

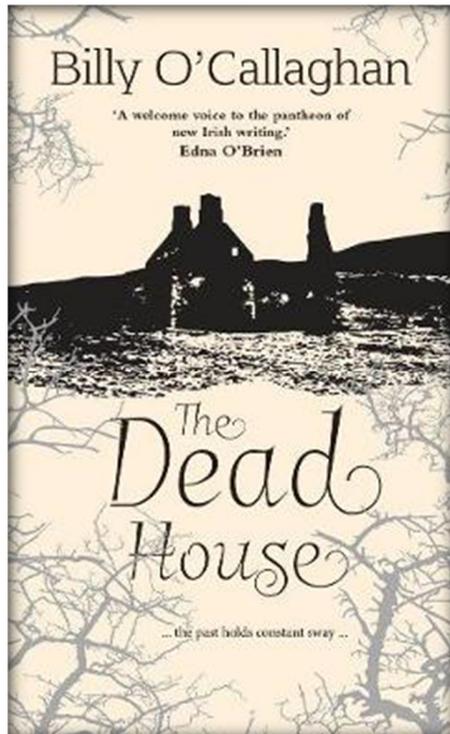


Helping you choose
your next book



LoveReading Reader reviews of **The Dead House** by Billy O'Callaghan

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.



Edel Waugh

This is probably one of the best ghost stories that I have read in years. Set in modern day Ireland and the U.K. Artist Maggie moves to Ireland to start a new life while carrying on her career of painting pictures. Maggie has a close friendship and work relationship with Michel, an art dealer and they remain close even after her move to Ireland. After a housewarming party there in this very rural part of the south coast of Ireland, nothing would ever be the same again for those that came to that small seemingly harmless house.

I had goosebumps reading this, the bleak setting, this mentally wounded woman left to her own devices far from

other people, and a deeply unsettling house with far too much history and not enough love. I recommend this who like a story of a haunted house. This will stay with you!

<http://edelwaugh.blogspot.co.uk/>

Sarah Musk

A very menacing ghost story set in a desolate cottage in Ireland. If you like to be scared, this book will scare you to death! This one of the creepiest books I have ever read. The whole story reeks of menace and evil.

A damaged woman artist buys a cottage in Ireland after a bad relationship experience. The story is set in the present day but terrible events which happened in and around the Irish cottage intrude into the present after a seance is held at a weekend moving in party. A mysterious entity comes into the house

and relates a shocking story from the Irish famine in the mid nineteenth century. Nothing is ever the same after this night.

I read the book with growing horror but could not put it down. The less is more works very well here - unexplained sightings of a girl on the beach and odd occurrences builds the tension up to an unbearable pitch.

After you have finished reading this book you will not forget it. A very well written and constructed ghost story which I would recommend anyone to read who likes to be scared to death!

Nicola Lowes

I really enjoyed this book. The tension is kept as an undercurrent which makes it all the more creepy. The ending was a surprise.

I really enjoyed this book. I wasn't sure at first because it was a bit slow to get started. I thought it was going to be one of those stories that's written with beautiful words but nothing much actually happens. I'm pleased I carried on though as it became loaded with a tense atmosphere.

It is told from Mike's point of view. He is Maggie's agent for her paintings and is a long time friend. He comes across as caring and hard working and is understated in his emotions but we can tell that they are there.

Maggie appears fey from the start and becomes more so as the story moves on. She invites three friends to join her at her newly-renovated house in a remote and deserted part of the Irish countryside. All is well until they take part in a Ouija game and an old spirit who haunts the place is awakened.

*The fear is kept as an undercurrent and is not sensationalised which makes it all the more creepy. The ending was a surprise. **I would like to read more by this author.***

Twitter @NJLowes

Sheila Dale

The big question in the book is 'do you believe in ghosts'. Whether you do or don't this book certainly makes you consider the possibility that they do exist.

This is a very good book, exceedingly readable, I couldn't put it down and read it in 2 sittings. It's very well structured with long chapters which really throw you into the story.

Quite disturbing and the ending really doesn't finish the book leaving you eager to know what happens next, hopefully there will be a sequel.

