

## A COIN FOR THE HANGMAN

British crime author **Minette Walters** has praised this debut novel highly.

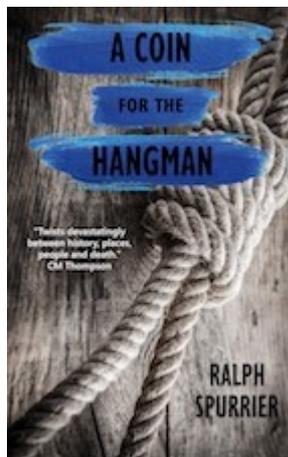
**This book has 53 4-star and 5-star reviews** at amazon **and readers** were like freaking out over this book **saying things like \*unusual, intelligent and intriguing\***.

Be honest. You would buy this novel instinctively too!

Scroll down, my lovely Bookworm, get a mid-morning cuppa and enjoy the read NOW!

## A COIN FOR THE HANGMAN

- by Ralph Spurrier and which is being published by Hookline Books, UK, exclusively and worldwide represented by #TheWittmannAgency (WORLD RIGHTS, excluding ENGLISH British / UK Rights, these are with the Proprietors)



### What's about

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**A COIN FOR THE HANGMAN:** This unusual debut novel that challenges the reader with an unreliable narrator in the guise of a young man charged with the murder of his mother, received special recognition from the **Walter Scott Prize Academy** in February 2017 **saying on their website:**

"We are delighted to reveal here a list of 20 books recommended by the Walter Scott Prize Academy.

The Academy was launched last year, to help broaden the reach of the Prize and strengthen its resources. An advisory group feeding into the submission process, it comprises people at the centre of literary life in the UK and Commonwealth countries.

For the first time, and to co-incide with the Longlist announcement, the Prize is releasing a further list of 20 books recommended by the Walter Scott Prize Academy from this year's entries.

They include newly published historical novels from Australia, Canada and Africa as well as some unmissable novels from the UK.

We'll be exploring all these books further in the weeks and months to come. Keep watching!"

## Synopsis

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When browsing through a collection of old books, a bookseller finds leather straps and a hood.

He quickly realises they are the tools of a hangman.

Also in the collection is a diary, the final words of a man sentenced to die for murder.

**Was there a miscarriage of justice?** Did the wrong man die at the noose?

**Minette Walters** gave *A Coin for the Hangman* high praise indeed:

**"A fiendishly clever plot set in the aftermath of World War II. I thoroughly enjoyed it.**

Other crime novelists followed. **"A compelling book, superbly plotted,"** said Peter Lovesey.

**"Twists devastatingly between history, places, people and death."**, said CM Thompson.

Ralph Spurrier's tale of a bookseller who finds a diary and hangman's hood in among a collection of old books is unusual in that the writer puts his own voice at the beginning of the novel.

Tales of crime and murder are not unusual.

However, tales of crime and murder where the convicted man leaves a diary to his executioner are exceptionally unusual.

**NewBooks** journal called this, **"A hidden gem"**.

While the **Historical Novel Review** said it was, **"A disturbing and poignant little novel."**

**The Crime Fiction Lovers website** wrote: "Occasionally – no, make that once in a blue moon – a book comes along that is so mesmerising and thought provoking that one fears that a review, however enthusiastic, may not do it justice.

This is one such book. **The quirks of fate, the misplaced word and the unfortunate coincidences that can shape lives, all are described with candour and a sense of compassion.**

These human twists are woven into heart-breaking descriptions of an England long since disappeared. The sense of loss that hovers over the story is almost palpable.

There are no happy endings in this tale, but **if you love the English novel and admire fine writing, then put this at the top of your reading list."**

## Unique elements of the book to stand out (USP)

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It's a curious thing for an author to make himself a character in his own book, and proves slightly unnerving to start with.

However, the fictional version of Ralph Spurrier does not detain us for too long. A book dealer, in the story he buys a job lot of assorted titles as a bungalow is cleared following the death of its owner.

Among the titles is a copy of Albert Pierrepoint's autobiography. Pierrepoint was, in fact, the most notable British hangman of the 20th century.

The fictional Pierrepoint has inscribed this copy of his story to the man whose bungalow has just been cleared, one Reginald Manley.

**A COIN FOR THE HANGMAN** is a sophisticated crime novel that invites sympathy with the convicted man as well as the executioner who ends his life.

An unusual novel that challenges the reader with an unreliable narrator in the guise of a young man charged with the murder of his mother.

Fate puts him at the centre of her death but can we, the reader, believe the words he writes or the evidence against him.

