



Sinful Folk

Ned Hayes

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A terrible loss. A desperate journey.

A mother seeks the truth.

In December of the year 1377, five children were burned to death in a suspicious house fire. A small band of villagers traveled 200 miles across England in midwinter to demand justice for their children's deaths.

Sinful Folk is the story of this treacherous journey as seen by Mear, a former nun who has lived for a decade disguised as a mute man, raising her son quietly in this isolated village.

For years, she has concealed herself and all her secrets. But in this journey, she will find the strength to claim the promise of her past and find a new future. Mear begins her journey in terror and heartache, and ends in triumph and redemption.

Sinful Folk Details

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Author : Ned Hayes

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From Reader Review Sinful Folk for online ebook

Renee says

**Disclaimer: The author provided a free ARC of this book for review purposes.

While I expected “Sinful Folk” a story steeped in history and detailed description, to be a slow read, it sucked me in from the first page and held me until the very end. This story takes you way back to the middle ages, and the author shows enviable writing skill in keeping the pace fast-moving and engaging. The protagonist, Mear, is fascinating and Hayes skillfully plots a suspenseful and mesmerizing tale full of rich and vital characters. The mystery is laid out immediately; why did these boys die in the fire and who caused it and why is this woman pretending to be a man? Instead of solving the mystery in a linear way, Hayes takes the reader on a journey that reveals more questions with every page.

I’m impressed that he was able to believably convey what it meant for a woman to live, love, and survive during this time. Hayes successfully conveys the danger and uncertainty and burns those emotions into the reader’s heart. I definitely recommend “Sinful Folk.”

Full review to come at www.onfictionwriting.com

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Collene says

Sinful Folk takes place in the fourteenth century. It is well researched and full of suspense.

Why were five boys coming together late at night and why were they trapped in a fiery tomb and who trapped them? Their loved ones, including the intriguing character of Mear, a woman disguised as a male, demand answers and justice. So they impart on a perilous winter journey to take the burned bodies of the five boys to the king in London where truths will be revealed and justice served.

Ned Hayes is an excellent storyteller. People who like to read Sharan Newman, S.J. Parris and the Brother Cadfael series by Ellis Peters may find a new author to add to their list. I loved both the physical and spiritual journeys of Mear. I found the historical note on Edward The Black Prince and the Liturgy of the hours

extreemly helpfl

Well done. I look forward to Hayes next book.

Diane S ? says

First I would like to thank my lucky stars that I am living now and not in the middle ages. What a horribly harsh time that was, a time that is formidably related in this novel. Starvation, oftentimes a matter of fate, capricious weather, death always a minute away. I was totally sucked into the atmosphere of this novel and emotionally involved in the fate of many of these characters, most of all Mear.

The author took a short piece of historical information, noted in the beginning of the novel and then took some strange occurrences which happened upon the death of the Black Prince, and used them to fashion this very fast paced story. Such a dangerous time to be alive. I did find the ending somewhat dramatic but all in all this was a very good and entertain read, full of atmosphere and well rounded characters.

Hannah says

[burial site and burial inscription of Edward, the Black Prince. (hide spoiler)]

Erin says

Find this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot....>

Author Ned Hayes was entirely unfamiliar to me when *Sinful Folk* arrived in my mailbox and I'll be honest, I didn't really know what to expect from the book when I cracked it open. All I know for certain is that I was pretty ticked by the time I finished chapter eight.

Now before you jump down my throat, realize context is everything. I began reading *Sinful Folk* in August when I'd landed an excerpt of the novel in nationwide contest. An excerpt that only included chapters one through eight. Do you see what I'm getting at? If not, allow me to spell it out for you. I was hooked on this piece from page one and wasn't exactly thrilled at only having part of the novel at my immediate disposal.

For two months the story hovered on the edge of my imagination, but thankfully, *Sinful Folk* turned out to be worth waiting for. I actually reread the opening chapters and finished the entire novel in two days, but that's neither here nor there. What matters is that the delay and anticipation didn't outweigh my ultimate admiration for Hayes narrative.