The horror builds gradually and the characters are very convincing although I did feel Alison cried an awful lot!! The big question in the book is 'do you believe in ghosts'. Whether you do or don't this book certainly makes you consider the possibility that they do exist.

Looking forward to his next book.

Cathy Petersen

Genuinely creepy in places this was a really good debut ghost story, well worth a read. For the most part I quite enjoyed this debut ghost story. It was well written and easy to get into, I liked the characters and the plot line and it has some genuinely chilling moments. The changing aspects of the landscape were really well done and you got a good feel for the isolation and impact of the seasons. The ghost story itself was a good one, creepy and unsettling, unfortunately it was interspersed with a little too much about the personal life and developing romance of the narrator which slowed the pace down and stopped any real tension building. I would have liked more on the changes to Maggie, the observations of her friends that worked so well in generating unease within the story and I think a greater emphasis on this side of the plot line would have made for a far better tale. Nevertheless it was an enjoyable book and the ending was really good. ***An author to watch I think.***

Twitter @Cerysthepup

Carrie Jones

Everything a ghost story should be; ominous, dark and truly scary. Read it with the lights on...

This novel is everything a ghost story should be; ominous, with dark shadows, chilling and filled with tension and unease.

There are not many characters, but they are very real, brought to life through our own imagination.

The descriptions and language used by Billy O'Callaghan is artistic and poetic, it is well written, with beautiful descriptions.

The scene mentioned in the blurb with the Ouiji board, did actually make me feel so uncomfortable that, if you are of a nervous disposition, I would suggest you

do not read it on your own in the house!

How does it end?... suffice to say, I still can't stop thinking about the final few pages.

And, as with all good ghost stories, our narrator poses the 'burning question: Do you believe in ghosts?' I certainly believe in this author's talent, and look forward to reading more of his work.

www.boozybookworm.com

Phyllippa Smithson

In reading this ghost story, I have lived life in the remote in west coast Ireland and come through pining for more having survived the formidably atmospheric writing style of the author.

Opening with a Prologue that had me immediately hooked, Michael (Mike) Simmons is describing the haunting aftermath of a time from his past which had the most earth shattering effect on not just him but his dearest friend, Maggie. In fact, for Mike, since first meeting Maggie, a talented student artist, she becomes more a younger sister than friend.

The thing that tied them was art – he a promoter of artistic talent and she, one of his protégés. Mike then relives that past over the following pages.

When Maggie escapes a physically and abusive relationship in London, she falls in love with Allihies and an abandoned cottage that required nearly double the amount she paid to make it liveable.

Soon after she moves in, Mike visits, along with two of her closest friends and the 3 visitors, and in just a short weekend, witness for themselves the joy Maggie has found. The mood is tainted when a Ouija board is produced but next day, but the 4 go their separate ways with nothing said.

When Mike is forced to return having heard nothing of Maggie for months, he sees a transformed individual. She is emancipated, slovenly in her appearance and gone is her passion for her art replaced by obsession.

*What has occurred to so dramatically change Maggie is at the heart of this story. **It's haunting drama is unveiled by some of the most poignantly descriptive writing I have read for an age. O'Callaghan paints in words** the spectacle of the stunning West cast landscape, the melancholy of humans stretched beyond their mental comfort zone, all against a backcloth of a rainbow of colours tinted by nature's light.*

Incredible writing.

Lorraine Blencoe

Beautifully written ghostly goings-on.

*The premise of this book is that the ghosts of an old cottage in a remote part of Ireland that is steeped in folklore, are awoken by an artist seeking escape from over-population and abusive relationships. A small group of friends stay at the cottage for the weekend and this culminates in a drink-fuelled séance. There is no doubt that this is a beautifully written novel, full of the lyricism of the Irish and it is a story that while not unique will always arouse intrigue. **But the quality of the description is also its downfall because there's just too much of it.** Passages of unrealistic dialogue and minute descriptions make the book drag past the first quarter of it. Shame. I was really looking forward to it and who doesn't enjoy reading a good ghost story.*

www.lorraineblencoe.com

Jayne Burton

Wow - what a great read. Spine chillingly good.

Fantastic book that I thoroughly enjoyed reading - even though it gave me the shivers on occasion. I really felt for Maggie all the way through, willing her to do the right thing. Loved Michael and Alison's story...

