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**The Lost City of Z**

DAVID GRANN

London: Simon &amp; Schuster UK Ltd, 2009

339p. | ISBN 978-1-84737-479-0 (trade paperback) | \$38.00 NZ

**Killers of the Flower Moon:****The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI**

DAVID GRANN

New York: Doubleday, 2017

338p. | ISBN 9780385534246 (hardcover) | \$37.99 NZ

As winter approaches you may be on the lookout for hearty non-fiction, non-professional practice reads. These you will find in David Grann's works. Coming across a recommendation for his latest work on a listserv, my interest was piqued by the fact that *Killers of the Flower Moon* covered the formation of the FBI. Being of a generation who could visit the FBI headquarters in Washington DC (discontinued after 9/11) I was especially curious to find out the link. Furthermore, as Grann has been a staff writer for over a decade at *The New Yorker* I felt I would be assured a gripping read. He did not disappoint. In fact I then immediately put in a reserve for his earlier book, *The Lost City of Z*, and read it in one day.

His first book, *The Lost City of Z*, traces the life of Percy Harrison Fawcett, a former British military officer turned explorer who disappeared in the Amazon in 1925 and the consequent attempts to find him and the elusive City of Z. Grann's vivid descriptions of the array of Amazonian creepy-crawlies and diseases and how they can invade the human body evoked the episode of *River Monsters*, when Jeremy Wade covered the candiru and made me wonder tangentially how any television crew could be prepared to venture into such lands for filming.

His latest publication, *Killers of the Flower Moon*, presents the systematic murders of members of the Osage nation, who removed from their original tribal lands became in the 1920s the richest people per capita in the world. It portrays starkly the lawlessness and racism that has helped form today's United States. The unfortunate and despicable events were the backdrop to J. Edgar Hoover moulding the Bureau of Investigation into the FBI, institutions he reigned over for nearly five decades.

In these two books, Grann delivers deftly-worded narratives so much so that one could forget they are not fiction. On both occasions he

became interested in the incidents through archival sources. Each book is meticulously researched using archival and private family collections as well as interviews. It is interesting to note that a Freedom of Information Act request was submitted to obtain some FBI records for *Killers of the Flower Moon*. The selected bibliographies run to several pages. Well-referenced, though not by footnotes that could detract from the flow, rather Grann presents a list of citations by page number, which had me delving back into the books to match a quote with its source. They also made me check *PapersPast* to see how much of these events were published in our local newspapers of the day.

A visual component complements the narratives. There are two sets of plates of period photographs and drawings in *The Lost City of Z*. They include historic illustrations, period and contemporary photographs that introduce the key figures and provide the reader with a glimpse of Amazon vegetation. *Killers of the Flower Moon* includes a map of Osage County, Oklahoma on the end papers and photographs of scenes and the key figures are scattered throughout the text. Not having intimate knowledge of Oklahoman geography, the map is very useful in situating many of the locations mentioned.

Grann has not relied on a structural formula that he rehashes. A different structure is used each time. In *The Lost City of Z* Grann's actions in investigating the story are slotted throughout the mainly chronological narrative. The reader becomes just as drawn to his next step as to the story he is recounting. In *Killers of the Flower Moon* the writing is divided into three chronicles, each contributing to the story from a different viewpoint – a key Osage nation member, the FBI and Grann himself.

I gather from both books and some of his articles from *The New Yorker* that Grann is an involved writer on all his projects. This is demonstrated by his expedition into the Amazon to experience the conditions and perhaps to find the City of Z. While Grann himself confesses an interest in reporting on obsession, something that he identifies in himself when alone and lost in the Amazon, what I find more noteworthy is that these two projects both relate to the intersection of indigenous peoples with western culture. They present events from roughly the same time period, late 1800s to 1930s, and depict the western belief systems of the time. Grann respectfully presents and considers tribal oral traditions as a legitimate source in bringing the stories to conclusion.

As for me, I will now read Grann's 2010 anthology. It also includes obsession in the title. These articles were originally published from 2000

until the publication of *The Lost City of Z*, so I believe I will see how Grann's view of it has changed over time.

*Elizabeth Charlton*