First and foremost, I liked the tone of the piece. It's dark, heavy and desperate. Everything I'd imagine life in the fourteenth century to be. A lot of authors have a tendency to romanticize the era and I really appreciated the edginess of Hayes' prose especially when you consider the material he covers over the course of the story. There's a lot more in these pages than the jacket suggests - suspicion, anti-semitism, revenge, etc. - and here again, I think the layers and subplots bring a very authentic level of drama to the story.

Mear is also worth noting. Her situation and lifestyle allow her to be a somewhat androgynous narrator. At times she feels masculine, at others feminine and I thought it really interesting to see that voice develop as she came into her own. It's not unusual to see a character evolve, but it isn't every day that an author is so creative in illustrating that transition.

Sinful Folk is heavy reading and covers a substantial amount of historic material. There were a couple moments that I found almost overwhelming, but even so, I consider the time the time I gave this piece well spent and look forward to reading Hayes again in the future.

Ericka Seidemann says

Set in medieval England, Sinful Folk follows Mear, a nun named Miriam disguised as a mute, old man. In Mear's small village, five boys burned to death in a house fire, including Mear's son, Christian. The fire was not an accident. The door was roped shut and the murderer has not been discovered. Mear and some village men decide to make the long trek to London to demand justice for their deaths, hauling the boys' dead bodies in a cart behind them. Mear is going on the journey to discover her son's killer, whom she believes may be one of her companions.

The historical detail and quality story-telling in this book was a surprise. I would categorize it as a historical thriller, though it's not a swashbuckling, sword-fighting type of story. Sinful Folk is agonizingly suspenseful. It's a slow burn, full of unreliable stories and questionable characters. It never lagged, never meandered, and I was riveted.

Along this journey we learn Mear's backstory, why she is disguised, how she came to have a son, and why she can't reveal her identity to any of her companions, even though she trusts many them with her life. The lives of these men are harsh. The winter is brutal and meat is scarce. It's painfully cold and the men are filthy and tortured with agonizing hunger. Every character is selfish, starving, and angry in their grief. The writing was above par, and the pacing was intense. I looked forward to reading this story every time I cracked the spine, and towards the end I eschewed chores, phones, and schedules to get to the end.

I gave it 5 stars on Goodreads because I enjoyed the entire book, not just the ending, or the middle, as is so often the case. I was full of anticipation to read it as it reached its close. The author's attention to detail only enhanced the mystery of Mear's story.

Sinful Folk is a hidden gem. I don't give out 5 stars on Goodreads readily, and this book deserves the praise.

Open Books says

You should know one important thing: Ned Hayes tries, as much as possible, to create characters who have "sensibility and a voice that is realistic for the time period and their station in life". Due to this, "Sinful Folk", a story based on real events from the 14th century, is not just another historical fiction that does not actually show how people thought differently at that time compared to how we think now. For example, the heroine of the book, Mear/Miriam, rejects being a woman within a society where women don't matter, and pretends to be a man (a woman like this was not as rare then as one might think). She is a renegade, but at the same time, without question, she wholly accepts the Christian worldview, even though if she was living today, her background would mean that she would find that worldview antithetic to her heritage. (To know why – read the novel.)

In the story, a small group of parents from a distant village lose their children in a fire and set out to reach the king to demand justice. All this really happened – but the mystery of what happened exactly, and why, is

what inspired Hayes. He paints an evocative picture of this journey in the middle of the worst winter of the age. The reality of medieval England (based on solid research) described in the book is so harsh that it is difficult to bear it sometimes - and this is just a soft version, in response to reactions from the very first readers. We see how brutal and dangerous life was back then, but we also gradually discover the truth about Mear (one of distraught parents) and the crime – Hayes is the master of suspense.