Gerri Tennant

Wonderfully crafted, it drew me in right from the start. *The way that the story of friendship and the start of a romance is handled made me feel that I wanted to keep this book for ever.*

When I received this book I fell in love with the outside of it (I don't say cover because there was no dust jacket). It is very tactile and beautifully illustrated with silvered tree branches. The contents are wonderfully crafted and it drew me in right from the start. The way that the story of friendship and the start of a romance is handled made me feel that I wanted to keep this book forever and read it again regularly. I read the whole book in two sittings wanting to know more about the unfolding horror. It touches on ancient Irish echoes and has a great way of relating the effects of the potato famine so that I now understand it a lot more than history lessons ever taught. However by the time the book had

finished I was left wanting to know more and didn't feel that the tale had an end that the beginning deserved.

Sabine Little

Beautifully written, and eerie in an understated way that keeps you reading all the way though. This is a beautifully written book, the prose is haunting, fitting well with both the topic and the geography of the work. Despite detailed descriptions of the characters, they somehow remain aloof, "other", which helps the atmosphere of this modern ghost story. The plot successfully merges the mundane with the supernatural, and O'Callaghan has a gift with words that makes the book a pleasure to read. It was a much quicker read than I expected, and, told retrospectively, made me wish that certain aspects had been explored more fully.

Emma Barton

This is an atmospheric ghost story that leaves you feeling it isn't quite over. Firstly, the book itself is a beautiful work of art that would certainly catch my eye. It is a short ghost story that is written in the first person, and follows Michael as he tells the tale of his friend Maggie, and her move to an ancient house in Ireland. It takes quite a while for anything sinister to happen in the book, as the writer builds layers of information about the characters and their lives. I enjoyed the story, but did feel restless after a while as I wanted the pace to get going. The ending is left very open, **and the author certainly expresses a keen sense of evil within the storytelling.**

Sally Doel

Maggie Turner is an artist. Following a brutal domestic-violence attack by her then partner, she decides to move away from London and buys a dilapidated old cottage in Allihies, Ireland, which she feels is completely suitable and fitting for her work and needs.

She borrows and spends quite a lot of money on the cottage, the money being borrowed off her good friend (and narrator of the story), Mike. She decides to throw a house-warming for her close friends one weekend after all the repairs have been done. However, they all are enjoying a drink and decide it would be a good idea to get the Ouija board out. This proves to be the catalyst for all sorts of strangeness. The friends all decide the following day, that it was just a

drunken 'game' gone wrong and they must have imagined it all.

They all go back to their normal lives, but her friends do become a bit worried about Maggie, when contact gradually becomes less and less. Mike decides to go and check on Maggie and finds what has developed since their night of drunken ghostly games.

I quickly got into this book and thought it was well-written and had great characters.

Fiona Rothery

'The Dead House' is one of the best new novels I have read in a long time. It is mysterious, compelling and full of beautiful and vivid description.

The story is told by Michael Simmons who acts as a representative for new and established talent in the art world. Maggie Turner is one of these artists who has become a good friend and someone that Michael feels the need to help and protect. After a violent relationship Maggie leaves city life to seek the wildness and isolation of the Irish coast and resume her painting. She settles in a very isolated and ruined cottage dating back to pre-famine times and knows she has found her perfect place. When Maggie invites Michael and two other friends to her house warming the four settle down to a relaxed and companionable weekend but the atmosphere changes when a spirit called the 'Master' is permitted to enter.

Billy O'Callaghan contrasts the conventions of city life and the art world with the rawness of the Irish countryside and the ocean. He has the ability to combine in one novel the stability and often monotony of everyday life and the world of business with the poignancy of emotions and the terror of the Supernatural. Just when you think the novel will reach a settled ending and normal life can resume he leads you to a startling and terrifying conclusion.

Angela Rhodes

Maggie Turner is a talented young artist, who having escaping from a violent partner, and her life in London, buys an ancient abandoned cottage in the wilds of Ireland, It is just what she needed she tells her friends, and once settled, has a house-warming weekend, A weekend that will leave them shaken, and some for some a feeling of dread and fear.

