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Midnight Express tells the gut-wrenching true story of a young man's incarceration and escape from a Turkish prison. A classic story of survival and human endurance, told with humor, honesty, and heart, it became a worldwide best-seller and the Academy Award-winning blockbuster film of the same name. In 1970 Billy Hayes was an English major who left college in search of adventures to write about, like his hero Jack London. He had a rude awakening when he was arrested at the airport in Istanbul trying to board a plane while carrying four pounds of hashish, and given a life sentence. After five brutal years, relentless efforts by his family to gain his release, and endless escape plotting, Hayes finally took matters into his own hands. On a dark night, in a wailing storm he began a desperate and daring escape to freedom... This is the astounding journey, told in Billy Hayes's own words, of those five years of living hell and of the harrowing ordeal of his time on the run.

Midnight Express Details

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From Reader Review Midnight Express for online ebook

Marsha says

This book was difficult for me to read in that it portrays Turkey and the Turks in such a bad light. I lived in Turkey around the same time as Billy Hayes was imprisoned there yet found the Turks to be kind and hospitable, generous and magnanimous. Having said that I do not doubt that prison life as described by Hayes was awful and perhaps still is. The book is a quick read and not great literature.

Kristina says

Writing is not so great, but story interesting enough. What I hated was the main character, Billy. Hello, moron, if you are caught sneaking drugs into (or was it out of? I can't remember) Turkey, and you were warned not to do it, then you must suffer the consequences. I had no sympathy for Billy. He came across as the typical American asshole in a foreign country and then had the audacity to complain when he was punished for his crime. Dumb ass.

Ευα Κουτσομπά says

Το εξπρ?ς του μεσονυκτ?ου ε?ναι ?να βιβλ?ο που με συγκλ?νισε.

Με ρο?φηξε, με ?ρπαξε βαθι? στην ιστορ?α του και με κλε?δωσε στα συναισθ?ματα και στις σελ?δες του.!

Το ?τι γρ?φτηκε σε πρ?το πρ?σωπο νομ?ζω ?κανε ?λη την διαφορ?. Μια αληθιν? ιστορ?α που σου κ?βει την αναπνο? σε κ?θε σελ?δα.!

Φοβ?θηκα πολλ?ς φορ?ς, ?λλες τ?σες δε μπορο?σα να π?ρω αν?σα, ?νιωθα ?λο μου το σ?μα να τρ?μει πριν ξεσπ?σει το συνα?σθημα που τις περισσότερες φορ?ς ?ταν απογοητε?τηκα δ?κρυα π?νου.!

?ζησα β?μα β?μα ?λη την εμπειρ?α, τις καλ?ς στιγμ?ς, τον τρ?μο και το φ?βο για κ?θε ν?ο γεγον?ς του αφηγητ?.

Και κ?που εκε? καταλαβα?νεις ?τι τ?ποτα δε ε?ναι ε?κολο στην ζω?.

Κ?που εκε? καταλαβα?νεις ?τι κ?τι που ?σως θεωρηθε? μια νεανικ? τρ?λα Μπ?ρει σε λ?γα δευτερ?λεπτα να γ?νει ?νας εφι?λτης.

Δε ξ?ρω πως ?ντεξε ?νας ?νθρωπος να ζ?σει κ?ποια χρ?νια της ζω?ς του μ?σα σε τ?τοιες αντ?ξοες συνθ?κες σε μια ξ?νη χ?ρα. Π?ς κατ?φερε να επιβι?σει συναισθηματικ?. Π?ς κατ?φερε τις περισσ?τερες φορ?ς να πρυτανε?ει η λογικ? απ? την τρ?λα που ε?ναι ?να μικρ? σκαλοπ?τι η διαφορ? τους.

Εθιστικ? βιβλ?ο μα και συν?μα τρυφερ?.

