



The Harlot's Tale

Sam Thomas

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It is August, 1645, one year since York fell into Puritan hands. As the city suffers through a brutal summer heat, Bridget Hodgson and Martha Hawkins are drawn into a murder investigation more frightening than their last. In order to appease God's wrath—and end the heat-wave—the city's overlords have launched a brutal campaign to whip the city's sinners into godliness. But for someone in York, this is not enough. First a prostitute and her client are found stabbed to death, then a pair of adulterers are beaten and strangled. York's sinners have been targeted for execution.

Bridget and Martha—assisted once again by Will, Bridget's good-hearted nephew—race to find the killer even as he adds more bodies to his tally. The list of suspects is long: Hezekiah Ward, a fire and brimstone preacher new to York; Ward's son, Praise-God, whose intensity mirrors his father's; John Stubb, one of Ward's fanatic followers, whose taste for blood may not have been sated by his time in Parliament's armies. Or could the killer be closer to home? Will's brother Joseph is no stranger to death, and he shares the Wards' dreams of driving sin from the city.

To find the killer, Bridget, Martha, and Will must uncover the city's most secret sins, and hope against hope that the killer does not turn his attention in their direction.

The Harlot's Tale Details

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From Reader Review The Harlot's Tale for online ebook

Erin says

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Author Sam Thomas introduced readers to the independent and unconventional Bridget Hodgson in The Midwife's Tale, but her crime solving days are far from over. Picking up a year after the original story, book two of the series, The Harlot's Tale, returns to the tumultuous streets of York, where Bridget, Martha and Will must race to discover who is sending the city's sinners to their final judgment.

Before I get too far ahead of myself, I want to make it clear that while The Harlot's Tale can be read independent of its predecessor, the book is best appreciated as a follow-up. Thomas provides all necessary information for those readers who might have missed his 2013 debut, but there is a lot to be said for the nuance and subtle detail built on the foundation of the original which is why I highly recommend reading the series in chronological order.

Take for example, Thomas' setting. Under siege in 1644, York felt like a city under occupation with its rhythms dominated by military order. A year later, York has fallen into Puritan hands and is utterly transformed by dogmatic conflict. Thomas' ability to first recreate seventeenth century York and then convincingly reinvent his fiction is nothing short of extraordinary, but the effort wouldn't be noticed by those who'd skipped the first installment.

Also of note is Thomas' cast and how he successfully avoided the situational and personal drama he highlighted in The Midwife's Tale. These are the same characters, but they've grown with the passage of time and that progression has wrought slight changes to their personalities as well as the role each plays in the larger story. There is a certain degree of familiarity here, but Thomas moves the story forward, effectively balancing the interests of new readers against those of his established fans.

Like its predecessor, I didn't feel the mystery particularly enigmatic, but that being said, I liked how it played out. Despite having correctly identified the culprit in the early stages of the novel, I remained engaged in the narrative and greatly enjoyed watching the details come to light.

A vividly atmospheric and action-packed historical, The Harlot's Tale is a deliciously alluring fiction that cleverly combines doctrine, disorder and death in a single irresistible volume.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

Set during a sweltering August in 1645, *The Harlot's Tale* returns to the dirty, tumultuous city of York and midwife Bridget Hodgson and her friends. Taking place a year after the first novel, *The Midwife's Tale*, this novel is a lovely reunion for those familiar with Bridget and a fabulous standalone for those new to her.

For me, the immediate appeal of this book is the unique setting: York following the English Civil War. Now that the city has been claimed by Parliamentary forces, York has been invaded by new hostile: 'godly' and zealous Puritan preachers, eager to transform York into a bastion of good. For midwife Bridget, her assistant Martha, and her nephew Will, the fiery fervor isn't particularly welcome, not with an unseasonable summer

making everyone edgy and impatient.

A particularly vehement minister, Hezekiah Ward, has gained prominence and attention in York for preaching against 'harlots' but his sermons seem to be taken literally when young women begin to die in particularly gruesome ways. Bridget becomes embroiled in the investigation to find the killer and draws the unwelcome attention of Ward and his family, many city fathers, and others as she tries to prevent another murder.

