1890 in Applecross, two or three miles north of Culduie. It was in the course of my research at the Highland Archive Centre in Inverness that I came across some newspaper clippings describing the trial of Roderick Macrae, and with the assistance of Anne O'Hanlon, the archivist there, discovered the manuscript which comprises the largest part of this volume. Immediately upon finishing this latest Man Booker nominee, I turned back to the author's introduction to check whether I had been reading genuine documents about a true case, or the imaginative products of a clever author with an uncanny sense of style. I think the latter, but even now I cannot be quite sure. The larger part of this book is, as Macrae Burnet tells us, the memoir written in 1869 by 17-year-old Roderick John Macrae at the request of his solicitor while he is awaiting trial in Inverness Castle. He freely admits to killing Lachlan Mackenzie (commonly known as Lachlan Broad) and two other people in the former's house in Culduie, Wester Ross, in order to relieve his father of the persecution he was suffering at Mackenzie's hands. From beginning to end of the book, there is no dispute about these facts; all that remains to be filled in are the details, motivation, and the question of moral guilt. Roddy Macrae's memoir takes up the first half of the book. It is preceded by various written statements made at the time by neighbors, the local schoolteacher, and the Presbyterian minister, which show a wide variety of opinions, revealing the character of each writer quite as much as that of their subject.

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