



Hue and Cry

Shirley Mckay

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1579, St. Andrews. A thirteen-year old boy meets his death on the streets of the university city of St. Andrews and suspicion falls upon one of the regents at the university, Nicholas Colp. Hew Cullan, a young lawyer recently returned home from Paris, uncovers a complex tale of passion and duplicity, of sexual desire in tension with the repressive atmosphere of the Protestant Kirk and the austerity of the academic cloister.

Hue and Cry Details

Date : Published June 4th 2009 by Polygon (first published 2009)

ISBN : 9781846971310

Author : Shirley Mckay

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Mystery, Crime, Fiction, Historical Mystery, Medieval, Cultural, Scotland, Murder Mystery, Literature, 16th Century

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From Reader Review Hue and Cry for online ebook

Sharon4 says

I thought it was a smashing read, and particularly impressive for the first in a series. It didn't drag as they sometimes do and the characters worked well. They weren't sacrificed in the interests of keeping the plot going. I like authors who want us to be invested in their characters - it makes me want to read more of them.

Miriam says

Over all I liked this book, but there were a couple issues I had with it. It feels insulting to the intelligence of the reader to set out the entire solution to several murder mysteries in a chapter where the protagonist is literally explaining the plot twists to a child, in preparation of a play put on to "catch the conscience of the king". The reader has, by that point, presumably actually read the book, and it's not like it was extremely complicated, so it was very pointless to rehash the plot again TWICE.

On the other hand, I liked the 16th century setting in St. Andrews, and the focus on the cruelties of college life at the time, as well as the examination of law and justice, both within the kirk and without. The characters were a bit blah, but the mystery was an interesting one, and who knows, the characters might improve in the sequels. I'll see, I guess.

Michelle Jalsevac says

So well written not only historically, but in the concept of blind justice, and what that means. I just returned from a trip to St Andrews Scotland and this book also iterates a beautiful picture of the scenery in that magical seaside town to a tee.

Anna says

This is the first of the Hew Callan books - murder mysteries set in medieval St Andrews. As I had already read the series of 5 Calendar books, Hew and his world were already familiar with me. For a new reader, however, McKay develops her world and characters convincingly and in-depth. She demonstrates a intricate understanding of life in the late 1500s, yet never comes across as trying to educate or explain the world she writes about. Hew, a young man recently returned from France, has been educated in the law yet resists following his father's footsteps in this field. Law, or, to be more precise, crime, drags him into its domain when one of his old friends is accused of murder. The novel is fascinating in its depiction of the young St Andrew's university and the pushes and pulls which made medieval life. It is well-written with characters which are well fleshed out and convincing.

Emma says

I've read quite a few medieval detective stories and this was on a par with most of them. The only series that stood out to me were the CJ Sansom Shardlake series and the Matthew Bartholomew series by Susannah Gregory. This was quite good but I don't know if I'll ever be inclined to continue the series. I liked the comic relief of Hew's horse Dun Scottis: definitely the best character!

Jim says

I found this an entertaining read, full of historical detail with carefully developed and intriguing plot. Everything tied in very nicely.

I felt all the action takes place 'off page' – mostly discovered through conversation, questioning the telling of tales and dropped hints. So the story loses some dynamic and involves a fair bit of repetition. The language style and vocabulary used by all the characters felt quite similar; with clearly indicated traits differentiating them.

So it's a good tale but perhaps not one of my favourites.

Judith Paterson says

A new, to me, historical crime series set in St Andrews.

Atmospheric and full of historical detail, verging on almost too much occasionally, but fascinating.

Story well crafted and interesting. Will look forward to reading more.

Victoria (Eve's Alexandria) says

This first book in the Hew Cullan series had its faults - the most severe of which is that I didn't quite know what it was, a crime story or a historical story - but in spite of that I enjoyed it. The writing is surprisingly good in parts and the dialogue has that hint of alienation that makes it feel distant in time. The main characters are ticklish and you can sense the potential in them, even if some of the peripherals are stick figures. That said, Mackay paid attention to some minor parts in ways that I liked - Will, the dyer's son, for example, with his quiet dignity. The plot is terribly baggy, particularly in the middle, and in spite of the length there are a few unresolved narratives. Still, there was enough to keep me interested, thematically speaking, to push through it. I hear the second book is better, following through the hints of promise in the first. I'm looking forward to it.

Bryn Hammond says

Inescapably I thought of the Matthew Shardlake mystery I read last year – lured by what I'd heard of its dirty streets of 16th century England, C.J. Sansom's sensory evocation of setting. Here I am in 16th century

Scotland, in a novel written first to evoke time and place, with a gritty detailed realism, that stands your hair on end. I'll go on with my Shardlakes but I found this one even more effective, and Hew Cullan has jumped the queue.

The writing is a joy. I notice in the author biography she did postgrad study in seventeenth-century prose; she knows how to write the sixteenth century into her sentences – without being difficult, but with an authenticity achieved. She does a shifting point-of-view that textures the novel, that makes people come alive – she enters their consciousness, and when they're in an extreme experience, her impressionistic writing can get it across. It's like a milder dose of what Robert Low did in *The Lion Wakes* (also very Scottish). In short I'll read anything written like this, mystery or whatever.

I found the story strong. Who did what just isn't what matters; I'm a bad guesser at mysteries and didn't foresee much; it was a story about the university, and the kirk, and the society of St Andrews; and it was well-ended. Ends are hard to do. When I say it's toe-curling – I had a real sense of horror, the more so because she can be understated – it's not one of those 'nasty, brutish and short' books, but about a struggling humanity. Hew is too humane for his profession of the law. Can he and his friends save society's victims? That is the question, and I cared.