This novel was written on the train that took Hayes to his work in Seattle and then back home every day. After one year he had the first draft. This commuter train is his favorite place to work on books, with “the sun rising over the misty meadows and forests outside the window”.

He found it fascinating to write about Mear, someone who Hayes is fundamentally quite different to. From time to time he asked his wife how a woman might respond in this or that circumstance and it helped him to portray events accurately. Generally, he loves having the opportunity to “visit” past places and cultures, and see the world through different eyes:

I find the whole process of getting into another time to be endlessly fascinating. I feel that my humanity – and the humanity of my readers – is deepened and enriched by experiencing a very different time and place.

"Sinful Folk" by Ned Hayes is available at OpenBooks.com, where you download and read first and then decide if and how much to pay. Price recommended by author is 3,99\$, but you can contribute more if you wish. You may also copy and share the eBook with no restrictions.

"Sinful Folk" by Ned Hayes at OpenBooks.com

BD says

All it took for me to spark my interest, was the historical note in the beginning of the book. It was hard to put this book down; I wanted to uncover the mystery behind these boys dying in a fire and why this women is pretending to be a man, hiding her identity from everyone in this medieval village. The characters in the book set out on a journey to find the truth; the path they take reveals more of the mystery with every page you turn.

It is evident that the author has a tremendous interest and knowledge in medieval history. He paints a vivid picture of this historical period and what it meant for a women to live, fight, and survive.

If you enjoy historical fiction and mysteries like "Pillars of the Earth" or "The Name of the Rose," this is the book for you.

Samantha says

I'm not sure exactly what I was expecting when I started reading Sinful Folk, but I don't think this was it. This novel is unique in many ways, and each character has deeply hidden secrets that only slowly and partially are revealed.

The author has based this story on two seemingly insignificant tidbits of historical fact.

1) In 1377, in the village of Duns, 5 boys were burned to death in a house fire. The parents decided to travel to London in order to present the boys bodies to the king and demand justice.

2) The tomb of Edward the Black Prince reads, at his request, "Ich dien Houmout." I serve is clear enough, but Houmout remains a mystery.

In this dark Canterbury Tales style novel, Hayes creates his version of the 5 boys who were killed and their parents. The historical record does not reveal if the original party reached London or if they ever discovered what had happened to the boys. A series of discoveries are made in this novelized version that will cause you to think over and over again that you know the truth, only to be proved wrong by new evidence.

The story is told from the point of view of Mear, the mother of one of the boys - except that everyone in the village believes that she is his father. We are given little detail on how this former nun managed to convince an entire village that she was a man, besides the fact that she also claimed to be mute, and therefore had no need to disguise her voice.

She is understandably obsessed with learning the truth about her son. As we learn more about Mear's past, her son's importance is even greater than anyone knows. Connections between characters are expertly created, though Mear always stays at least somewhat to herself. She trusts no one, believing that the killer is one of the men she travels with.

My main issue with this book was not understanding why some of the events would take place, beginning with why parents would load up their children's dead bodies and cart them away to London, rather than pursuing the case without this gory evidence. Other events that I will not give away also left me thinking, "but why?" Setting those feelings aside, the storytelling was expertly done and I was kept wondering until the end what the outcome would be.

Many obstacles keep the travelers from reaching their goal, but many surprising truths are eventually revealed. All on the path are sinful folk, with secrets they are hiding and lies they are telling. Even Mear herself.

Kathryn Veque says

I love it when fiction and non-fiction come together.

I was asked to read an ARC copy of this novel and review it, which I was happy to do. This isn't your ordinary Medieval novel... SINFUL FOLK is one of the most original novels I have ever read. The storyline was unlike anything I'd ever seen before and to find out it was based on real events was truly amazing. The novel is about children dying in a mysterious fire back in the Middle Ages and how the villagers seek justice for the crime. The main protagonist, Mear, is such a heart breaking and heart wrenching character. She's so relatable, seeking justice for her child and closure for the death. Her path is certainly not an easy one.

