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Harlot's Ghost: A Novel



Synopsis

With unprecedented scope and consummate skill, Norman Mailer unfolds a rich and riveting epic of an American spy. Harry Hubbard is the son and godson of CIA legends. His journey to learn the secrets of his society and his own past takes him through the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the “momentous catastrophe” of the Kennedy assassination. All the while, Hubbard is haunted by women who were loved by both his godfather and President Kennedy. Featuring a tapestry of unforgettable characters both real and imagined, *Harlot’s Ghost* is a panoramic achievement in the tradition of Tolstoy, Melville, and Balzac, a triumph of Mailer’s literary prowess. **Praise for *Harlot’s Ghost*** **“[Norman Mailer is] the right man to exalt the history of the CIA into something better than history.”**—Anthony Burgess, *The Washington Post Book World* **“Elegantly written and filled with almost electric tension . . . When I returned from the world of *Harlot’s Ghost* to the present I wished to be enveloped again by Mailer’s imagination.”**—Robert Wilson, *USA Today* **“Immense, fascinating, and in large part brilliant.”**—Salman Rushdie, *The Independent on Sunday* **“A towering creation . . . a fiction as real and as possible as actual history.”**—*The New York Times* **Praise for Norman Mailer** **“[Norman Mailer] loomed over American letters longer and larger than any other writer of his generation.”**—*The New York Times* **“A writer of the greatest and most reckless talent.”**—*The New Yorker* **“Mailer is indispensable, an American treasure.”**—*The Washington Post* **“A devastatingly alive and original creative mind.”**—*Life* **“Mailer is fierce, courageous, and reckless and nearly everything he writes has sections of headlong brilliance.”**—*The New York Review of Books* **“The largest mind and imagination [in modern] American literature . . . Unlike just about every American writer since Henry James, Mailer has managed to grow and become richer in wisdom with each new book.”**—*Chicago Tribune* **“Mailer is a master of his craft. His language carries you through the story like a leaf on a stream.”**—*The Cincinnati Post* From the Trade Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

only more so. The author pulls you through the mazes created by his characters who are often as much in opposition to each other as they are opposed to their organization's targets.

Metaphor and simily are used to make the descriptions of the Maine seacoast come to life! The ghosts seem almost real !

The characters draw one in, the historical details are fascinating, and the prose is well beyond just artful. But then, from Mailer artful prose is expected. It most certainly does require an investment of time, but that investment is rewarded.

I read this book when it was first released and I liked it a lot more back then, probably because I had expectations of a sequel, and the writing, storytelling and plotting are the usual high standard you expect from Mailer This time around, it seemed too long and the lack of a sequel to tie up the loose ends kind of ticked me off. I do appreciate hard work; you have to admire the amount of effort that went into writing this book. RIP, NM

I strongly concur with my fellow 3-star reviewers. Archmaker especially makes points I heartily endorse. Since others have described the plot, etc., I want to add a few points perhaps ancillary to those of other reviewers. The book, 1135 pages in the paperback edition, is going to take you a commitment of time such that you have to decide if it's worth it..especially if, like me, you're not a fast reader. Like my colleague-reviewers, I have a mixed feeling. It is a magnum opus and there are parts that are fascinating. But there are other parts that are slow and drudge...one gets the impression that Mailer's editor, in awe of the writer's huge literary eminence, was unable/unwilling to say to him at a number of points, "Norman, enough already." The book is about 500 pages too long, the character of Kittridge is not only unlikeable but writes/speaks unlike any woman I've ever known in my long life; the blather about her incomprehensible "alpha and omega" psychological theory, that runs throughout the book, is a constant annoyance. But...but...Norman Mailer is Norman Mailer and the book is at many points compelling. His author's note at the end is illuminating. SO, SHOULD YOU READ THE BOOK? I hesitantly recommend yes. If you are willing to bear the negatives I and others have cited, I'd have to say yes - you won't forget this novel. You will certainly learn an enormous amount about the CIA..bearing in mind this is Mailer's imagination and not objective history. Nonetheless he has woven, as he acknowledges, his skien upon history-at least in part.

I just can't handle Mailer. He is far too sophisticated for me. I can't keep up with him much of the time and gradually I fade, fade, awaaaay until...I didn't finish it and am not sure at the moment what it was about. Maybe I will try it another time when it is the only book in the cabin and I am trapped by a blizzard.

I really enjoyed the actual spying, espionage and CIA parts of this book. Unfortunately this could have been achieved in about 600 pages. The rest seemed to be made up of the protagonist Harry Hubbard visiting brothels and lusting after various women in his life. This seemed to be designed to put a gap between Harry Hubbard and the likes of James Bond - i.e. spies don't actually drink martinis and are not irresistible to women, however this could have been achieved in more subtle means rather than an explicit awkwardness and complicated relationship with women. Not only did it create a gap between the likes of James Bond and Harry, it also created a gap between the reader and Harry. Apart from the above criticism, the book is definitely an enjoyable read and I chewed through it in a few days. The CIA work, though not as glamorous as a genre spy novel, is far more interesting and I enjoyed the interaction with real world events. Other criticisms I have read did not bother me, for instance the lack of a clear cut resolution and the ending seemed to me to be

appropriate given the nature of spy work.

Many of the negative reviews of this book seem to be concerned with its length, that it falls short of being a spy novel and lacks a grand central theme. Well, the length can't come as a surprise to anyone before they start reading it! Don't pick up a big book and then complain that it's a big book. As for it being a spy novel, it is clear this was never going to be a spy novel in the style of John Le Carre - this is Norman Mailer after all. As for the absence of a central theme - wrong again. The book, at its heart is about deception: how we deceive ourselves (the alpha and omega theories of self in the book), our partners (there is adultery a plenty); how nations deceive each other, the government deceives its subject - and the BIG one, how God may have deceived everyone (I'll leave you to read it for that revelation). This is an amazing book, beautifully and powerfully written, populated with well defined characters and magisterially weaves fiction with the real life episodes of the late fifties and early sixties, culminating in JFK's assassination. Don't be put off with the number of pages or the negative reviews, go to the book with an open mind and enjoy.

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