As with Thomas' previous novel, this book is rich in atmospheric detail -- sweltering 17th century York is not my kind of vacation, I'll say! -- and peppered with a wonderful, appealing cast of characters. Bridget Hodgson remains a favorite heroine: she feels authentic and real, very much of her era but filled with the kind of independent spunk I like. (Based on a real woman, Thomas' website details the historical Bridget and her world, and it's a fascinating rabbit hole!)

Unlike the previous book, this one has more of a murder mystery/procedural feel. The shockingly gruesome crimes boggled Bridget and the city, and escalated the tension within York. The murders aren't, however, just a series of horrifying events; in Thomas' hands, they force Bridget and her friends to wrestle with the lofty ideas of punishment and sin, the moral concessions made in every day life, and the values they wish their city (and family and friends) embody and live. The very real, human response to the crimes kept me reading when I might normally have put the book aside (I'm not suuuuuuper wild about murder-y mysteries) and once more, Bridget's behavior and responses kept me engaged in the story. I'll go anywhere with her!

Readers need not be familiar with *The Midwife's Tale* to enjoy this novel; Thomas recaps the events from the first book easily, and while the relationships between the characters builds from that book, a new reader won't feel lost or left out. For those who enjoy unusual settings for their murder mysteries, consider adding this book to your TBR; anyone interested in midwives will absolutely want to pick this and the previous book up.

Sharon Chance says

In his second book in the "Midwife Mystery" series, "The Harlot's Tale," Thomas takes his readers back to 17th century England to the town of York, where the fanatically religious have taken over the town and any and everyone is suspect to evil doings.

Midwife Lady Bridget Hodgson and her assistant Martha primarily go about their duties delivering the babies of the town, but frequently they are called upon to witness and examine the deaths of the unfortunate. (It's a horrible job, but one that goes along with being a midwife in those days.) Now, in the midst of a raging heat wave, someone is going about make a religious statement by killing some of the harlots and their companions and it falls upon Bridget and her friends to find out who is doing these unspeakable deeds and stop them before the entire town is swept up in the fevered frenzy of fear.

Thomas does a wonderful job of setting the stage for this intriguing mystery, leading the reader through the twists and turns, and ultimate surprises that make this such an enjoyable novel to read. Plus he adds in historical facts that educate as well as entertain the reader. Thomas' characters are so interesting - the wise, curious and brave Lady Bridget is a great heroine (who was a real-life 17th century midwife), and her sassy sidekick Martha keeps the action moving along at a lively pace. Even the secondary characters - Bridget's

smart, but vulnerable nephew Will, the adorable scamp Tree, and spunky dwarf jailer Samuel Short - are so personable and add to the overall story.

Fans of historical fiction with a generous dose of mystery will find this novel a great addition to Thomas' series, but it can also be easily read as a stand-alone novel as well.

Emma says

Lady Bridget Hodgson lived in York in the mid 1600s. She was married and widowed twice, and she lost her two children. She is a skilled midwife with a lot of experience. I met her for the first time in The Midwife's Tale.

When I was invited to review The harlot's Tale for this book tour, I accepted right away, all too happy to spend some more time with Bridget, her assistant midwife Mary Hawkins, and her servant Hannah. Just to reassure you, it works really well as a standalone, you can understand this one very well even if you have not read the #1 in the series.

Just like in the 1st mystery in the series, Bridget is summoned by her brother, working for the police, to help him in a double murder. But as in The Midwife's Tale, Edward does not want her to get too much involved and is preparing to pronounce justice by himself. As usual, Bridget can feel he is mistaken, and she has very little time to investigate by herself to figure who really did it and why. Things get more complicated as more...

my whole review is here:

<http://wordsandpeace.com/2014/01/06/b...>

Pam says

2nd in a 1600's murder mystery series, I give The Harlot's Tale 3 1/2 stars. Main character is a midwife who helps the city of York solve crimes - In this case, someone is brutally killing the city's whores. (The word "whore" is used in the book way too many times). It pits the evil religious fanatics against the sinners of society.

