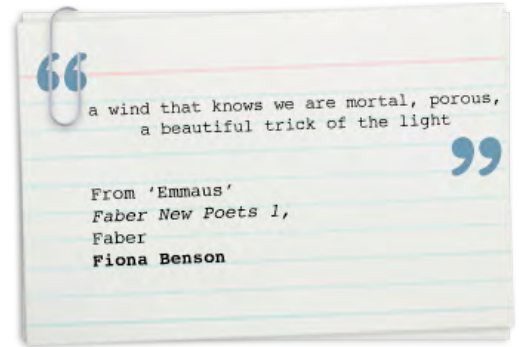




Good Morning! It's Tuesday on May 03, 2011.

Literature for everyone in the South West

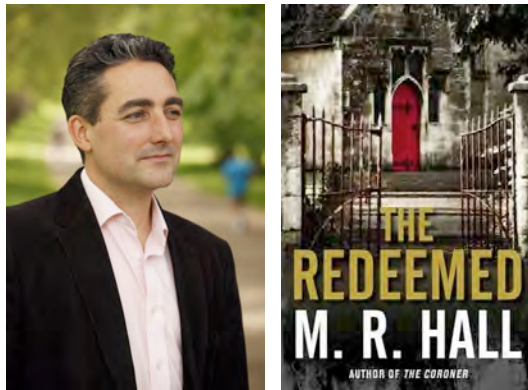


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book of the month

THE REDEEMED by M.R. HALL



The third stunning Jenny Cooper novel from the author of *The Disappeared*

The body of a dead man is discovered in an overgrown cemetery in Bristol, the sign of the cross gouged into his flesh. At first it seems to coroner Jenny Cooper that all the evidence points to a horrific, if routine, suicide.

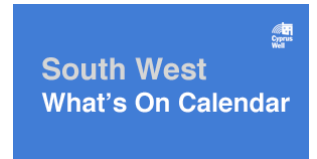
Then an enigmatic young priest, Father Lucas Starr, arrives on Jenny's doorstep, entreating her to hold an inquest into the death of Eva Donaldson, a high profile political campaigner whose past life continued to haunt her. A young man, Paul Craven, has recently been sentenced for Eva's brutal murder. But despite Craven's conviction and the evidence against him, Father Lucas is convinced of the man's innocence.

Jenny's lone quest for justice will take her to the dark heart of an establishment who wish to silence her, and on an inner journey to confront ghosts that have haunted her for a lifetime. For Jenny Cooper answers to no one but the dead . . .

About M.R. Hall

M. R. Hall is a screenwriter and producer and former criminal barrister, a profession he left due to a constitutional inability to prosecute. Educated at Hereford Cathedral School and Worcester College, Oxford, he lives in the Wye Valley in Monmouthshire with his wife, journalist Patricia Carswell, and two sons. Aside from writing, his main passion is the preservation and planting of woodland. In his spare moments, he is mostly to be found amongst trees.

www.m-r-hall.com



Book of the Month Clips

Dissolution by C.J. Sansom
[Pan Macmillan](#)



Innocent by Scott Turow
[Hachette Book Group](#)



Dark Matter by Michelle Paver
[Pan Macmillan](#)



Cyprus Well CEO, Tracey Guiry, on *The Redeemed*:

I always worry when I come across a book mid-way through a series. I think I'm going to miss out on the luxury of getting to know who the central characters are, and why they make the choices they do, but *The Redeemed* by M R Hall didn't at any time reveal it was the third in a series. I was expecting crime fiction, the cover suggests plenty of darkness with a blood red church door seen through haunted-house gates, and I definitely got that – but I also got a whole lot more.

The very real, gritty world of a coroner is shot through with dark mystery, cult religion, murder, politics and even ghostly hauntings, and yet Hall has still given care and space to a gentle yet powerful revealing of Jenny Cooper' character which meant I couldn't help but empathise with her.

