

Books by Agatha Christie



Dame Agatha
Mary Clarissa
Christie, Lady Mallowan,
DBE (1890-1976) is best known
for her 66 detective novels centered
on her protagonists, Hercule Poirot and

Jane Marple. *The Guinness Book of World Records* recognizes her as the best-selling novelist of all time with sales of some two billion copies. According to her estate, her works are third in the rankings of the world's most widely published book, behind only Shakespeare's works and the Bible. She also wrote *The Mousetrap*, a murder mystery play which has been running continuously in London since 1952, the longest running play in the world. Her novel *And Then There Were None* has sold over 100 million copies, the world's best-selling mystery ever. I was prompted to go back and re-read two of Christie's best after seeing a piece about *Murder on the Orient Express* in the book review section of a Saturday *Wall Street Journal*. Comments on these two are noted below.

MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS: A HERCULE POIROT MYSTERY (1934)

Belgian detective Hercule Poirot (who appeared in 33 of Christie's novels) is in Istanbul and receives a telegram to cancel his schedule and return to London. On the second night out, the train is stopped near Vinkovici, Croatia, Poirot hears a cry from the next compartment, and the next morning American Samuel Ratchett is found to have been murdered. Poirot is asked to investigate and begins to sift through the evidence. By piecing together the charred remains of a burned letter, Poirot learns that Ratchett was a fugitive named Lanfranco Sasseti who had escaped justice for the kidnap/murder of a 3-year old American heiress, fleeing with the ransom money. Circumstances make it clear that the murderer is one of the 12 passengers in the car occupied by the victim and the core of the book consists of Poirot's interviews with each of them along with the evaluation of evidence and the results of a thorough search, all coming together with a final group session of the 12. This is a classic Agatha Christie and, since I had forgotten how this all ends, was thoroughly rapt with Poirot's process and just how he puts it all together. The movie of *Murder on the Orient Express* was released in 1974 and the cast featured Albert Finney as

Hercule Poirot and included – get this – Lauren Bacall, Martin Balsam, Ingrid Bergman, Jacqueline Bisset, Sean Connery, Sir John Gielgud, Anthony Perkins, Vanessa Redgrave, and Michael York. I ordered the DVD and enjoyed watching it all over again.

THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD (1926)

As you can imagine, Agatha Christie and her books have received a substantial amount of recognition. In 1955, she was the first recipient of the Mystery Writers of America (MWA) Grand Master Award. In the same year, her *Witness for the Prosecution* received an Edgar Award by MWA for the best play. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was voted the best crime novel ever by 600 fellow writers of the Crime Writers Association on September 15, 2015, coinciding with her 125th birthday. *And Then There Were None* was voted the world's favorite Christie novel followed closely by *Murder on the Orient Express* and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. There are many factors that make the latter so appealing. The setting is the English village of King's Abbot, a village "rich in unmarried ladies and retired military officers," and a place where "our hobbies and recreations can be summed up in the one word, 'gossip.'" There were only two houses of any importance in King's Abbot. One was King's Paddock, left to Mrs. Ferrars by her late husband and the other, Fernly Park, owned by Roger Ackroyd, a congenial, wealthy man nearing age 50. The book is a first person account of a Hercule Poirot mystery narrated by Dr. James Sheppard, the popular village doctor serving the community. Readers will relish Christie's set-up in this story, getting acquainted with the main characters in King's Abbot, including Sheppard's sister Caroline, the gossip queen of the village, and meeting the new neighbor who has just moved in having retired from his profession, a man readers will soon learn is named Hercule Poirot. Roger Ackroyd is murdered near the end of a dinner party he was hosting at Fernly Park, and there are a handful of suspects and a number of clues to work with. Ackroyd's niece, Flora, asks Poirot to lead the investigation and the search for the killer is on. Readers will enjoy the small village setting, 1920s English class distinctions, the workings of Poirot's mind as he works closely with Dr. Sheppard to corral the murderer, and Christie's development of the web of suspects and shifting suspicions, all leading to a unique, surprise conclusion. (SHA)