Bridgit, the midwife, has been a well-drawn character in both of the books in this series. Her cohorts are also well-drawn. (Although the relationship between Bridgit and her brother-in-law and his family strikes me as odd, and hot and cold). The mystery was good. The murders were pretty gruesome, and there was a lot of death in this story. I liked the ending. Will probably continue reading Bridgit's stories, if author continues to write them.

Lisa says

If you enjoyed The Midwife's Tale, you are going to love The Harlot's Tale. The mystery is as gripping with a great cast of supporting characters that will have you guessing the identity of the villain throughout the entire book. I came to love Bridget Hodgson even more for her feisty sleuthing in a man's world, and with

Martha again by her side they are quite the feminist pair. Sam Thomas again gives us a vivid look at historical York in 1645 and social dynamics of an England gripped by Puritanism. There are definitely some twists, including the death of a main character that have me eagerly waiting the next book in this series!

nomadreader (Carrie D-L) says

(originally published at <http://nomadreader.blogspot.com>)

The backstory: Last year I read and adored *The Midwife's Tale*, Sam Thomas's debut mystery.

The basics: The story opens in August 1645, the year after the events of *The Midwife's Tale*. York is battling a brutal heatwave and adjusting to life with Puritan control. A new minister, Hezekiah Ward, has arrived in town, preaching about the evils of prostitution, just as much of the city believes the heat is God's punishment for evil. When the bodies of a prostitute and a john are found brutally murdered, Bridget's brother-in-law calls her in to view the bodies. Once again, her skills as a midwife find a crime-solving purpose.

My thoughts: Once again I was delighted with the characters of Bridget and Martha, her servant and midwife apprentice. The relationship of the two women is one of my favorite parts of this series. As Bridget teaches Martha more about midwifing, the reader learns with her. There are numerous births throughout this mystery, but I also appreciate how Thomas uses the story to teach more about the less expected aspects of midwifery:

"This was the darker side of service as a midwife. Most of our labor went into delivering mothers and infants, but constables and Justices also called upon us in more desperate situations. Midwives bore the burden of examining the wasted bodies of children who had been bewitched, and those of infants left to die under a haystack."

It's this darker side of service that draws Bridget and Martha into the murders. As a midwife, Bridget has unparalleled access to information. In this case, the class differences between Bridget and Martha also aid in their solving of the crime. Because Bridget is a lady, there are people who will only speak to her, but there are also people who cannot fathom speaking to a lady about matters of prostitution and murder.

Beyond Bridget and Martha, their motley crew of family and friends continues to delight. This broad cast of characters are a wonderful antidote to the often dark tone of this novel, and I look forward to these relationships continuing to develop in future books.

The mysteries at the heart of this novel were indeed fascinating, but I wished for more red herrings and actual mystery. While the resolution was quite satisfying, the mystery itself was not as engaging throughout the book as the other plot points were.

The verdict: *The Harlot's Tale* is a wonderful continuation of *The Midwife's Tale*. Thomas masterfully constructs the world of York in the 1600's, and the depth of this world and his characters more make up for the less intense moments of the mystery.

Heather&Lia Breslin says

Equally as enjoyable as the first in the series

Patty says

This is the second book from Sam Thomas involving his fascinating character, Lady Bridget Hodgson, a midwife in Puritan York circa 1645. Loosely based on a real woman, Bridget is a lady of means and some influence in town. Her brother in law is a magistrate and turns to her for input when a horrible murder occurs.

A prostitute and her client have been killed just as a new preacher has come to town railing against such ungodly acts. Bridget, her assistant and nephew start to investigate but soon find that all is not as it seems in their god-fearing town.

