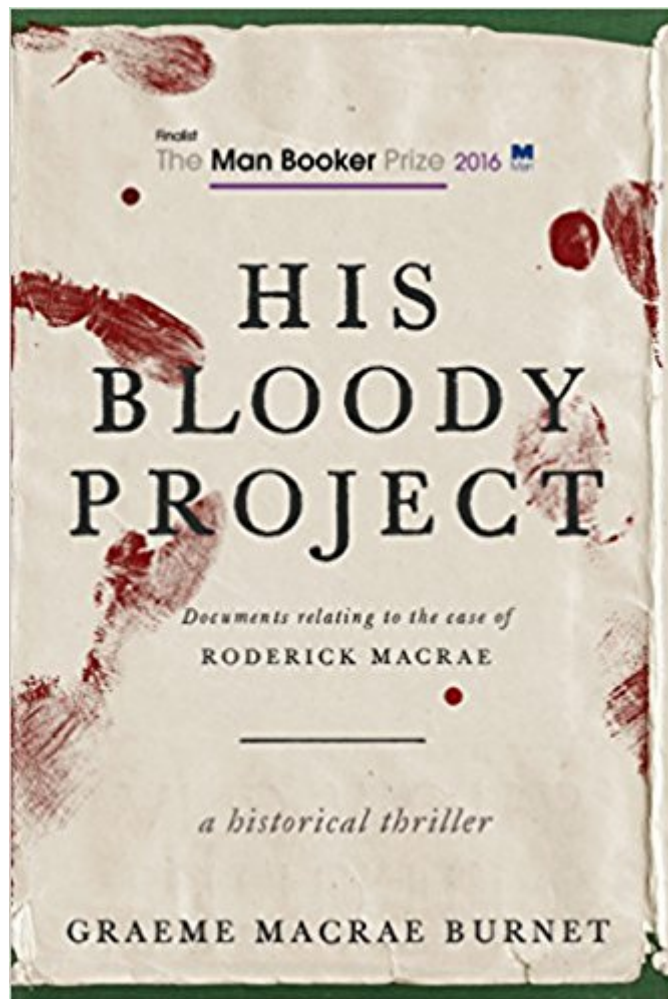


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His Bloody Project: Documents Relating To The Case Of Roderick Macrae (Longlisted For The Man Booker Prize 2016)



Synopsis

Longlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2016 A brutal triple murder in a remote Scottish farming community in 1869 leads to the arrest of seventeen-year-old Roderick Macrae. There is no question that Macrae committed this terrible act. What would lead such a shy and intelligent boy down this bloody path? And will he hang for his crime? Presented as a collection of documents discovered by the author, His Bloody Project opens with a series of police statements taken from the villagers of Culdrie, Ross-shire. They offer conflicting impressions of the accused; one interviewee recalls Macrae as a gentle and quiet child, while another details him as evil and wicked. Chief among the papers is Roderick Macrae's own memoirs where he outlines the series of events leading up to the murder in eloquent and affectless prose. There follow medical reports, psychological evaluations, a courtroom transcript from the trial, and other documents that throw both Macrae's motive and his sanity into question. Graeme Macrae Burnet's multilayered narrative; centered around an unreliable narrator; will keep the reader guessing to the very end. His Bloody Project is a deeply imagined crime novel that is both thrilling and luridly entertaining from an exceptional new voice.

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. This review may seem spoilerish, but I was careful to make sure that it isn't. I haven't included any information that one can't glean from the blurb, the table of contents or the first few pages. Now, stop reading this review and go read this book!

The book concerns the real life slaying of a family of crofters by a troubled teenager, Roderick Macrae. The book is structured around the account of the events leading up to the killings written by Roderick in his jail cell as well as contemporary news articles and commentaries. The grim life of the crofters and society's sneering attitude to them and the lower classes is set out in vivid detail. The suffocating and hopeless nature of the life faced by the dirt poor, the harsh spiritual guidance of the Free Church all build to provide a context where the murders are committed. Yet the kinship of the community and support for each other is striking. This book is a gripping read and I completed it in one sitting. Hope this wins the Booker prize for which it is justifiably nominated.

If the story of Roderick (Roddy) Macrae, a teenage boy who committed a heinous triple homicide in a remote Scottish Highlands, town seems extraordinarily realistic, there's a good reason for it. The crime actually occurred in 1869, baffling the community and capturing the attention of some of the top solicitors and psychological experts of the time. This is not a whodunit. We know it's a whodunit; Roddy freely confesses. We also know the motivation. The key victim,

Lachlan Mackenzie, is a local constable who abuses his power and conducts a personal vendetta against the Macrae family. No reader will shed tears for his untimely demise. So why, then, was His Bloody Project longlisted for the prestigious Man Booker Prize this year? The reason is the brilliant re-imagining of the author, Graeme Mccare Burnet, who claims to have discovered the incarcerated young man's memoir while he was researching his own roots. What follows is the 'actual' memoir, written in the tone of the 1860s, witness statements, medical reports, a psychological assessment of Roddy (by real-life prison doctor James Bruce Thomson), notes from the trial and so forth. The result is that the reader is whisked away to the town of Culduie and set down among the crofters who stoically work their croft, eeking out a meager living, with nary a chance of upward mobility. Powerless and frustrated, unable to do much more than accept their yoke, Roddy and his family come alive under the deft pen of Mr. Burnet. While Roddy is unusually eloquent for an uneducated young man, his memoir seems quite straightforward—that is, until the doubts emerge. Is his version truly accurate? Or is he partially insane or at least, disingenuous? This novel is extraordinarily ambitious, psychologically complex, and filled with enough narrative tension to keep readers at the edge of their seats. In short, it's a fine achievement.

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