

★ Case Study

Graeme Macrae Burnet

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A psychology enthusiast dives into writings by and about his favorite psychologist in Graeme Macrae Burnet's literary novel *Case Study*.

Upon discovering that her sister had been seeing rogue psychologist Collins Braithwaite before committing suicide, a young woman, known as "Rebecca," sets out to prove that he drove her sister to despair and is, therefore, a murderer. Her efforts consist of several sessions with Braithwaite where she spins yarns based on actual experiences, delving into her deepest secrets. She records these in her notebooks, which find their way to a distant cousin, who, in turn, passes them along to an author, initials GMB, with a known interest in all things Braithwaite.

The fictional author and Burnet share the same initials, which should be a clue as to how close the book will come to breaking the fourth wall. It is a small detail, overlooked and forgotten as the recollections within the notebooks unfold. Until the narrative changes. The chapters alternate between Rebecca's notebooks and a biography of Braithwaite, following him from childhood through his dissolute adulthood. Rebecca's personal explorations of her innermost thoughts and suppressed experiences, spurred by her conversations with Braithwaite, contrast with Braithwaite's depersonalized biography. Even so, they are complementary, one offering insight into the other.

Braithwaite's biographical information is detailed, including the moment he developed an interest in psychology and his therapeutic approach. Of particular interest is his writing career, which is where Rebecca begins her research and comes to her initial conclusion. The meticulous attention to the contents of Braithwaite's books calls their actual existence into question. The matryoshka-style layering of narratives, each dependent on the other, is engaging and disorienting.

Case Study is an immersive novel that stretches its fiction to fact-like proportions.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (November / December 2022)

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