

Multi Award Winning, UK Crime Novelist SARAH HILARY

Unraveling Complex Crime Narratives with Remarkable Depth

'An astonishingly
gifted writer'
- Marian Keyes

BY BEN F. ONCU

In the intricate world of crime fiction, Sarah Hilary stands as a beacon of excellence.

With a debut novel that captured the presti-

gious Theakston's Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year Award and an ever-growing series featuring DI Marnie Rome, her storytelling prowess has garnered global recognition. Her second standalone novel,

'Black Thorn,' further cemented her reputation as a master of suspense.

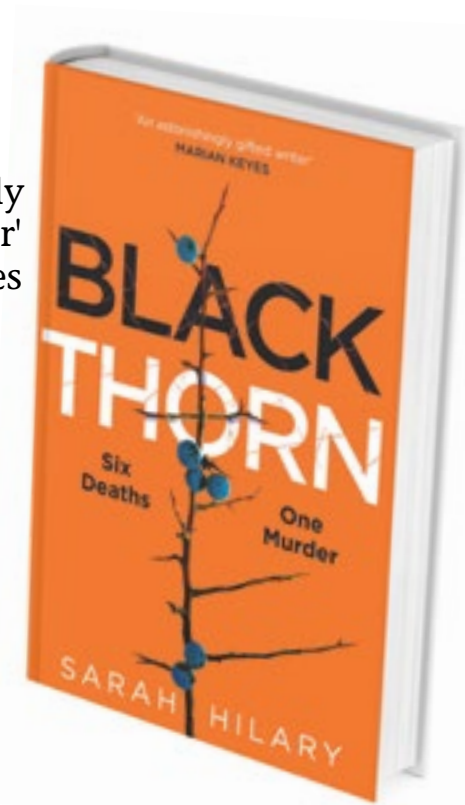
However, beyond her own literary achievements, Sarah possesses an ardent passion for the works of others. In an exclusive interview, she unveils her deepest literary affections and shares the hidden gems that have

left an indelible mark on

her soul.

Her love for the written word transcends boundaries. Whether she's discussing the emotional suspense that captivates her or revealing her fascination with characters displaying quiet courage, Sarah's insights into the intricacies of literature are both profound and captivating.

As a writer herself, Sarah defies conventional advice, finding solace and inspiration in the pages of other authors' works while penning her own narratives. She delves into her childhood reading habits, highlighting the pivotal influence of iconic authors like Charlotte Brontë and Daphne du Maurier on her writing



journey.

Notably, Sarah's interview reveals her nuanced connection with characters who fall on the autistic spectrum, a reflection of her own identity and a commitment to representation in fiction.

From her admiration for Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic detective to her aspiration

for her life story to be penned by a collaboration between Patricia Highsmith and Shirley Jackson, Sarah's reflections and desires are as intriguing as the gripping plots she crafts in her novels.

As she eagerly anticipates Megan Abbott's latest release as a post-writing indulgence, Sarah Hilary remains

gious Theakston's Old





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a writer who not only crafts gripping tales of crime and suspense but also holds a profound appreciation for the power and beauty found within the written word.

Sarah Hilary's debut novel, *Someone Else's Skin*, won the 2015

Theakston's Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year and was a World

Book Night selection. The Observer's Book of the Month ('superbly

disturbing') and a Richard and Judy Book Club bestseller, it has been published worldwide. No Other Darkness, the second in the series, was shortlisted for a Barry Award in the US. Her DI Marnie Rome series continues with *Tastes Like Fear*, *Quieter Than Killing*, *Come and Find Me*, and *Never Be Broken*. *Black Thorn* is her second standalone novel following *Fragile*.

What's your favorite book no one else has heard of?

A thriller called *Sex Crimes* by an American author, Jenefer Shute. It's an extraordinary book, about a successful professional woman in her forties, who has

what she intends to be a one-night stand with a younger man. This sparks the start of intense relationship that becomes increasingly obsessive – on his part as much as hers – and which ultimately ends in an appalling assault. The book opens with Christine in custody. She's been dubbed the Boston Fury by the media and no one, including her friends and family, can make sense of how she came to do the terrible thing for which she's standing trial. As the novel unfolds, Shute deploys her considerable skill as a storyteller to help us understand what happened and to illuminate what might happen next. I must have read and re-read *Sex Crimes* at least a dozen times, each time finding something new in it. The ending has haunted me for years. One of the most searingly truthful explorations of human frailty that I've ever read.

You're organizing a party. Which two authors, dead or alive, do you invite?

I would love Charlotte Brontë and Daphne du Maurier to come and talk about their lives and their books. The echoes of *Jane Eyre* in *Rebecca* have fascinated

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me since I was a child. Both books were a huge source of inspiration when I was writing my first standalone thriller, *Fragile*. I'd ask Charlotte and Daphne their upbringings, their love of scaring themselves and their readers, their passion for landscape and escape ... Each woman rebelled against her circumstances in different but similar ways. I'd want to talk about that. We'd eat soused mackerel from Fowey, and Yorkshire parkin. I'd try to be a good hostess and not just sit worshipping at their feet like a fangirl.

What do you read when you're working on a book? And what

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"Sarah Hilary's gripping novels, published by Macmillan, showcase the pinnacle of literary excellence, captivating readers worldwide with each thrilling narrative."



