

Rachel Monroe: Beyond Macabre Fun [C1]

Con una linea investigativa incentrata sul nesso fra la psicologia femminile e il genere true crime, questa scrittrice e giornalista ci offre un'analisi profonda sulle cause che portano molti lettori, in particolare le lettrici, a una vera e propria ossessione per queste storie macabre.



Why are we magnetically **drawn** to the **goriest** details of real-life criminal activity? With its expanding presence on streaming platforms, in best-selling books and on serial podcasts, the true crime genre is reaching new heights of popularity. Many people find this worrying, and think that true crime makes **unhealthy** viewing or reading. But is the experience it offers really just one of morbid entertainment? There are some experts that argue that the reasons for true crime's success go beyond macabre fun. One psychological explanation is that watching such stories helps the viewers strategise how to act if they were to find themselves in similar circumstances. This may explain why more women are fans of the genre than men: women generally feel more **threatened** in the world, and may have more to gain by being prepared.

SAVAGE APPETITES

In her 2019 book *Savage Appetites: Four True Stories of Women, Crime and Obsession*, the American journalist Rachel Monroe explores the female relationship with the true crime genre. She focuses on obsession as an important aspect of women's experience, and shows how parasocial relationships — identification with victims, or [perpetrators](#), or both — and political theories of crime all serve [to draw](#) a female audience in. To find out more, Speak Up contacted Monroe, who also contributes to magazines such as *The Atlantic* and *The New Yorker*. We began by asking her what it is about true crime that [appeals](#) to women in particular, and if these women have anything in common. **Rachel Monroe (American accent): **True crime can be for some people all about learning about the criminal psychology and the fascination with that world. And other people, the focus is much more on the detective side of things; the mystery aspect and the crime solving, the clues and the solutions... For some people, it's much more about thinking about justice and I think that a lot of women have the experience of being not believed or not listened to or they are having their concerns [dismissed](#). And so I think in some ways that makes them [drawn](#) to this idea of a [miscarriage of justice](#) or something like that. And then there are the people who are really [compelled](#) by [empathising](#) with the victims. The one thing that I did find consistent in working on this book was that everybody that I spoke to who had a true crime podcast, or worked for a true crime TV network, or wrote true crime books: their audience is [overwhelmingly](#) female and so there really is something there but I think it's hard to give a simple answer as to what it is.

MIXED MOTIVES

We watch true crime for complex reasons, says Monroe. We may be curious about what drives people to do the unthinkable because we see our own dark side reflected in them. We may want to understand something simply because it is [abhorrent](#) to us. Or we may think that an [investment](#) in acquiring such knowledge could help us preserve a [belief](#) in justice. True crime stories may help us feel more sure of ourselves and regain a sense of order in the world; and there is also the hope that [righteousness](#) will

[prevail](#), as Monroe explains. **Rachel Monroe (American accent): **That motivation of feeling connected to the victim, feeling [empathy](#) for the victim, wanting justice for the victim, that's like a very strong [throughline](#) for a lot of people and a lot of women who have been victims themselves in some way or another, presumably not murder, but victims of other kinds of exploitation, of violence, of coercion, of manipulation... I think these stories can help us understand and relate to and [sort through](#) those experiences in our own lives. But at the same time I think that is also mixed with this sense of voyeurism, this idea of feeling almost [entitled to](#) know everything about a crime, really the most intimate details of a victim's life and a victim's death.

THE TIPPING POINT

We then asked Monroe if there may be a link between the [reported rise](#) in mental [health issues](#) and the growing demand for the true crime genre. **Rachel Monroe (American accent): **An interesting [throughline](#) in writing the book and examining these different crime stories was how often I could see these moments at which a situation that was bad, a relationship that was tense, got much worse when the economic situation got worse, or somebody lost health [insurance](#), or somebody lost a job, or somebody [got sick](#). And often that's the [tipping point](#) at which an uncomfortable or normally bad situation [tipped over](#) into really [awful](#). The crime happens and you're trying [to walk it back](#): "OK, when could the [path](#) have gone another way?" And I think again for people who have experiences in their own life of dealing with people in crisis or dealing with situations that feel like they're [spinning out of control](#), reading these stories helps you gain a perspective on your own life.

CRIME AND POLITICS

Monroe says that there is a close relationship between the political [landscape](#) and the true crime stories we are told. **Rachel Monroe (American accent): **There's a political aspect to the factors that cause crime and [crime rates](#) and [trends](#) in [crime rates](#), but then there's also, more interesting to me 'cause I'm not a criminologist, is the way that certain cases

get used and [get picked up](#) and certain crimes get amplified and get [a ton](#) of attention and other crimes get ignored or get no attention at all. We start to see the politicisation of certain of these big sensational crimes. I mean I write about that a little bit in the book, like starting in the 80s and 90s this crime panic that was [stoked](#) by the Reagan administration. And there was a big crime [spike](#) then, but the victims who got picked to be [featured](#) and the people who were invited to imagine themselves as victims, generally like middle class white people, versus who was actually being victimised by crime. And so I do think that because crime stories are so visceral, they really get us at this very deep immediate level they can be really effective political [tools](#).

Glossary

- **perpetrators**, = colpevoli, assassini
- **appeals** = attirare
- **health issues** = problemi di salute
- **awful** = orribile
- **path** = percorso
- **miscarriage of justice** = errore giudiziario
- **threatened** = minacciare
- **abhorrent** = aberrante
- **rise** = aumento
- **tipping point** = punto di non ritorno
- **stoked** = attizzare
- **unhealthy** = malsano, morboso
- **dismissed** = ignorare
- **reported** = segnalare, riportare
- **spinning out of control** = perdere il controllo
- **crime rates** = indici di criminalità
- **get picked up** = essere presi, scelti
- **goriest** = più scabrosi, truculenti
- **investment** = investimento
- **belief** = fiducia
- **prevail** = prevalere
- **throughline** = filo conduttore
- **insurance**, = assicurazione
- **compelled** = costringere
- **overwhelmingly** = con prevalenza schiacciante
- **got sick** = ammalarsi
- **tipped over** = ribaltarsi
- **to walk it back** = tornare indietro
- **trends** = tendenze
- **drawn** = sentirsi attratti
- **to draw** = richiamare
- **entitled to** = avere diritto a
- **featured** = presentare

- **righteousness** = giustizia
- **sort through** = mettere ordine
- **landscape** = paesaggio
- **a ton** = un sacco (lett. una tonnellata)
- **spike** = impennata
- **tools** = strumenti