Γιατ? π?ρα απ? τις ?σχημες καταστ?σεις ο πρωταγωνιστ?ς ?ζησε και μικρ?ς ?μορφες στιγμ?ς. ?μαθε να εκτιμ? κ?ποια πρ?γματα που πριν την περιπ?τεια του τα θεωρο?σε δεδομ?να.!

?κτιμησε την κ?θε μικρ? αν?σα ζω?ς και ελευθερ?ας.

Απ? την ?λλη διαβ?ζοντας προσπ?θησα να καταλ?βω το σκεπτικ? της γειτονικ?ς χ?ρας. Β?βαια οι εποχ?ς αλλ?ζουν. Σ?γουρα τα πρ?γματα ?χουν αλλ?ξει και Δε ε?ναι τ?σο ?σχημα ?σο την εποχ?

που διαδραματίζεται η ιστορία. Ήμως και πάλι δε Μπέρνις σαν άνθρωπος να μην δεις και κρύβεις κποιες καταστάσεις. Πχ: Οι ποινές για κποια αδικήματα ήταν πολύ υπερβολικές αλλά μόνο στο αναφοράς μετανάστες. Οι Τούρκοι δείχναν να ρατσισμός απέναντι σε άλλες εθνικότητες ενόστους πατριώτες τους με τα ίδιες κατηγορίες οι ποινές ήταν πιο μικρές και τα προνόμια μεγαλύτερα. Οι τελευταίες σελίδες του βιβλίου που αφηγούνται την απήδραση ήταν πολύ εθιστικές. Δε μπορώ να αφήσω το βιβλίο απ' τα χέρια μου. Η ανόσα μου κοβόταν σε κάθε πράταση. Μα στο τέλος λυτρώθηκα μαζί με τον Μπίλ και μάθα και εγώ απ' τα δικά του λάθη. Γιατ' τότε ήταν εκείνος σ'μερά είναι πολύ άλλοι!

Αλλά τελικά μάθαίνει πραγματικά κ'νεις απ' τα λάθη του ή τα προσπερνά και τα σημειώνει στο υποσείνιδεοτο του ως μια απλή περιπτεία πιστεύοντας ότι την άλλη φορά του ήρθουν καλύτερα; Η ζωά είναι δική μας και της συμπεριφερόμαστε πώς επιθυμούμε αλλά η τρέλα απ' την λογική και η ελευθερία απ' τον εγκλεισμό είναι μια μικρή φωτιά που διαρκεί όσο η φλόγα ενόσ σπирτου.!!

Sleeping with Ghosts says

Libro autobiográfico basado en la historia real de Billy Hayes, un ciudadano norteamericano que viaja a Turquía y es prisionero en condiciones inhumanas por traficar Hachís, una droga ilegal pegada en su cuerpo. Sirvió de guión para la película homónima protagonizada por Brad Davis y John Hurt. BSO a cargo de Giorgio Moroder.

40 Anniversary

Petra CigareX says

Update: This is the wrong Billy Hayes. (Thank you Kim). I stand by the sentiments of the review, and sorry Mr. Midnight Express Hayes. I have also seen mention of the right Bill Hayes in some obituaries, but not in any of the major media ones that published yesterday, when Oliver Sacks died.

We have a long way to go

The synchronicities of the world, or perhaps the bits of flotsam thrown up on the sea of Chaos can sometimes startle you with their relevance.

This book popped up as a recommendation just now. Oliver Sacks died yesterday. In his last book, his brilliant autobiography On the Move he said that Billy Hayes was his last and his greatest love.

We think we as a society have come a long way with gender equality, acceptance of homosexuality and tolerance of non-traditional relationships. But we haven't. We really really haven't. It is shameful that in the obituaries of Oliver Sacks, not one of them mentioned his partner and lover Billy Hayes. They would have if there had been a wife or girlfriend.

Bless you Billy Hayes, it's terribly hard to grieve for those dear to us, and it's kind of a slap in the face when the world won't even acknowledge your love and part in your lover's passing.

We have a long way to go.

Read 1/1/1990.

Charlie says

Will have to read this book again. Not a great piece of work for sure.