It is so interesting to go so far back in time to try and solve a mystery without the up to the minute answers we are so used to with today's CSI mentality. Bridget and her band must work through their murders in what seems to be agonizingly slow increments but you need remember that they are 250 years in the past and it's all manner of remarkable that a woman is at the center of the story. But apparently midwives carried some weight during this period which I found very fascinating. The plot is twisty and turny and the final killer came as a bit of a surprise. You do have to love that in a murder mystery. The relationships introduced in the first book developed further here and the door is left open for future Tales (I hope, I hope!) but the book can stand alone quite nicely.

If you like your history with a bit of murder and a cast of diverse and well developed characters then come read what tale the Harlot has to tell.

Book of Secrets says

I love historical mysteries, and THE HARLOT'S TALE is easily one of my favorites. This is the second book in Sam Thomas' Midwife Mysteries series, and the story picks up about a year after Parliamentarians won the city of York during the English Civil War. Puritanism is on the rise, and with it comes a fanatical preacher named Hezekiah Ward. In his sermons, Ward targets the prostitutes of the city, saying their sin is the reason God is punishing York with unbearable heat and drought. Their evil ways must be stopped. It is God's will.

Lady Bridget Hodgson is a respected midwife, wealthy gentlewoman, and sister-in-law to a powerful man in government. Her occupation and station gives her more influence than most women of her day. When a string of gruesome murders takes place, all of the victims prostitutes or their "clients," Bridget's brother-in-law Edward calls on her to help with the investigation. When clues surface indicating one of the godly crowd may be the killer, Bridget must take care. The men in charge of the city are Puritans, and many share the same belief that York should be wiped clean of sinners and be an example for the rest of England.

There's so much I enjoyed about this book! First, the characters. They are engaging, well-drawn, and most importantly, realistic for their time. Bridget is clever, strong, and intelligent. As a wealthy widow, she's gained independence, though she understands the limitations society has put on her as a woman. Bridget's

partners in mystery-solving are her savvy and headstrong assistant Martha, and her loyal, yet troubled nephew Will. Martha's sarcastic tongue had me snickering several times.

The mystery itself was fantastic. The pacing was fast, and there were several viable suspects. Just when I thought I had it figured out, another plot twist would change my line of thinking. I was so surprised by the ending! I love the author's engaging writing style and vivid descriptions of mid-17th century England. This book gave an eye-opening account of some absurd crime-solving techniques of that time, as well as an interesting look at midwifery and the women who practice it. Highly recommended!

Source: Review copy from NetGalley.

Linniegayl says

This is the second in the author's Midwife series set in 1644 York. While this is definitely darker than the first, with a few fairly grizzly murders, I thoroughly enjoyed it. My main frustration? I want to read the next in the series immediately. I like the "family" that Bridget is forming and wonder how some new additions are going to work out.

Angie Bolland says

I really wish there were half stars. I would give this book 3 and a half stars. The story continues in the second installment in the midwife series. Although the siege has been lifted, a scorching heat plagues York. A itinerant clergyman comes to town and blames the heat on the whores and adulterers. He says that if the sinning doesn't stop that God's wrath will be unleashed. Then the murders begin... Horrible, scarring murders. I had to skim over these parts because they were pretty gruesome. I stayed with the book because I liked the characters from the first book, but if this is the direction the series is going in, I will not continue to read them. Just sayin'.

Angie says

A solid and engaging historical mystery; the details of Puritan York ring true, and the ending is a satisfying and surprising one without resorting to a cliche (or, as I call 'em, M. Night Shyamalan-esque) and over the top twist. An interesting cast of characters that includes a man with a clubfoot, a dwarf gaoler, and some very fanatical preachers. A quick read for a cold night.

Erin Al-Mehairi says

If you like a great historical mystery set in the mid-1600s of York, then I highly recommend Sam Thomas' midwife mystery series for its superb character development, intriguing mystery, and detailed social and emotional issues of 17th Century England!

As The Midwife's Tale introduces widowed, wealthy, and independent midwife Bridget Hodgson to us, as

well as her supporting characters of maid Martha and Hodgson's nephew Will, we learn about how they all came to be in their respective situations in York, the state of the citizens, and takes us en route with them as they solve a murder mystery.