## Recommended for (Target Audience)

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Men and women, over the age of forty who love Ken Follett, William Boyd and Alex North looking for a book like Paper Moon of action/adventure or action/thriller books and movies.

## Available options

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full English manuscript available, WORLD RIGHTS (excluding NORTH AMERICAN RIGHTS and excluding TV & Film rights)

## What readers say

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### Compelling

„What a novel !!

I read quite a lot and this is an interesting story about the second World War. The interweaving stories of the Eastman's and the hangman was compelling evidence of the abuses prior to the war, during and after.

A very interesting take on a detective story and the twists and turns of the storyline and characters."

– Kim Hamilton Goodreads Reviewer (5 stars)

### I could not put this book down

"I could not put this book down, it was spellbinding, I loved it. It was very well reassessed, I follow this author, I can not see how he could out himself it leaves me wanting more.

If it were possible I would give this book many more stars!! I can. It says enough soothing about this book. "

– Sylvia Mucci, Goodreads Reviewer (5 stars)

### This novel ticked several boxes for me!

"With its glimpses of life in England and Germany, before, during and shortly after the 2nd World War, this novel ticked several boxes for me.

The portrait of Henry and his life with his mother proved to be a sensitive 'coming-of-age' story, various flashbacks to battles and the horrors seen in them, and later, in the concentration camp at Belsen and German officer prison camp were very vivid and well-written, but the 'piece-de-resistance' came at the end, with Henry's delicately written letter to Reg, his hangman.

Spurrier tells us early on that the wrong man was hanged, so the reading was like the unravelling of an onion, with full knowledge that the centre was rotten. Excellent writing here."

– Adrian, Goodreads Reviewer (4 stars)

### **What a marvellous read!**

"If I had to tell you what there was about A Coin for the Hangman that made me buy it, I couldn't. I just don't remember.

What I do know is that I'm extremely happy that I took advantage of the sale. What a marvellous read!

Ralph Spurrier tells his story from multiple points of view, and this device works perfectly. One is the voice of the bookseller in 2006 who wonders just what he's got his hands on.

Another is the voice of George Tanner, a British soldier who stayed after war's end to guard Nazi prisoners while they were put on trial. The third voice we pick up in 1953 - Reginald Manley, one of the last hangmen in England. His is a voice of such supreme self-confidence that it borders on hubris.

Finally, the fourth voice is that of the condemned man, Henry Eastman, and we learn about him from his youth at the beginning of World War II to his death in 1953. Each voice has an important part of the story to tell, but it was lonely, misunderstood Henry that I came to care for most.

I was enjoying the story so much that I wished it would slow down... or that my reading speed would. Each voice is so distinct, and each one drew me right into not only the story, but into the time period itself. Manley and Tanner both helped liberate a Nazi concentration camp-- a section that was almost visceral in its impact, but I think some of the best scenes in the book involved the effects of the war on families.

How those blackout curtains meant that family life shrank into just one room (the kitchen), and-- even more importantly-- how difficult it could be for both men and women to pick up their disrupted relationships after the war.

I didn't do very well when it came to solving the mystery in A Coin for the Hangman. If only I'd given one critical scene more thought instead of merely finding it puzzling as I raced on to the conclusion!

This is a story where the vagaries of fate, coincidence, and even a misplaced word can all have consequences. At book's end, I was left with a profound sense of loss - and the knowledge that I'd just read a remarkable book.

I'm definitely going to keep an eye peeled for more books by Ralph Spurrier."

– Cathy Cole, Goodreads Reviewer (5 stars)

### **Absolutely fascinating and utterly gripping - it has a morbid beauty**

"A Coin for the Hangman' is emotionally grim in a few places, yet the potential miscarriage of justice, albeit fictional, is absolutely fascinating and utterly gripping.

It witnesses the final curtain call for one of Britain's last executioners, Mr Reginald Manley. Holding down an ordinary occupation by day, catching the train along with everyone else, yet called upon by a higher authority to provide a 'service' to his country when the need arose.

The arrival of an unmistakable envelope to his home address signified only one thing to his wife –

duty was calling for her husband, and she couldn't help but despise him for it.

You'd be right to wonder why anyone would choose to walk this career path voluntarily. Sweeping from the past to current events, this intriguing fictional account draws from his personal experiences during WW2 and the effects this has on his future after witnessing horrors beyond any human comprehension.

As this compelling tale unravels we come to appreciate that no one truly escaped the camps. Not the prisoners, not even Reg and his fellow army buddies, all of their memories howling constantly to chip away at their very souls. Each new chapter brings fresh appeals for their traumatised character traits, leaving you to draw conflicting conclusions regarding their current behaviour.

