



Killer Verse: Poems of Murder and Mayhem

Harold Schechter (Editor) , Kurt Brown (Editor)

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Killer Verse: Poems of Murder and Mayhem is a spine-tingling collection of terrifically creepy poems about the deadly art of murder.

The villains and victims who populate these pages range from Cain and Abel and Bluebeard and his wives to Lizzie Borden, Jack the Ripper, and Mafia hit men. The literary forms they inhabit are just as varied, from the colorful melodramas of old Scottish ballads to the hard-boiled poetry of twentieth-century noir, from lighthearted comic riffs to profound poetic musings on murder. Robert Browning, Thomas Hardy, W. H. Auden, Stevie Smith, Mark Doty, Frank Bidart, Toi Derricotte, Lynn Emanuel, and Cornelius Eady are only a few of the many poets, old and new, whose work is captured in this heart-stopping—and criminally entertaining—collection.

Killer Verse: Poems of Murder and Mayhem Details

Date : Published September 6th 2011 by Everyman's Library (first published September 1st 2011)

ISBN : 9780307700933

Author : Harold Schechter (Editor) , Kurt Brown (Editor)

Format : Hardcover 255 pages

Genre : Poetry, Horror, Crime, True Crime



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From Reader Review Killer Verse: Poems of Murder and Mayhem for online ebook

Melissa says

Removing myself briefly from my Skyrim haze to read some poetry. This is a handsome little volume, very trim & compact with a nice red ribbon place marker. I was surprised that I didn't like it as much as I thought I would. Am I getting too delicate as I age? Within the first few pages of this book, I found "Mother" by Kaci Hamilton. At first I thought it was about matricide & I was totally cool with it. Reading on, it's actually the mother that's doing the killing. "That little mouth/the spittle of milk" - I just got kind of sad again re-reading that passage. It turns out that infanticide = not my cup of tea.

This book veers between strange, uncomfortable oddities like "Birthing" (told from the perspective of Susan Smith's made-up carjacker & interspersed with passages from her confession), "Herbert White" (which starts off "When I hit her on the head, it was good/and then I did it to her a couple of times,— " and goes nowhere pleasant from there); "Stackalee" and other poems containing words like baith, ere ye, maun, and bonny that would be perfectly at home on a Nick Cave album; and then druck like Melissa Balmain's "Facebook Psycho" ("old-school killer app", yeah yeah, got it). All this back and forth has made me slightly dizzy and a little creeped out.

Kevin Farrell says

Here I am reading poetry. That is a stretch but when I saw this book I just had to check it out. Poems about murder. There are poems from the murderers perspective, there are poems from the victims perspective, and there are poems from Death's perspective. I am not a student of poetry so some of these have challenged me a bit. I tend to enjoy the simple, brief rhymes that speak clearly to me.

Here is my favorite from the book:

Black Widow

Mrs. Murphy killed her mate.
The act was frowned on by the state.
She murmured, just before they threw
The switch, "It's just what spiders do."
by
Gail White

How much fun is that?

The section on Psychopaths is a bit rough - just so you know.

Nicole says

A pretty decent collection of poems, about murders and tragedies both real and imagined. Among my favorite poems were "With or Without Milk," "Facebook Killer," and the several Meditations on Murder at the end of the book.

Stephen says

Poignant **repugnance**...ice cold **passion**...
Evocative cruelty...**inhuman** humanity...
Lush, callous, **beautiful** and deeply unsettling...

Poems + Murder =

What a perfect **cover** for this book. I love how it **gorgeously foreshadows** the elegant, **polished depravity** of this stellar collection of **poems** centering on murder, death and the darker, more disturbing aspects of **human nature**. Included in this **morbid meter** are poems told through the eyes of killers, victims and those loved ones left behind by tragedy to pick up the remnants of a life irrevocably altered by the intervention of man's inhumanity to man. There are ditties dressed in dread that are light and darkly humorous and there are shocking, violent verses that will bring the soul to quivering.

This is art, dark art to be sure, but it...really...really works.

The material covers the entire history of violent murder and runs the gamut from the biblical homicide of Abel by Cain (*Abel*) to pieces concerning Lizzie Borden (*The Passion of Lizzie Borden*) and Jack the Ripper (*Whitechapel Nights*). Modern poems speak of the atrocities committed by more contemporary serial killers like Ted Bundy (*Denise Naslund*), Andrei Chikatilo (*In Rostov, The Butcher*) and Jeffrey Dahmer (*Road Kill*). I was surprised at how wide ranging the topics were though the subject matter stayed consistently focused on the violent snuffing out of life.