In The Harlot's Tale, the novel picks right up in their ongoing lives, giving us a brief update, as well minor (but more than enough) details about who the characters are in case someone picks it up to read without reading The Midwife's Tale. But it doesn't at all make the book seem wordy or redundant for those who did read the first book, either. In my opinion, he does a nice job of setting the story and is fast getting to the plot of The Harlot's Tale. I definitely think you could read this second book without even reading the first (though reading the whole series will certainly show a progression and give more depth to the series).

I LOVED The Harlot's Tale even more than his first book. The writing seemed more carefree, as if he was more at ease with himself as fictional writer. He seemed more willing to be open about the social issues of the day, namely the inclusion of fundamentalist Christians who began giving roadside sermons and cracking down on sinners at this time. Isn't this the main source of all angst in English cities of the past? Trying to rid the area of whores and pox by telling women they are sinners seems to be one of the most talked about issues in history. Maybe eventually it's because of Jack the Ripper immortalizing the situation for everyone. Well, long before Jack came, Christians tried to rid the cities of whores by condemning them even further than their already lowly status. Thomas does an excellent job within the story of allowing us to see the circumstances through the eyes of women who lived in poor conditions without a husband and had to sell their bodies in order to survive. He allows his protagonist Bridget to be rather religiously impartial, even though her law enforcer brother-in-law is not. Thomas has her character weighing both sides of the coin, which I always think is a great way to get readers to think on important issues and break down judgemental barriers.

When a harlot is gruesomely murdered in a strange death scene in the novel, it's as if the Old Testament of the Bible is being acted out to represent their sin. Bridget, Martha, and Will take to their detective work again, all the while uncovering heartfelt emotions for the reader (well, this reader) as to the plight of those women who were forced to work as prostitutes just to feed their children. Why were the men never taken to task for their abhorrent behavior? No demand, no supply right? That's the way I see it. Many times these women had no other choice. Those Christian women with money who tried to preach a better way to them didn't understand that most of them KNEW it was wrong, and why, and didn't even like doing it themselves. Who would? But as a line in the book said, words don't feed children. I really like how Bridget always has compassion for them as she holds men accountable for having bastard children and then leaving them to starve. At any rate, I think Thomas handled this issue extremely well and I applaud him as a man for genuinely being able to channel a strong female character as a male author. He has a very uncanny knowledge of women's emotions and desires and it all adds to his well-developed characters as well as to the social message of his books.

Thomas' mystery novel was fast-moving, intelligent, emotional, gritty, and I didn't want to put it down. It moved much faster and was written with more finesse even than his first. I am beyond excited to read the third in his series next year. Bridget is a perfectionist at everything she does, whether it be delivering babies or solving a murder, and as I reader I felt as if I was bustling around the city with her and Martha. She has her own fears and nightmares (and grief) behind the scenes which really softened her more in this novel and as I reader I could connect with her even further than before.

Thomas is a historian and his research on midwives is unparalleled. His intricate details of her work as a midwife in this series is captivating. Overall, he creates a world for us that makes it easy to join in as we read, even though we could never imagine what it might have been like to live in it.

I am eager to recommend The Harlot's Tale to fans of English mysteries set in the mid -1600s. If you like Sherlock Holmes, switch up the protagonists and try your hand at reading about a female midwife who stumbles upon becoming a detective of sorts and finds she not only rather feels it a duty, but an intense desire within herself to help women in need. As she delivers babies in to the Old World with precision, she also pieces together puzzles of death and mayhem. It's absolutely a series not to be missed!

Christine says

Another GREAT work from Sam Thomas. I loved his 1st one "The midwife's Tale" I was very happy to see that the same characters are also fatured here.

The midwife, Lady Hodgson is once again helping women give birth and not always in the plushest of places. Prostitutes are coming up dead, and her curious mind wraps around trying to solve the crime.

The city of York with all it's sludge and glory is portrayed perfectly, I became totally immersed into the book and that's when I know it is a winner.
