

## Review Ritual

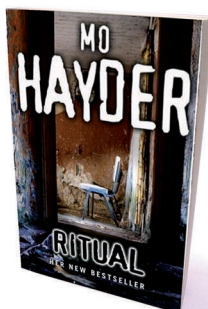
**Mo Hayder** (Bantam Press, £14.99)

● This is Bath-based Hayder's fifth crime novel and the third featuring dangerously driven DI Jack Caffery's struggles to find redemption through maverick police work. Relocated to Bristol from the Met, Caffery is called to Redcliffe Quay where police diver 'Flea' Marley has found a severed human hand in the water. The matching hand is found buried nearby and forensics reveal that the hands' owner was alive when they were cut off. Flea's dead father having been an expert on African Shamanic rituals, the suspicion that 'muti' magic is involved soon emerges. Flea approaches her father's colleague Kaiser Nduka about this, and about her own issues concerning her parents' mysterious death in a diving accident. Meanwhile, it emerges that the hands came from a young drug addict and the investigation moves into the world of Bristol's scag heads. Tig, another friend

of Flea's, runs a rehab charity supported by a local African businessman and the connections between these strands throw up a series of blind alleys and gruesome revelations.

Muti – the use of organs from living children to bring good luck or ward off evil spirits – came to UK attention in 2001 when the headless and limbless torso of an African child was found in the Thames. As Caffery pursues the Bristol crime, we learn that his life is overshadowed by the mysterious disappearance of his brother Ewan when they were children. He believes that Ewan was abused and killed by a local paedophile and has moved to Bristol to trace 'the Walking Man' – a tramp who murdered the man who abused his brother.

'Ritual' is a dark book about nasty matters and



Hayder manages to combine the need for suspense and action very well. Like most crime novels there's essentially a small cast of suspects enticing you to play with the possibilities while the relationship between Caffery's hard man detective and Flea's scattier determination has a classic sub-sexual undertone. There's loads of 'police procedural' acronyms to please the crime buffs (though whether Avon & Somerset are happy about descriptions of cops taking magic mushrooms or shagging prostitutes in cars is doubtful) and it would be churlish to question the implausibilities of so satisfyingly organised a crime novel. It's the first of a Walking Man series, apparently, so more local seediness can be eagerly anticipated. (Tony Benjamin) ★★★★★

## Review The Sorrows of an American

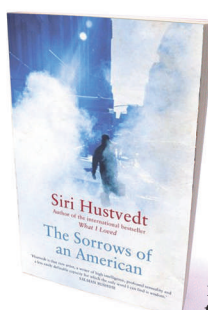
**Siri Hustvedt** (Sceptre, £16.99)

● There has always been a link between literature and psychoanalysis: both disciplines construct stories in some shape or form. Since Freud, novelists have explored the self as a legitimate dimension in the charting of character and motivation. In the book's acknowledgements, Siri Hustvedt states that she works as a volunteer at the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic in New York City. Her latest novel 'The Sorrows of an American' reflects this interest. It is intelligent, complex and reflective. A 'grown-up' book that takes little on face value. The characters have depth and are portrayed with compassion and understanding.

Erik Davidson, a divorced psychiatrist, finds a letter from an unknown woman in his father's papers. His father, a history professor, has just died and the mystery woman is pursued by Erik and his sister Inga. Inga, the widowed wife

of a famous author and the mother of an adolescent who witnessed the atrocity of the Twin Towers. She also has to fight an unscrupulous journalist trying to expose the secrets of her late husband.

The book is about how much we reveal and how much we keep secret and the relationship between the two. The title suggests a political theme, but is more a personal and psychological journey into the labyrinths of the self, of family and of relationships. The 'America' of the book is described in terms of loss; what the immigrant communities contributed to the rise of America and how difficult it has been for subsequent generations to capture that diversity of experience. The relationship between the dead and the living is a theme



that pervades the whole book.

This is a 'special' book. It is accessible and flows with a surprising clarity, given its subject matter. All the book's characters matter, none are stereotypes and there is no lazy writing. Although serious and philosophical, its tone is light: there is humour, there is romance and there is joy.

Capturing the contradictions of human existence in all its complexity, but written with simplicity and compassion, 'The Sorrows' are all our sorrows. There are no certainties and, in the end, no one to look after us; not even our memories are reliable and we all keep secrets - even from ourselves. ★★★★★ (Andrew Morris)

**SIRI HUSTVEDT** WILL BE SPEAKING AT TOPPINGS BOOKSHOP IN BATH ON 30 MAY. SEE BOOKS DIARY OR VISIT WWW.TOPPINGBOOKS.CO.UK FOR DETAILS

## CrimeFest

● Murder, bank jobs, car chases and hard-bitten gumshoes... If you like your literature on the wrong side of the law, then CrimeFest is for you.



With a horde of 80-plus authors and crime fiction experts in attendance, a smorgasbord of workshops, a swish black-tie gala dinner and prize ceremony, and book-filled goodie bags for all delegates, it's a crime spree we can all approve of. Guests at the Blackwells-supported baddie-books bash include Ian Rankin (pictured), Karin Fossum and Jeff Lindsay, author of the 'Dexter' thrillers currently being televised on ITV. As well as lively interviews with many of the featured guest authors, there will be panel sessions (with titles like 'The Bleeding Edge - Writing Violence' and 'Partners In Crime - You're Never Alone With A Sidekick'). CrimeFest reading groups will gather, with free copies of the titles to be discussed, and there's a writers' workshop for aspiring crime writers. The registration fee also includes entry to the Crime Writing Association's Debut Dagger Competition for unpublished authors. The gala dinner will include a glittering awards ceremony, as the winners are announced of the Last Laugh Award (for best humorous crime novel of 2007) and the Audible Sounds of Crime Award (for best crime audiobook of 2007). As if that weren't enough, all delegates get to take home a CrimeFest goodie bag stuffed with loot, including free books. It's a killer line-up, so if you can't steal a couple of tickets, maybe wait until nightfall and try breaking in...

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