MY PERSONAL FAVORITES:

While not an exhaustive list, as there are many wonderful poems in this book, here are a few **standout** pieces that really got to me or that I thought were just brilliantly executed:

Birthing: is a subtle, deeply moving poem told from the viewpoint of the fictional black man invented by **Susan Smith** after she drowned her children. As with a few of the stronger poems, interwoven in the verse are segments from Smith's own hand written confession. Extremely powerful.

I Know Who You Are: is an angry, bitter piece told through the voice of Virginia Tech student Seung-Hui Cho, who murdered 32 of his peers on April 16, 2007. The piece was composed from the notes left by Cho and is a startling look into the mind of someone who has lost it.

The Good Shepherd: Atlanta, 1981: Told from the viewpoint of serial killer John Wayne Gacy, the title is an ironic jab at the mass-murderer's methods for luring his young victims to their death. Gacy's detached brutality and complete lack of empathy for his victims emanates in waves off the pages and this is a very effective piece.

Lord of Crows: Describes the horrific torture and murder of Matthew Shepard near Laramie, Wyoming in October, 1998. Matthew was killed by two men because he was homosexual and his attack led directly to the Hate Crime Prevention Act of 2009 (named for Matthew and James Byrd). Subtle but very moving.

Charlie Howard's Descent: Charlie Howard was another gay teenager murdered for his homosexuality and this sad, tragic piece is told from the viewpoint of Charlie as he forgives his attackers even as he drowns. I was struck by this piece in part because I was unfamiliar with the crime even though it happened at or about the same time as The Matthew Shepard case and it hit home to me how many of these crimes take place that the general public is never made aware of.

This book is worth buying for any one of the above pieces and I am extremely thankful that I came across this wonderful selection of poetry.

Overall, I can't quite bring myself to bestow 5 stars on the entire collection as there were a number of poems that did not really inspire or raise my emotional state to the level of **moved**. However, as with the pieces mentioned above, there are plenty of 5 star gems contained in this very worthy book to justify my strongly urging you to pick this up. In the end, one of the highest compliments I can dish out is that *Killer Verse* has motivated me to seek out and read more poetry.

4.0 stars. HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION!!

Peggy says

This was an impulse read, discovered when browsing our local public library's poetry section. Each poem tells the story of a murder from many points of view, both murderer as well as victim. I was excited to find an excellent pantoum included, "Blue-Beard's First Wife" by Leon Gellert. I also liked Simon Armitage's "Gooseberry Season," and Mark Doty's "Charlie Howard's Descent." The best poems leave holes in their telling, where something remains unfathomable about what is described.

Kem White says

This is another good anthology in the Everyman's Library Pocket Poets series. And this is the book of poems for you if you think poetry is all about daffodils and fluffy clouds. There's not a lot of laughs in this collection as all of the poems are about murder, psychos, and murder victims. But many of these poems are quite gripping: "Frankie and Albert," Tony Barnstone's "The Lover," Cornelius Eady's "Birthing," and Melissa Balmain's "Facebook Psycho" are among my favorites. As with any anthology, there are a few clinkers such as Stevie Smith's "The Murderer" and James Wright's "At the Executed Murderer's Grave." These latter two poems were just too difficult to understand. It's interesting to see how the individual poets get inside heinous crimes and create an enthralling, often tragic, image in just a few words. This book is probably not for everyone but if you think you might like poetry that's sometimes spine-tingling, sometimes horrific, then this small volume is for you.

Kate says

I've always been fascinated by murder ballads, so when I saw this book on the new shelves at my library I had to check it out. The poetry within spans hundreds of years, from anonymous murder ballads to more contemporary poems. Some poems were about actual murders that had been committed, such as those by Jack the Ripper, Lizzie Borden, and Jeffrey Dahmer. Others took place in the mind of the killer, or from the point of view of the victim.

Due to the graphic nature of some of the poems, I'd say this isn't a collection for everyone. But if you're interested in the darker side of human nature, I'd recommend giving it a shot. It's definitely interesting!

NinjaMuse says

In brief: A collection of poems about murders and murderers.

Thoughts: There are a lot of really good poems in this, but don't do what I did and read it cover to cover. It gets heavy fast, when you do that. It weighs on a body.

This is a lot like short story collections for me, in that some poems hit harder than others and some just fell flat, but I liked the variety and the diversity of the perspectives and types of poem and most of the poems I didn't like (or didn't get) I could still appreciate the technique of. There are condemnations of and meditations on death and murder galore, as well as explorations of the states of minds of killers, which were probably the darkest bits for me. That and the descriptions of the acts.

Particular favourites include "Fall River Historical Museum", "Naked City", "The Good Shepherd: Atlanta, 1981", "Whitechapel Nights", "On the Turning Up of Unidentified Black Female Corpses", "Wi'-Gi'E", "Crime Club", and pretty much all the murder ballads.