It's tragically apparent that these effects touched others in Germany and on home turf, both physically and mentally. And yet there is a unique young man he will come to meet in his part timeline of work that will haunt him more than anything in his entire life. While not directly attributed to the war effort, Henry Eastman's acute, yet troubled and innocent mind is slowly being eroded by current events in his young life.

Henry's character is painted as immediately flawed. Book-loving, sharp-witted, and polite to a fault, he towers over his peers and doesn't make friends easily, despite being a confectioner's son. He has made some questionable decisions, but then again, so have many around him, or so we come to understand.

So, how could an inoffensive Henry Eastman find himself acquainted with Reginald Manley? Well, life has been brewing a storm, for both of them, it seems.

The plot is too precious to spoil in any further detail. Its intricate nature will have you fooled at first, it certainly did me.

Being left wondering where it was going in the first few pages, with a bookseller claiming to have come by some personal effects of someone whose estate included some well-worn books of possible interest, along with the pages from an intimate diary of the condemned man, where he calmly asserts his innocence and comes to terms with everything that preceded his demise.

His frank and personal script appears in the final chapters and what is revealed is quite something.

This diary is the catalyst for 'A Coin for the Hangman'. One small spark creates a historically disturbing, yet incredibly absorbing work of fiction. It has a morbid beauty as it is written in an entirely believable manner, which left me engrossed until the early hours to see if justice was indeed ever served."

– Wendy, Goodreads Reviewer (5 stars)

## About the author

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**Ralph Spurrier** A bookseller specialising in crime fiction becomes an author specialising in guess what? Crime fiction!

Ralph Spurrier's debut novel concerns a bookseller who buys an odd collection of books in an estate sale and finds a diary, leather straps and a hood. He quickly realises that they come from England's last executioner and he follows a mystery that goes back to WW2.

*A Coin for the Hangman* takes on elements of the author's own life - Ralph Spurrier is a bookseller who trades in old books and first editions. He owns Post Mortem Books, which specialises in crime novels.

He is well known in this world, and not just for selling books, but for pursuing signed copies and

first editions of authors such as Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, P.D. James and Ruth Rendell.

However, Ralph has always wanted to write his own crime novel, especially one that revealed something sinister about the lives of those who once owned the books he handles.



## Fresh Blood Questionnaire

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courtesy of Chris Simmons of Crime Squad at amazon (dot) co (dot) uk

### **1) You've come late to the crime fiction world, haven't you?**

Yes, as a writer I should have got my head down and been published some 40 years ago but I have been immersed in the crime fiction genre for all of those years, first in publishing and then as a specialist crime fiction bookseller, Post Mortem Books.

### **2) What was it that inspired you to write a crime novel now?**

I had been handling and selling crime fiction ever since Macmillan published their new crime list in 1970 followed by a long stint with Victor Gollancz's long-established "yellow perils". In 1979 I began buying and selling secondhand books, specialising in crime and in 1984 I became a full-time bookseller with a good mailing list of customers who began to buy new titles as they were published - if I could get them signed. Thus began the core of my business with authors signing thousands and thousands of copies over the years. Dick Francis, Ruth Rendell, P.D. James, Paul Doherty, Reg Hill, Peter Lovesey, Caroline Graham, Minette Walters, Colin Dexter and many, many, others all allowed me into their homes with box loads of new titles for them to sign. This kept me busy for nearly 30 years and it was only when I stopped selling new titles that I suddenly realised that perhaps I, too, could write a crime novel. I had a good idea and I just needed the impetus to get on and do it.

### **3) You did a Masters Degree in Creative Writing at Sussex University. Some are critical of these courses. What is your opinion?**

I'd already done an English degree at the same university as a 50 year old mature student and had thoroughly enjoyed the experience. When I saw the Masters in Creative Writing advertised

some 10 years later I knew that if I was going to write at all I was going to need some kind of carrot and stick device to actually make me get down and do it. For me, it really worked as I had to produce a 15,000 piece of work - the central part of the published novel as it turned out - and this was critically assessed by not only my tutors but also by my fellow students. The stick was the deadline and the carrot was the critical praise received after the work was completed. It worked for me as I had a definite goal in view but I saw people there who were doing the course primarily as a pastime occupation and although that particular year we all gained our degrees only two of us have gone on to be published authors.