Fragile by Sarah Hilary

"Sarah Hilary's 'Fragile' is a haunting contemporary thriller filled with dark secrets and fractured lives. The story weaves a gripping narrative reminiscent of 'Rebecca' and 'The Handmaid's Tale,' showcasing the author's skill in crafting a chilling and psychologically intense tale. Hilary delivers a masterclass in modern Gothic fiction, drawing readers into a world where hidden pasts collide with uncertain futures, leaving an indelible mark on the psyche. A compelling, unsettling, and beautifully crafted standalone that reaffirms Hilary's place among top-tier psychological thriller writers."

kind of reading do you avoid while writing?

I read all the time, especially when I'm writing. Aspiring writers are often advised not to read fiction when writing but I honestly think this is the worst advice; books are what inspire us; it would be like telling a landscape artist not to go outside while working. I read fiction and non-fiction, finding that a combination of the two gives me the steer I need when I'm working on a new book. I also love short stories so will dip into those. I struggle to read poetry when I'm working, I suspect for the same reason I never listen to music when I'm writing – the rhythm of it gets in the way of the rhythms I'm trying to create in my own work.

What moves you most in a work of literature?

Always the emotional suspense. Like every crime writer, I love a puzzle but for me the real puzzles are people. I want to know what goes on inside their heads, what makes them tick. I'm moved by themes of loss and grief, and the idea of how cruelty or love can transform us in different ways. For me, true courage in a character isn't necessarily physical bravery or great feats of cunning or endurance. I'm moved by quiet courage, those small feats of determination that keep a character going against all odds. Jane Eyre is a good example of this kind of courage. One of my favourite French authors, Fred Vargas, created a hero called Jean-Baptiste Adams-

berg who is quite possibly the quietest detective in all of crime fiction and, as a result, one of my favorites.

Who is your favorite fictional hero or heroine?

I have a very complicated relationship with my favorite fictional characters, and one which changes over time. When I first read Rebecca, I was eleven and in love with Maxim de Winter. Later, I fell for Rebecca herself, and also (more oddly) for Mrs Danvers. I do love both the young hero in My Cousin Rachel, and Rachel herself. The very first time I ever fell for a fictional hero and heroine, however, was when I read These Old Shades by Georgette Heyer at the age of ten. Leonie and her 'Monseigneur' are still two of my favourite characters in all of fiction.

I'm especially fond of characters who fall on the autistic spectrum, such as Patrick Fort in Rubbernecker by Belinda Bauer. I'm autistic myself, so I'm always looking out for characters with whom I can identify; there aren't nearly enough of them. In Black Thorn I created my first openly autistic heroine, in Agnes Gale. My detective, Noah Jake, in my D.I. Marnie Rome series was also autistic but I never used that word to describe him in the books. It was important to me to use the word autistic to describe Agnes in Black Thorn, as representation in fiction really matters.

What kind of reader were you as a child?

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Find Sarah on X @Sarah_Hilary.

"Sarah Hilary's books are a symphony of suspense, weaving intricate mysteries around compelling characters. Each page is a labyrinth of secrets, exploring the darkest corners of human nature with raw emotion and depth. With a masterful blend of psychological depth and gripping narratives, her stories linger long after the final chapter ends."

Obsessive and a bit secretive ...! Books were my passion. Every summer, my mum would gift me two of her favourite novels from when she was the same age. This is how I came to read *These Old Shades* but also *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *A Dream of Sadler's Wells* (and the other Lorna Hill ballet books), the ghost stories of MR James, Edgar Allan Poe, the Sherlock Holmes short stories and many, many more. When I was a teenager, my dad introduced me to Dick Francis and Raymond Chandler. I also read comics (for girls and boys), and started writing my own books when I was about nine, including spy stories

to entertain my little sister. I quickly developed my love of reading into a love of writing, partly because I wanted to make readers feel the way I felt when I was lost in a book.

If you could meet any writer, dead or alive, who would it be? And what would you want to know?

I'd quite like to ask Arthur Conan Doyle how he felt when his publisher insisted he resurrect Sherlock Holmes after he'd taken such trouble (and delight) in killing him off. I'd ask him when he was first aware of hating this incredible character he'd created and how long it took him to come up with the plot to explain how Holmes

survived that famous tumble into the Reichenbach Falls.

Which writer would you want to write your life story?

I'd love Patricia Highsmith and Shirley Jackson to collaborate to transform my story into something befitting a crime writer. I was lucky enough to have a very safe and happy childhood but that doesn't make for a gripping life story. In the hands of Highsmith and Jackson, I'm confident that I'd come across as a striking combination of Tom Ripley and Merricat Blackwood. What more could a crime writer want ..?

What books do you find yourself returning to again

and again?

As a writer, I'm intrigued by books that seem to shift and change over time. Rebecca is one example but also *Red Dragon* and *Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris. I often re-read these to try and get a sense of how the author achieved this level of 'pull' for the reader, making me think about the characters long after the books are closed and put back on the shelf. As a reader, I'll return to favourites for reasons of comfort and nostalgia. I've recently re-read my favourite thrillers by Mary Stewart, including *Nine Coaches Waiting* and *The Ivy Tree*.

What do you plan to read next?

I've been promising myself Megan Abbott's new novel, *Beware the Woman*, as a treat for when I've finished writing my next book. Megan is one of my favourite writers, a source of real inspiration. She writes particularly well about the emotional landscapes in our hearts and minds, taking us into the darkest corners and shedding her own brand of light on what we find there ●