That's my take on it right now. Awkward to read.

I'll leave it at that for now. If I reread it I'll post another review.

Shovelmonkey1 says

Having lived, worked and travelled extensively in Turkey for many many years I can't believe I waited so long to read this. "Midnight express" is a commonly used phrase amongst many of us who've lived in the remote parts of Turkey. Even now it's a sort of watch word for remembering to toe the line and avoid situations which might lead to incarceration. Billy Hayes' story has infiltrated its way into popular culture.

Admittedly there are many better written books on Turkey to peruse, including Istanbul: The Imperial City, Lords of the Horizons A History of the Ottoman Empire, Inside the Seraglio: Private Lives of the Sultans in Istanbul and many others besides, but Billy Hayes story is famous and compelling because of the sheer fascinating horror afforded by life in a foreign jail. It's a weird form of voyeurism after the fact (he gets out - no this is not a spoiler). Also the production of an award winning Hollywood movie, generated from Billy's transcontinental woes and bookish rememberings also helps lodge certain events in the public cinema-going psyche.

So how horrific was it? Was he beaten? What kind of penury and squalor did he encounter? Was the punishment fitting to the crime?

Well, yes it was pretty shit. It was prison after all. If it was meant to be a treat they'd have sent him to a 5 star hotel. And young Billy was a little bit on the silly side, oh yes, silly Billy trying to get on a US bound plane with a couple of k's of hashish jammed down your trousers. Regardless of your opinions on Bill's poor decision making and how he ended up in prison in the first place, the book does make compelling reading and he gets full marks for honesty. The writing style is a bit jagged and uneven, but he's not a polished or practised writer, simply a man with a story to tell. And tell it he does.

Having seen the inside of several Turkish "police-hotels" myself, I can confirm that they are substantially less than pleasant. On one occasion having had my passport confiscated and my luggage "taken away for safety", I enjoyed a joyous 24 hours of gendarme hospitality. At one point when I asked to use the toilet I was escorted to an open-sided hole in the floor and instructed to drop trow and piss while a plain clothes officer blocked the door to the room and his mate stood and watched in what can only be described as an appraising manner. Ah good times. I won't tell you about the other things I've seen. They're better not discussed on a public forum.

I suppose the bottom line, for myself and Billy, is that if you can avoid time in the Turkish choky, then so much the better.

♥ Marlene♥ says

How weird really that I had never read this book while I love to read books about people in foreign prisons. This is the most famous one so why did I not pick it up sooner? I think because of the movie.

Vaguely I recall having watched the movie as a teenager and that I was shocked and liked it. That is what I recall) but that is why I probably did not read it. I have a tendency to not read a book once I have watched the movie because when I do that the characters of the book will look like the ones in the movie. Meaning I cannot make up my mind how people might look. Okay this is nonfiction so it is not a big deal but this is why I always try to read the book first. I like to make up in my mind how characters look and how they talk and such.

That being said apparently the movie was not true to the real story. They changed some things and added others.

(view spoiler)

Finished this book yesterday and I can say I really liked it. I liked his honesty most of all. Most men especially in that era would not have written how they made love with another man but he did and made it sound soft and beautiful.

He was young and apparently headstrong and I so felt for his parents. I have made mistakes in my life so I do not make judgement on him(like some other reviewers)

Yes he was selfish at times and very stubborn at others so I am very curious how he is now. How are his parents?

While writing this review I visited his wikipedia page and it says he wrote another book.

"Hayes has now written the sequel books, "Midnight Return (Escaping Midnight Express)" and "The Midnight Express Letters--from a Turkish Prison, 1970-1975", a collection of the original letters written home to family and friends during his imprisonment"

Not sure I want to read more. It sounds to me more like earning some more cash but I will check it out.

Anyway there is nothing about the relationship with his parents who did help him with money. I recommend this book not for the writing but the story will draw you in.

Antonella says

Expreso de medianoche nos narra la historia de William, "Billy", el mismo escritor, quién es condenado a 30 años en una prisión de Turquía.