In her previous outings, in *The Coroner* and *The Disappeared*, Jenny Cooper is a small-town lawyer until she is appointed Severn Vale District coroner. She doggedly digs in the dark corners of difficult cases, places that others either wouldn't dare go, or would rather not have revealed. The coroner character could have all too easily been glamorised as a powerful, hard hitting and square jawed hero, but Hall is clearly building on his own personal experiences as a former criminal barrister in keeping Jenny Cooper's feet firmly on the floor, even if her head is sometimes floating off in a thunderstorm. At all times the book feels dead right in terms of expertise, process and procedures so as a reader I could relax and learn from the professionals.

The story begins with what at first seems a fairly straightforward, if a tad grisly suicide, and Jenny Cooper is called in to rubber stamp the paperwork. But we soon find she isn't that sort of coroner – she really cares about people. So when a Priest visits her out of the blue to plea the innocence of a convicted murderer in another case, Jenny Cooper is intrigued and decides to look beneath the surface. As she encounters cult leaders, councillors, her own employers, and as the families of the dead crowd around her – she has to remind herself constantly that her overriding duty is to uncover the truth, and she has to force herself to look at each case with a fresh perspective. As the suicide, the ex-porn star, and the cult begin to intertwine, she is torn between conscience and an inner alarm bell that tells her she is going to irritate some very powerful people in the city.

For me the book was held together brilliantly by Jenny Cooper. She is a brilliantly layered character, complex, capable, fiercely intelligent and independent, yet fragile, flawed and scared. She carries a dark secret which threatens to split her apart, yet she can't bring herself to face – and this is mirrored by the unravelling of the layers of exploitation around her. She's easy to empathise with, and that close relationship causes her inner horrors to become our own. There is one terrifying episode as she is alone in the house, just going up to bed, when she hears a gentle tapping at the door. We learn that not everything with Jenny can be taken at face value and we are pitched into the turmoil of her own haunted emotions, trying to cling to what is real and what she imagines. I was genuinely afraid for her – is she actually competent to do her job? Hall cleverly interweaves Jenny's reality, an often chaotic mass of clients, dead people, ghosts, overdue filing and emails – with the personal detail of surviving the emotional roller coaster of daily life led under enormous strain and stress.

Having lived in Bristol it was a joy to have the little blooms of recognition as the characters roam the city. The plot keeps its finale well under wraps right to the end, and in keeping with Jenny Cooper's quiet insistence the end comes swiftly and without fuss, yet I wasn't disappointed – the world doesn't always go the way we want it to.

The Redeemed packs in all the very best ingredients of an intelligent mystery thriller. The



The Death of King Arthur by Peter Ackroyd
Penguin



Coroner is a compelling heroine, as compelling as any detective or pathologist I've ever come across, and they are many. This was a great, absorbing read, terrifying and intriguing. I quickly learned I knew nothing about the role of a coroner, but now, for me, stand aside gumshoe, private eye, hard-boiled detective - the Coroner is the new sexy sheriff in town. Now that I've met Coroner Jenny Cooper, I want to hear more.

Cyprus Well interviewed M.R.. Hall last year:

Could you tell us a bit about your usual writing environment and approaches? Do you have a set place where you write, do you write a set number of words a day, for example?

I moved to Monmouthshire about seven years ago from London and love the quiet. Our house on the site of an old Georgian paper mill and I use one of the stone sheds as an office. I'm always in there between eight and nine in the morning and leave no earlier than six in the evening allowing for lunch and the odd coffee break. Having begun my working life as a barrister (a seven day a week, often into the small hours job), I always felt very guilty about the stay-at-home life of a writer, so I try to at least match office hours.

How much planning do you do before you begin a novel, in terms of the plot and the connections between events earlier in the books, and the eventual untangling?

Writing thrillers, it's essential to plan meticulously. I learned the craft of storytelling as a TV screenwriter and use very similar techniques from writing novels. The first two to three months is spent researching and plotting. First I spend a few weeks perfecting an outline of the story, then I break it down into twenty five to thirty chapters, each of which has three or four scenes, or story points. That gives me the scaffolding for the book, and when write the prose I invariably feel that knowing where the story is going gives me freedom to play with the characters and the dialogue in between times.

Holding the reader's attention is my primary goal. I feel that as a writer it's your duty to put your reader's experience ahead of any desire you may have to indulge yourself!