Susan McDuffie says

I devoured this book in one sitting--well, I did sleep for about 4 hours before I finished it off! A lovely historical mystery, with very well developed characters, a great sense of time and place, and an intriguing plot. Highly recommended!

Pagan says

I found myself torn as to how to rate this, unsure as to whether it warranted two or three stars. As is evidenced by the rating clearly visible, I settled upon three.

I began reading this book a long time ago and found that I simply could not enjoy it. This lack of enjoyment stemmed initially from the characterisation that Mckay provided us with, or more accurately its very notable absence, each person we were introduced to seemed hollow to me, a paper thin cut out simply used as a narrative device. These characters did not feel like people to me and the only enjoyment I managed to glean from these early pages came from a troublesome horse.

The second key reason I was initially struggling to submerge myself within this book and its story was that I felt that it lacked any sense motion. Nothing seemed to happen and yet over the course of the first few chapters two murders had taken place and various accusations but they meant very little to me. In truth I found myself completely disenchanted with the idea of ever finishing the book the first fifty pages having taken me weeks to read because every time I picked it up, I grew tired of it after a page or two.

I battled through those first few chapters and then I simply gave up, I had intended it to be an easy and quick read that would sate my reading desires whilst my life kept me too busy for the intricate novels I so enjoy.

January 1st 2018 was when I eventually picked up this book once more with the intention of actually trying

to read it. Granted, the story did pick up to some degree after a little more wading through what I could appreciate was good writing just lacking the kind of flare that I desired.

I reached two hundred odd pages in with my mind made up that it was a perfectly decent novel that I simply could not get into and then Nicholas regained consciousness and that awful encounter occurred and I found myself seething and ready to throw the book across the room. It lay dormant for a few hours before I came back to it, determined to finish it and hoping that the writer could pull it back (I was bought the three first Hew Cullan books and really didn't want to leave them unread and unloved on my shelf for eternity).

She did pull it back. The characters began to come to life, not Hew though he remained very bland until the last fifty pages within which we caught a glimpse of a person beneath, in truth I found it hard to warm to the 'main' characters as they were (Hew, Meg, Giles, Nicholas) but found the cast of 'secondary' characters in particular Agnes to morph into a much more complex network than I had thought Mckay capable of weaving by this point. The story and its resolution although relatively simple proved satisfying at the end and with the decided improvement in these elements I found myself able to appreciate the clear dedication taken to write this novel. The research done to make it as strongly grounded in its historical setting was admirable and I could appreciate some of the word-craft taking place within Mckay's sentences which at times was quite beautifully done.

Although this book in its whole has left me quite honestly perplexed I can say confidently that it is a novel of value and that I would recommend it. I can see why other people may love it and wish that my appreciation of it could have been much greater than it was. In conclusion this is a decent book that I failed to connect with until the end, I hope that in reading the second book I will be able to see what I missed in this one. The potential to be an enjoyable read was there, it just failed to put out this time around.

Tocotin says

A very well written, but completely nerve-wrecking book. I know next to nothing about feudal Scotland, but the details and the dialogue felt very different from the usual historical fiction fare – it took me to a new place and time... and to be honest, not always the one where I'd liked to go.

And the book isn't graphic in any way, mind. Most is of the horror is left unsaid. But it makes you think. How did those people of old endure all this cruelty and tyranny? And it was sometimes impossible to fight against, because it was your religion, you grew up with it, you didn't ask questions...

I liked the main character and his friend the doc, and his sister and dad, I just thought they were a bit too modern in their way of thinking. And still, they threw the word "whore" around like nothing. *sigh* Stop it, women writers, pretty please? You are better than that.

PS. for those who would like to read it: it ends well! But one serious quibble I have is this: there is no great showdown. As with the scary stuff, the climax mostly happens offstage. And this is disappointing. I like those group scenes where everyone reacts and a great hot mess is made, and then it gets resolved. Right?

Amy Corwin says

I'm about half-way through so far. I'm enjoying it although there are some sentences I've had to skip because I couldn't quite figure out what was meant. Not a lot, though, and not enough to ruin the story.

Now that I'm done, I have to say I enjoyed it, although it was a little on the longish side. It reminded me, however, of the challenges of historical novels in that when characters such as the doctor are true to their time and start talking about "balancing the humours in a body" to make them well, it's so frustrating. You want to shake the character and tell them to wake up and realize that bleeding someone almost to death isn't doing them any big favors. You'd have thought that experience alone would have taught them that well before the middle of the 19th century, but I guess that's why the "scientific method" we take for granted today was such a brilliant new innovation when it finally occurred to someone in the 19th century. LOL

Not to go off on a tangent, you understand, but the obscure, off-the-wall theories humans used to believe "way back when" is one of the things that can drive you crazy, particularly in a historical novel. It's really hard to identify with a character whose mindset is so different and superstitious. Fortunately, the doctor is only a minor character and the main character is of a very different sort with a modern enough view on life to make the reader care about him and identify with him.

I was not particularly surprised at the end, but that didn't affect my overall pleasure with the book.

Denise says

16th century Scotland: Having recently returned from Paris to his home town, young lawyer Hew Cullan finds himself involved in a complex murder case when an old friend of his is suspected of being responsible for the death of a 13-year-old boy he was tutoring. To clear his friend's name, Hew looks into the case himself and soon discovers that there is a lot more to it than one might suspect at first glance.

A solid historical mystery read. I enjoyed the very well rendered atmosphere a lot, but unfortunately didn't care overly much for any of the characters. In the end, I found the mystery a bit too convoluted and drawn out. Might still check out another one in the series at some point.

Joannapercy says

Since I have given a lot of worse books 3 stars this is a 4. The characters are well developed and the story kept me guessing. The historical detail was there but not in so much detail that it feels like a history lesson. A good read.