Drinks are flowing and laughter is ringing from the cottage, but this soon dies down, when Liz brings out a board, an Ouiha Board, " It's harmless fun" she tells them and so they play, and a spirit comes through, one who calls himself "The Master". Now the "game "isn't fun, they stop playing, put it away, going to bed, they try to forget it, and the next day it is forgotten.

Life goes on, but for Maggie, it's not that simple, Maggie, is acting a little odd, her painting has changed, she hears voices, catches glimpses of things from the corner of her eye, and is drawn towards the stone circle near her home.

A beautiful, story, that climbs slowly, enticing the reader, fooling him/her into thinking " I thought this was a Ghost Story" trust me, it is, and one that will "haunt" you for days and nights after,

*It put me in mind of Susan Hill and Jonathon Aycliffe, **haunting and beautifully written.***

Sue Packer

'The Dead House' is a beautifully written, modern ghost story set mainly in Ireland. Maggie is a talented young artist who escapes an abusive relationship in England and moves to an isolated and run down old cottage in rural Ireland where she hopes to recover physically and emotionally, and begin painting again. Things seem to start well as she starts to renovate the cottage. However when friends visit for a housewarming party, things take a dark and sinister turn when a spirit is contacted with a Ouija board. Her agent and friend Mike is among the group and the book is written from his viewpoint as we follow his fears for Maggie. He returns to Ireland from his home in London to visit Maggie some months later and is horrified to find a dramatic decline in both Maggie and the cottage. Interwoven through the story is also a tale of a horrific murder during the Irish famine and the spectre of a young woman seems connected with the spirit in the cottage.

*The author's description of both Maggie's swift descent into subjugation by the spirit and also the bleak and brooding landscape surrounding the cottage make for **a frightening but enjoyable read, and even better, an ending that chills the soul.***

Ann Quintilla

A beautifully written modern ghost story

This is one of the most beautifully written stories I have read for a long time. Billy O'Callaghan's prose paints incredible pictures, not only of the landscape of Ireland but also of emotions. It is a story about belief – or disbelief; of reason trying unable to explain the inexplicable; of memories and demons that can never be entirely hidden or forgotten.

The narrator is Michael Simmons, a fine art dealer. Maggie is a young, talented artist who is severely abused by her partner. After recovering from this attack she goes to the west coast of Ireland, finds a ruined, isolated cottage, buys it and with Michael's financial support, renovates it. When he sees the cottage Mike is uneasy about it. He feels Maggie is not ready for the isolation and there is something about it he finds disturbing but Maggie insists she is happy there. When he goes there again it is to a housewarming weekend. Also present is Alison, the woman he eventually marries and Liz, a poet. One evening Liz produces a Ouija board and that is when the trouble begins. The spirit that makes itself known to them is a victim of the Irish famine. He takes control of Maggie's life and impacts on all of them.

Billy O'Callaghan's words draw you into the story and refuse to let you go. At times it is spine-chilling and at others suffused with incredible beauty. He finds so many ways to describe the colour and mood of the sea and the sky. He is true artist with words.

Don't expect a neatly packaged ending because, in fact there isn't an ending. Life goes on but the demons continue to haunt.

This is the author's first novel and I eagerly await the next one.

Lynne Morgan

This book hooked me right from the start. The setting is the south-west coast of Ireland, on the Beara peninsular, a beautiful area with stunning landscapes and many prehistoric monuments which lend a mystical air to the location.

The book tells the story of artist Maggie Turner, who re-locates to the area to concentrate on her painting, and among the other characters, her agent Mike Simmons, who represents her work in the art world. Contrary to all her friends' advice, Maggie is drawn to the area and renovates an old house, deserted for many years after the famine times – but it soon becomes apparent that all is not as beautiful as it first seems!

Ghosts from the past are woken after a casual séance session in the house,

resulting in seemingly dire consequences for Maggie.

Billy O'Callaghan's writing holds your attention with skill and just the right amount of tension, immersing you in a journey which is full of other worldly mystery and frighteningly supernatural happenings. The descriptions of the wild landscape and equally wild weather add to this ghostly atmosphere, and the story keeps up this unnerving mood right to its chilling end.