If you have morbid tastes like I do, and you occasionally find yourself in the mood to read about death, true crime, and serial killers, I certainly rec this. It's a strong collection with something for everyone, as long as their taste runs dark. Definitely not a collection for everyone, though!

Warnings: Death, murder, gore, dead bodies, sex crimes, abuse, slavery, entitled white men, racism. One poem that hints at a coming lynching. Poems from the POVs of killers. Covers Matthew Shepard, Ed Gein, Jeffrey Dahmer, Richard Speck, Susan Smith, the Atlanta, GA child murders of 1981, the Virginia Polytechnic shootings of 2007, and the Athens, GA shooting of 2009. Some poems unfriendly to trans and gay people. (Ask and I can give titles and page numbers.)

8/10

Samantha Graziani says

Fun compilation, great for when you're feeling a little mischievous and some are fun to read aloud. I'm not a poetry buff, but I enjoyed reading poetry around this theme.

Vasha7 says

Overall, I can't say that this collection aroused great enthusiasm in me. There were lots of poems based on recent cases -- odd how many of those sounded similar, in spite of the varied forms used; perhaps it was that the way that the poets chose to tell/analyze the cases was similar. And the collection was unbalanced between very new (at least three quarters), late 20th century (most of the rest) and just a sprinkling of older ones. Might have seemed less incongruous if it stuck to just contemporary verse. In that case, though, we would have missed a few good items like "The Murderer" by Stevie Smith, "Crime Club" by Weldon Kees, or "The Inquest" by W. H. Davies; "A Case of Murder" by Vernon Scannell is widely reprinted, but for very good reason, and I'm not sorry to encounter it again.

What were some that left a favorable impression with me? "The Ballad of Charlotte Dymond" by Charles Causey stands out for its startling imagery and driven mood. I must say I have a weakness for the ballad format; "Victor" by W. H. Auden is pretty good too. "American Murderer" by Megan Levad alludes to songs such as blues or "Stackalee". "Actually, However" by Thom Ward is an unusually interesting meta-fictional take on crime stories. "Fart" by Roger McGough manages to be very colloquial and conversational and still sound like a poem, but more important is how the language works to make the story unforgettable. Then there's "The Lover" by Tony Barnstone, "The Murder Writer" by Lynn Emanuel, the excerpt from "Blue Front" by Martha Collins, "Charlie Howard's Descent" by Mark Doty, "The Sound That Wakes Me at Night, Thinking of It" by Charles Harper Webb, and maybe a few others. Rather a scanty harvest.

Jennifer says

The ever-marvelous Everyman's Library serves up its own selection of death in *Killer Verse: Poems of Murder and Mayhem*. Divided into sections like Vers Noir, All in the Family, and The Mind of the Murderer that describe either the tone or point of view of the poem's narrator, the collection features works about the usual suspects such as Cain and Abel, Lizzie Borden, and Jack the Ripper as well as a few you might not be expecting (Susan Smith, Seung-Hui Cho, Richard Speck). Mothers kill their children, children their fathers, husbands their wives, and wives their lovers in a veritable abattoir of verse that ranges from Browning's classic and beautiful "The Laboratory" to Melissa Balmain's very modern and creepy "Facebook Psycho." If the short section on Murder Ballads is less than compelling, the notes on the cases that inspired the lyrics of the anonymously written songs at least partially make up for it.

Julio A. Cervantes says

A good collection of short poems to read during the month of Halloween.

Elizabeth Kennedy says

I love poetry! In this collection there are many styles represented, from free verse to meters, lyrical lines. In almost every entry that struck me however, there was a master author. The subject itself lends itself to

emotion, from the victim view, the murderers torment to the punishers predicament, it bleeds angst. This was an amazing collection, so glad I read it! Be warned, some poems are based on crimes within our memories, and are not for the faint-hearted.

A E Fox says

I wasn't sure if I was going to like this book, but I ended up loving it. It is diverse in voice, POV, content and so on. I also appreciate the span of time between pieces from when they were written. The way it is arranged is effective, and it is just the right amount of poetry. I wrote down eight "new favorite poems" and became inspired by the pieces. I borrowed it from the library and now need to buy it. Happy I picked it up!

Sundry says

I liked it, but it was often a difficult read due to the subject matter. No punches pulled! Really traveled to dark places with these poets. Disturbing number of murdered beauties and pregnant girls in the traditional verses.

The one that will stick with me for a long time: A Case of Murder by Victor Scannell. I think if you Google it, with Killer Verse you can read it online.

Scary stuff!

Nicely produced volume. The blood red ribbon for keeping one's place was a stroke of genius.