Like Ken Follett or Bernard Cornwell, author Ned Hayes takes you into the Middle Ages so vividly that it's difficult to put the story down. The novel is truly a work of artistic literature and one I highly recommend. 5 out of 5 stars.

Jenny Q says

This is the story of a woman named Miriam, who has been living as a mute man, raising her child in a remote village after fleeing a monastery and a mysterious pursuivant. We meet Mear (as she's being called by her fellow villagers) as an awful fire consumes the village weaver's home with five of the village's young boys inside, one of them Mear's own beloved son, Christian. The fire could have been the result of an accident--after all, these things happen. But the village soon discovers that someone had tied the door shut from the outside, and that the death of the next generation of young men was no accident at all. Suspicions and accusations immediately start flying, and many point their fingers toward the few Jews who still live in England, even though none of them live in their village. A handful of men decide they must seek justice, and so they set out with the bodies of their sons on an arduous journey to present their case to the king and demand satisfaction from a faceless villain.

Snuggle up by the fire when you read this book because you're going to get cold just reading about the bleak winter landscape our group has to travel in. What struck me most about this book was the stark depiction of the lives of peasants during this time period and the cruelty that such hard living brought forth in people. Our group not only faces suspicion and abuse from those they meet along the road, but also from within their own ranks as tensions flare amid freezing, starving conditions and the ravages of grief and anger. I enjoyed following Miriam on her journey, which was both physically taxing and emotionally freeing. Her pain at losing Christian, her sole reason for living these past ten years, was a palpable thing, as was her determination to finally seek out his father, and failing that, to carry out her mother's dying request. The mystery of who killed the boys was slowly teased out along with the story of how Miriam became Mear in the first place. The story reached its boiling point when the group finally made it to London, and just when it seemed all was for naught and Miriam was going to spend her final hours in misery and degradation, she managed to find the strength to wage one last fight in an effort to save herself and her fellow travelers and ultimately found the redemption she so desperately needed.

This is a dense read, and by that I mean that it's highly detailed while being very subtle at revealing clues in the mystery, so you have to pay close attention and it takes a little longer to read. This sometimes made me feel like the story was slow-going when really the content was quite action-packed. I'd pretty much figured out who the villain was before the big reveal, but really, no one was without some form of guilt, and that made the story all the more intriguing. I can't say that it's the type of book I'd probably read again--at times it's pretty intense and some parts can be difficult to read. It is unapologetically gritty and harsh, filled with pain and suffering, but Miriam--and the reader--are rewarded in the end. And it is a creative and plausible take on the real-life mystery surrounding the final will and resting place of Edward the Black Prince. Overall, this is a very well-written small press title that is worth a read for anyone who likes English historical fiction, and particularly those who would like to take a break from the nobility and spend some time in the point of view of the serfs and working class.

Moonlight Reader says

Disclosure: I won a free copy of this book from an author. It was a no-strings attached sort of a thing, and there was no agreement that I would review this book at all as a part of the giveaway. In addition, I was very excited about the release of this book because the author is someone I follow here on Booklikes, so I had

read various excerpts from the book before getting my hands on it (digital hands, really) and it looked fantastic.

I was not disappointed.

I'm going to witter on for a bit about myself, to explain what kind of a reader I am. I have read a lot of historical fiction, including the grand dame of English historical fiction, Sharon Kay Penman, and Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*. Both of these writers primarily write in a period that is quite a bit later than the period chosen by Mr. Hayes for his novel, but they - Penman in particular - are well known for the quality of their research and writing.

I am not tremendously knowledgeable about the English Middle Ages and am definitely not reading as a scholar. However, I am pretty picky about obvious errors and I am quite picky about good writing, and I love a great story. Ned Hayes is one of those authors who is the total package.

Sinful Folk was, in a word, wonderful.

