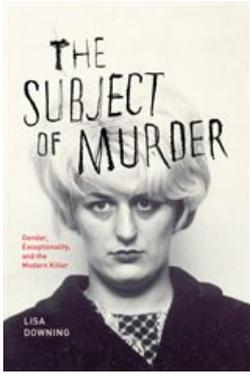


## The Subject of Murder: Gender, Exceptionality, and the Modern Killer

Posted on Friday 15th March 2013



**[Lisa Downing \(/staff/profiles/french/downing-lisa.aspx\)](/staff/profiles/french/downing-lisa.aspx)**, professor of French discourses of sexuality at the University, has published widely on history and theories of sexuality and gender to much acclaim. In the run up to its release, her latest title, *The Subject of Murder*, has also garnered much attention.

The new title examines real-life murder cases and the representations made of them from the 1830s in France, to 20th and 21st-century US and UK cases, and offers a new interpretation of the way in which our society understands the figure of 'the murderer'.

Since at least the nineteenth century, we have seen the murderer as different from the ordinary citizen - a special individual, like an artist or a genius, who exists apart from the moral majority, a sovereign self who obeys only the destructive urge, sometimes even commanding cult followings. In contemporary culture, we continue to believe that there is something different and exceptional about killers, but are murderers such a distinctive type? Are they degenerate beasts or supermen as they have been depicted on the page and the screen? Or are murderers something else entirely?

The book explores the ways in which the figure of the murderer has been made to signify a specific kind of social subject in Western modernity. Drawing on the work of Foucault in her studies of the lives and crimes of killers in Europe and the United States, Downing interrogates the meanings of media and texts produced about and by murderers. Upending the usual treatment of murderers as isolated figures or exceptional individuals, Downing argues that they are ordinary people, reflections of our society at the intersections of gender, agency, desire, and violence.

Recent reviews of the title have described the work as an 'original, superbly researched and important work', an 'intellectual tour de force' and 'the kind of book that you didn't know you needed until you read it'.

Professor Downing is an expert in interdisciplinary sexuality and gender studies, French nineteenth-century culture, literature, and medicine, modern critical theory and film philosophy, and convenes the **[MRes Sexuality and Gender Studies \(/postgraduate/courses/combined/arts-law-inter/gender-studies.aspx\)](/postgraduate/courses/combined/arts-law-inter/gender-studies.aspx)**. She is the author of five books and over 30 academic journal articles and chapters, and the editor of nine books and special journal issues. She was the recipient of a prestigious Philip Leverhulme Prize, awarded to outstanding scholars under the age of 36 who have made a substantial, internationally recognised contribution to their field of study.

Currently available for download and will shortly be released in hard copy format, more information about the title is available [here](http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/S/bo14637101.html) (<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/S/bo14637101.html>).

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