What drew you in particular to crime fiction?

I would classify my books as legal thrillers rather than crime stories in the traditional British sense. My stories are always about a struggle to achieve justice rather than the mind of a criminal or the gory details of a murder. It's an area to which I've instinctively been drawn since I was a child - I don't know why. I studied law at university and practised as a criminal barrister for a few years, and I've drawn heavily on my experiences in my books.

Are there other crime writers you particularly admire?

Elmore Leonard is the best and has been for three decades. What amazes me about him is that his best novels, many of which have been made into terrific Hollywood films - Get Shorty, Be Cool, Jackie Brown - were all written in his 60s and 70s. He's also a master of dialogue, a much neglected area of writing in British novels, I always think. There is nothing original about Quentin Tarrantino's movie dialogue - his style was lifted straight from the pages of Leonard. While I admire PD James and Colin Dexter, they're a little bit old school for my tastes. I feel crime is a contemporary genre and it has to reflect current realities - despite his age, Leonard never slips a cog in this regard.

Do you have any tips for writers in the South West who want to see their work published?

You don't have to be an accomplished prose writer to get published, but you do need to be a good story teller. Jeffrey Archer and Dan Brown are not literary masters, they are story-telling masters and I greatly admire them for it. Read books on screen writing and story structure to understand the eternal fundamentals of dramatic structure. Robert McKee's Story is among the best. If you are uncertain about your prose style, just tell your story in as few words as you can. Forget complex language and aim for directness and simplicity. Anyone can load a sense with adjectives; very few people can convey the meaning with one or none.

We keep a close eye on the revolution that seems to be happening in the world of digital books, the Kindle, iPad, etc. What are your thoughts on this new development and where it is headed?

Some people will adopt the new technology, others won't. I see it as complementary, not as a threat. That said, nothing would persuade me to read books on a Kindle or other such

device, especially after spending a working day looking at a screen. There's no joy in it, no tactile sensation, no emotional connection with the feel, smell or folds of a particular book. An e-reader is a lonely, sterile thing - the literary equivalent of eating cardboard. What about the pleasure of handing a well-thumbed copy of a much loved book to a friend or relative to share? Gradually, I'm prepared to bet that enough people will have stories of dropping them in the bath or getting them fouled up with sand on the beach that they won't appear quite as cool as they do now.

Do you have a favourite writing exercise you'd like to share with our readers?

I've never really done writing exercises, but over a twelve year career in writing TV drama I did learn the technique of telling things in as few words as possible and reducing dialogue to the minimum necessary to convey meaning. For anyone getting tangled up in how to write prose, I would advise getting hold of some of the screenplays of your favourite movies (most are available free online) and study the economy of language. Erich Segal's Love Story was an unproduced scene play for many years, then in frustration he filled it in with a little prose and produced a 115 page book which sold over 50 million copies He had a great story and needed only a few words to tell it.

M.R. Hall live!

MR Hall and Robin Blake will be discussing the role of the coroner in their novels, in a free event this month from Bristol Libraries, Cyprus Well and Pan Macmillan.

Robin Blake is the author of acclaimed works on the artists Van Dyke and Stubbs. He has written, produced and presented extensively for radio, is widely published as a critic, and is a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at BrunelUniversity. He lives in London.

20th April, 19:00, Bristol Central Library, College Green, BS1 5TL
Book your free place from any Bristol Library

For further information please contact: Andrew Cox, Reading Manager, Bristol Libraries
0117 9222180



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Book of the Month Archive

June 2010 Derek Landy: *Skulduggery Pleasant Dark Days*
July 2010 Scott Turow: *Innocent*
August 2010: Julia Green: *Drawing With Light*
September 2010: C J Sansom: *Heartstone*
October 2010: Of Love and Hope
November 2010: Michelle Paver *Dark Matter*
December 2010 Peter Ackroyd *The Death of King Arthur*
January 2011 Andrew Taylor *The Anatomy Of Ghosts*
February 2011 Jill Mansell *To The Moon And Back*
March 2011 Aminatta Forna *The Memory of Love*

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