El libro es muy rápido de leer. Es narrado desde la perspectiva del protagonista y nos cuenta cada experiencia dentro de la prisión, a un ritmo muy rápido.

Aunque ya sepas como termina la historia (lo cuenta la sinopsis), la pregunta del ¿cómo? se mantiene durante todo el libro.

Si bien yo me esperaba "más acción", por así decirle, creo que sucede todo muy rápido al final, pero eso no quiere decir que no me gustó.

Me gustó mucho que el autor en ningún momento se priva de contar las cosas y los sentimientos que le van

surgendo, incluso en un momento llegó a sorprenderme.

"En la cárcel parecía que todos permanecían a la expectativa de algo. Se esperaba que abrieran la celda y que llegara el pan por la mañana; se esperaba la comida a mediodía; se esperaba que llegara el agua, para poder ir al baño o lavarse; se esperaban las visitas; se esperaba el juicio; se esperaba la libertad..."

PD: me gustó mucho descubrir el por qué del título del libro.

Kelanth says

Ho sempre adorato il film "Fuga di Mezzanotte", è uno dei miei film preferiti, quelli che riguardo ogni tanto per rispolverare i ricordi che ne ho. Non per niente ha vinto due Oscar e tra le varie firme si può leggere Oliver Stone, insomma non stiamo parlando dell'ultimo "Vacanze di Natale".

Quest'estate ero in Svizzera, gironzolavo tra le bancarelle di Lugano e da lontano ho visto la copertina di questo libro, non sapevo neanche che prima del film ci fu il libro, potevo immaginarlo certamente, ma ci sono delle cose che dai per scontato e basta. Ammetto che ho tenuto da parte questo libro per un po' perchè avevo una paura folle che mi offuscasse uno dei miei film preferiti. Ma come ormai è regola poteva essere il libro inferiore al film? Certo che no, perchè se il film è meraviglioso, il libro è stupendo e ci sono voluti solo due giorni per leggerlo.

Siamo ai livelli di Papillon; anche questo è una storia vera: William Hayes, uno studente americano, cercò di contrabbandare hashish fuori dalla Turchia nel 1970. Condannato a quattro anni e 2 mesi prima e all'ergastolo poi, nel durissimo carcere di Sagmacilar, riuscì a scappare nel 1975 in Grecia per poi fare ritorno a casa.

Una storia incredibile, il libro trasuda di amicizia, disperazione, luridume, pazzia, torture, giovinezza, oppressione e voglia, tanta voglia di libertà, di quanto a volte diamo per scontato il sole che ci batte sulla testa, del fatto che possiamo prendere la porta di casa e cominciare a camminare senza fermarci, senza trovarci di fronte ad un muro dopo pochi passi. E' la storia di uomini imprigionati che sono costretti a sopravvivere nonostante tutte le angherie, le privazioni, le torture e il sistema legale della Turchia negli anni settanta.

Questo è un libro che ti colpisce duro e tu sei lì che ad un certo punto gridi "dai Billy, non mollare, il confine è lì, dai ancora un poco e ce la fai...". Storie di vite vissute al limite estremo della sopportazione, parole e pagine che ti entrano dentro e cominciano a sedimentare, ti danno consapevolezza, perchè sai che è vero quello che stai leggendo, quasi non ci credi, ma lo sai che è vero.

Memorabili, certi libri sono davvero così, senza ma e senza se.

<http://kelanthsblog.blogspot.com/>

Evi Routoula says

Η αληθινή ιστορία του Αμερικανού Γουίλιαμ Χίις, που πιεστηκε το 1970 στο αεροδρόμιο της Κωνσταντινούπολης κουβαλώντας δυο κιλά χασίς. Το τουρκικό δικαστήριο τον καταδίκασε σε 30 χρόνια κθειρίζη. Μετά απ' πέντε χρόνια στις φυλακές της Τουρκίας κατ'έφερε να δραπέτεψει και πέρασε απ' τον βόρο στην Ελλάδα.