**4) Your crime novel, 'A Coin for the Hangman' is unusual in that there is no 'reveal' of the perpetrator of the murder at the conclusion. Was this a deliberate ploy?**

I have always loved the work of Roy Vickers who, in his masterly 'Department of Dead Ends' stories, reveals the culprit in the first line as did Francis Iles in 'Malice Aforethought'. Conversely, Colin Dexter's Inspector Morse novels played cat and mouse with the reader but always whipped the cloth away in the last pages to reveal the real culprit. I wanted to combine those two ends of the genre - and then turn both on their heads so that the reader who had been first led one way and then another is abandoned at the end to try and work out for themselves just who might have done it. It was the concept of author as being unreliable - one of the more fascinating concepts that we worked on at the degree course - that captured my imagination.

**5) Is this concept of the unreliable narrator why you included yourself in the story?**

Quite. Here is an author - the fellow with his name on the outside of the book - appearing as a character in the book, within the text. Just who is telling the story? The author? Or the author as a character? He's a bookseller in real life and he's telling us about this book collection and the story behind one of those books he finds in an estate sale. What's true? Is this story real? In the afterword I explain that before the internet I could have passed the 'novel' off as a true crime story because I had used real people and real towns and events as the backdrop. It would have taken a determined researcher to uncover that all the characters - bar two - were fictitious. These days it just takes a couple of clicks to find all the information you want. Even so I still had readers who asked me if the story was actually 'true' - a perfect accolade for the unreliable narrator. Every author of fiction is a liar - it goes with the territory. I just took the additional step of showing to the reader that not only was I, the author, a liar but so was the character with my name a liar and that the author of Henry's Diary - the kernel of the book - may well be a liar too. If we are all liars just who can you trust? It's left to the reader to try and solve the puzzle at the end because the reader will be the one most likely to come up with the right answer. Or not. As we will see in the sequel.

**6) There are a number of allusions to other writers in the novel. Was this deliberate?**

Yes. The hero - if he can be called that - Henry, is a young man with a voracious appetite for books and he reads many crime novels of the period, Agatha Christie and Freeman Wills Crofts for example.

But he would also have been a reader of other, more literary, material, novels, poetry and philosophical works that were around at this time in the early 1950's.

While we know for sure that he reads crime fiction and such authors as H.G.Wells, the other authors are hidden not only within the text of the diary he keeps in the condemned cell but also in the main body of the novel.

One reader, much to my satisfaction, spotted an allusion to the opening of James Joyce's 'Ulysses' but missed the passing reference to the same author's 'Finnegan's Wake'. Thomas Traherne, John Donne, Gerald Manley Hopkins, Guy Chapman (author of 'A Passionate Prodigality', a first world war memoir), Wilfred Owen, Keith Douglas (a second world war poet) Daphne Du Maurier ('Rebecca' as a book and as a film), Dante, Bemelmans, Jacques Brel (the renowned chanteur), etc etc - they're all in there hiding, waiting to be discovered by the enquiring reader. Their words and phrases are buried in the text but provide an important insight to the mind of Henry Eastman who

is - or more accurately - becomes an 'Outsider'.

**7) People have mentioned the switching of scenes and times backwards and forwards. Is this a difficult trick to pull off?**

You have to be careful not to lose the reader in the various switches between real time and that of memory but once the device is recognised it shouldn't be a problem. I was interested in the experience of the characters in the extreme situations that some of them found themselves in during the Second World War and the effect it had on their present day personae.

I have two of my characters be part of the relieving army at Belsen and there can be little doubt that the horror of that experience had a devastating effect on their subsequent lives. When they and the rest of the combatants return home after demob there was a huge disconnect between what they had experienced away from home life and the world they came back to.

Similarly, the women left on the Home Front had experienced loneliness and stress that did not necessarily disappear when the men folk returned. Into this post war Britain I place my five main characters all struggling to come to terms with a world that has changed but their memories and war experiences are never far away from the surface.

**8) You have mentioned that there are two leitmotifs within the book. What are they?**

Wagner's Ring Cycle uses leitmotifs - musical fingerprints if you like - to highlight the appearance of characters or their involvement in the development of the story. Loge, the Fire God for example, is always represented by fast moving scales up and down as if to represent flickering flames. Other characters all have their own themes. Well, I wasn't as adept as that but I did include two motifs that run through the book as way markers for the reader through the novel.

The first is railways. The story proper begins at a Bavarian railway station and it ends on the tracks by a small Wiltshire railway halt. In between we will encounter trains both physically and in books and films ('Brief Encounter' and 'The Lady Vanishes').

The slightly detached observation of the world, facilitated through the train window is understood as analogous to the sensation of dreaming.

Second are the birds. They appear at moments of crisis and of memory recall and the eagle-eyed reader will spot them in people's names, on the side of industrial chimneys and in children's books. They are harbingers of doom and their very presence wraps the reader in suffocating wings.