



A Handbook on Hanging

Charles Duff, Christopher Hitchens (Introduction)

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A Handbook on Hanging is a Swiftian tribute to that unappreciated mainstay of civilization: the hangman. With barbed insouciance, Charles Duff writes not only of hanging but of electrocution, decapitations, and gassings; of innocent men executed and of executions botched; of the bloodlust of mobs and the shabby excuses of the great. This coruscating and, in contemporary America, very relevant polemic makes clear that whatever else capital punishment may be said to be--justice, vengeance, a deterrent--it is certainly killing.

A Handbook on Hanging Details

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From Reader Review A Handbook on Hanging for online ebook

Garry Evens says

A Handbook on Hanging is an amusing satire that makes its point several times over. A little satire goes a long way, and there is a lot here. I've read some of the reviews that compare Charles Duff with Stephen Colbert. I think the comparison is apt: both the author and Colbert take on the persona of conservative patriot. But Colbert's show lasts only thirty minutes--shorter if you account for commercials--whereas *Hanging* is 204 densely-worded pages. If you stretched "The Colbert Report" to three hours I would imagine getting just as bored as I did reading this book.

Maybe *bored* isn't the correct word. *Impatient*, perhaps, is a better one.

Neil Griffin says

One of the more sarcastic and cutting books I've ever read with barbs at Capital Punishment, merry England, Western Civilization, and more. Hats off to Duff for keeping this amazing, pompous voice up for the whole book and somehow having the read get more enjoyable as the handbook moves along.

I'm reminded a bit of Helen DeWitt's *Lightning Rods* in how good satire can poke holes in right-wing arguments better than passionate and sincere pleads. Holding their bullshit up to a slightly concave mirror is not only fun, but also effective in the Swiftonian sense.

Juliana Gray says

This was a surprisingly charming piece of satire-- and, thanks to the helpful chart in the back, I now know "the drop" required to break my neck in the event that I am ever hanged. What a useful book!

Richard Martin says

I found myself smiling and chuckling as I read. It is a sprightly read. There are puns galore.

Marissa says

I enjoyed the tone of this book satirizing British society and the hypocrisy of capital punishment, but it did get old about halfway through.

Jo says

A satirical look at capital punishment and British society in the early 20th century. Plus a bit of pisstaking of other cultures, politics and just life in general. Wryly amusing.

Jonathan says

This book is a real oddity, and one well worth the read. A searing polemic indicting the death penalty in England (which was primarily by hanging, but he also touches on other methods of execution), in the guise of a defense of the executioner. Duff's style makes me think of a mid-20th century British version of Stephen Colbert. The NYRB rerelease will primarily be preaching to the choir, but as the book's description states, no matter what your views on capital punishment, you cannot come away from this book without realizing that no matter what else capital punishment is, "it is certainly killing."

Jeff says

A Handbook on Hanging is a sporadically hilarious, satirical defense of hanging (and capital punishment in general). When it hits the mark, it reaches laugh-out-loud ironic perfection, skewering not only hanging, but also a wide range of modern cultural assumptions. Its best moments backhandedly criticize our common fascination with the macabre and our press's willingness to indulge this fascination.

Unfortunately, it's a flawed work. It's very disorganized, lurching from argument to argument without order, repeating and returning to the same arguments in no obvious pattern (including describing endless examples of botched hangings), and even contradicting itself. Moreover, this form of social criticism is most effective when it takes a consistent tone. A Handbook on Hanging, however, often indulges in straightforward outrage, which lessens its power as a satire.

Terry says

A classic satire on capital punishment.

Stephanie Molnar says

A bit repetitive but I enjoyed the tongue-in-cheek comments said to make the "art of the hangman" seem less beastly.