Most historical fiction focuses on the nobles not the vassals. This makes sense, as it is undoubtedly much easier to research how the royalty and the powerful members of the church and the wealthy lived. The peasantry are usually there, in the book, as an aside. They serve things, they (if they are male) are the cannon fodder for the foolish wars embarked upon by the powerful, or they (if they are female) are a sexual outlet - sometimes consenting, sometimes not so much - for the men of noble blood that they might encounter. Nonetheless, they are mostly interchangeable. Unnamed, unknown, unimportant.

But, of course, in the Middle Ages, as in any other period, those are the people who do most of the living and loving and hating and dying. This book gives them a voice in Mear, or Miriam. And it is a beautiful voice, utterly convincing.

"In the end, I listen to my fear. It keeps me awake, resounding through the frantic beating in my breast. It is there in the dry terror in my throat, in the pricking of the rats' nervous feet in the darkness.

Christian has not come home all the night long."

The book begins with the death of Mear's son, Christian. He is burned to death in a terrible fire, along with four other boys. The men of the village, including Miriam, because she is living as a man, and a mute one, at that, take a pilgrimage in the dead of winter, seeking justice for their boys. The story is the story of their journey, and the life story of Miriam, who has secrets that are slowly revealed as the journey unfolds, picking up other travellers as they go. It is incredibly dangerous for peasants to be abroad on the road in winter, especially as they travel without the permission of their Lord. This is no light-hearted picaresque tale about villagers on a pleasure trip - the characters face real dangers, real hardship, and experience real terrors and injuries. It is winter, in the midst of a famine, and the world is a harsh and unforgiving place.

*In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter*

Long ago.

(Poem by Christina Rosetti)

I don't want to spoil the story, so I will stop here. Ned Hayes has a story-teller's sense of timing and mystery, and a poet's grasp of language. He could have been a bard in another time.

"Rooks have clustered on either side of the long road. It is as if they line a grand parade route for our passage. Their black feathers are stark as soon against the White Road and the snow. They stab at the ground with their strange bare bills and unfeathered faces."

Cross-posted on wordpress and Booklikes

Kelly says

We starve. First is a ripping agony of hunger in our gut, a faintness and a shadow in the eyes. Then there is emptiness entire. Now our bellies seem to float away, flat and empty as a bag. A weariness is on me, one I cannot shake. I go to sleep weary and wake up weary. Rest does not bring me strength.

We are saved. We will not starve this day.

I vow to never complain about my first-world problems again...at least not until I forget about this book and before I start my next medieval book. The protagonist was an old woman in her late 20s. I guess you'd want to be close to death (considered old) younger if you had to live that brutally hard life. Every winter they'd freeze and starve. They were free game to be attacked if on the roads. A woman could be burned as a witch at any time with very little besides an ignorant person proclaiming them to be so. Terrifying that superstition and ignorance ruled the day and not fact and intelligent discourse. Well, I should temper that...I'm sure there were people who had common sense, but it seems hysteria overruled much of the time. And that is nearly impossible to counteract. (view spoiler)

I was mesmerized by this story. Can't wait to read Ned Hayes next book. Beautifully written. (view spoiler)

Terry Fossum says

My thanks go out to Ned Hayes. My insanely busy schedule has kept me from any enjoyment reading for a number of years. His book, *Sinful Folk*, helped me rediscover the joy of reading lost for so long.

Ned transported me away from my own life's busyness and challenges to a land far away and a time I knew nothing about. His descriptive narrative made me feel as if I actually journeyed with our small group of adventurers as they sought restitution for a tragic crime committed against their own. We voyaged along the ice-covered road together, through the 14th-century wilderness. We met the challenges, and wondered jointly: Who could do such and thing, and why?

I shared the sorrow, the trials, and the eventual triumph of a mother sworn to act upon a secret long kept. I experienced a portion of life I would have never come into contact with, because Ned took me there.

This is a book you will treasure in your library, and share with those who enjoy an outstanding read, and a wondrous adventure!