Επιστρέφοντας στην πατρίδα του γράψε την περιπέτειά του. Μετά απ' λίγο καιρό γυρίστηκε και η ομνυμη ταινία με τον αδικόχαμνο Μπράντ Ντίζις.

Διαβάζεται ευχρίστα ως μια δραματική περιπέτεια.

Jim says

I'll admit that this was a surprisingly good book, in spite of the fact that I really have a dislike for the author. I had seen the movie decades ago, so I had (I thought) a good idea of what I would find in the pages of this particular piece of literature. It wasn't long before I realized that the movie had been fictionalized to the point of being a totally different story.

I can't work up any sympathy for the author, a bisexual smuggler who brought his ordeal on himself through his selfishly motivated attempt to smuggle dope out of Turkey. My sympathies were with his parents who were brought to the brink of bankruptcy through their efforts to free him.

I could rail on for hours about Billy's behaviour in prison which included assault, theft from other prisoners, dope use (slow learner) and volunteering to be a rectal ranger for at least one fellow inmate. It suffices that I don't like the guy, but his book is worth a read, if only to see how Hollywood's handling of a prison tale can unjustly demonize an entire nation.

Asails F says

It was supposedly a true story. Today I listened to Billy Hayes tell the story he always wanted. It was different than the book and far from the movie. I liked his new true story better.

This leaves me with another foul feeling about the publishing industry. I can hope goodreads brings out the truth about deplorable acts in this industry.

Billy used to hang out around Bluepoint and Sayville Long Island and drugs were everywhere. He made an easy buck and lost it all. He stated it was his life changing event and is doing everything he can to make it up to those he hurt.

Forget the book at get Billy Hayes Nat Geo presentation about his drug experience. Don't waste your time with this book...

Luis says

Siguiendo la temática leída en "Papillon", mi siguiente lectura fue la de este libro.

Cumple con su función, te cuenta una historia y no trata de ser pomposa en su intento, el gancho es

inmediato.

Basada en una historia real (con alguna que otra mentirilla piadosa), Expreso de medianoche es la crónica de Billy Hayes en una cárcel de Turquía tras su fallido intento de pasar hachís de contrabando. Y no digo mas para evitar spoilers.

La película es buena sin dudas, PERO no es 100% fiel al libro, incluso llego a perjudicar muchísimo la imagen de Turquía como país (por retratarlos como bárbaros), el mismo autor pidió perdón por el daño causado, otros solo vieron el poder que ejerce el cine sobre la opinión de las personas.

En líneas generales no tiene desperdicio. Lo recomiendo para pasar un buen rato.

Daren says

So this one of those books I am surprised I haven't read before now. Fairly well known, the plug on the cover says 'A harrowing true story in the great Papillion tradition', which it really is.

The short version of the plot - in 1970 a foolish American decides to stick 2kg of hash in his pants just before boarding his flight home. Caught, he enters the Turkish police cells, then on to prison. He attends court a couple of times, is sentenced to a short stay, which is subsequently changed to thirty years by the high court. It isn't a spoiler to say after five years he makes a successful escape to Greece, where he is deported to the USA.

The writing wasn't particularly special, but it told the story well and came across honestly. The book tells of the corruption within the prison system, the violence of the prison authorities - the beatings, the rapes (mostly of the child prisoners), the availability of drugs, and the horrific prison conditions. It also tells the stories (or part of them) of Hayes' fellow inmates, although whether these are true or not is probably up for debate. In likelihood he probably changed their details around etc.

For me it was pretty compelling reading. It has aged well (1977 it was published), and doesn't suffer from being a generation or two old. Four stars for me.

On another note, I don't recall having seen the film, but it does differ fairly significantly from the book. The movie firstly has him with a girlfriend at the time of his arrest, then embellishes the psychiatric hospital visit (in the film he bites out someone's tongue), and the film sees him killing the head guard, which didn't happen, and his eventual escape differs from the escape method outlined in the book.
