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1938 Poirot novel by Agatha Christie Hercule Poirot's Christmas First UK editionAuthorAgatha ChristieCover artistNot knownCountryUnited KingdomLanguageEnglishGenreDetective fictionPublisherCollins Crime ClubPublication date19 December 1938Media typePrint (hardback & paperback)Pages256 first edition, hardbackPreceded byAppointment with Death Followed byMurder is Easy Hercule Poirot's Christmas is a work of detective fiction by British writer Agatha Christie, first published in the UK by the Collins Crime Club on 19 December 1938[1] (although the first edition is copyright dated 1939).[2] It retailed at seven shillings and sixpence (7/6).[2] It was published in US by Dodd, Mead and Company in February 1939 under the title of Murder for Christmas.[3] This edition retailed at \$2.00.[3] A paperback edition in the US by Avon books in 1947 changed the title again to A Holiday for Murder. The book features the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot and is a locked room mystery. The premise is a family reuniting for Christmas, and they find the host of the gathering murdered in a private room. Most reviews at the time of publication were positive, referring to "the brilliance of the whole conception"[4] and remarking that "never has his [Poirot's] mighty brain functioned more brilliantly".[5] Another considered this novel to be "a major Christie" and stated that "the rules were not made for Agatha Christie." [6] One reviewer analysed the novel in some detail, considering this and recent novels to have too much of a pattern in the plot and felt that Poirot was "becoming too much of a colourless expert." [1] A later review by Barnard was terse, "Magnificently clued." [7] Plot summary Multi-millionaire Simeon Lee, frail in his old age, unexpectedly invites his family to gather at his home for Christmas. The gesture is met with suspicion by the guests. Simeon is not given to warm family sentiment, and the family are not on good terms, in particular, with the black sheep of the family, Harry. Simeon also searched out his orphaned, Spanish-born granddaughter, Pilar Estravados, to live in his house. None have met their late sister Jennifer's daughter before; she proves to be delightful. Simeon is intent on playing a cruel game with his family's emotions. Stephen Farr, a surprise guest, arrives on Christmas Eve. He is the son of Simeon's former partner in the diamond mines, welcomed warmly by Simeon. Simeon calls his family together that afternoon, to hear him on the telephone with his attorney, saying he wants to update his will after Christmas. This incomplete information stirs up negative feelings among his sons and their wives. After dinner on Christmas Eve, the sounds of crashing of furniture and a hideous scream are heard by several, who rush to Simeon's room. When they get to his door, they find it locked and have to break it down. The sight revealed includes heavy furniture overturned, crockery smashed, and Simeon dead, his throat slit, in a great pool of blood, a grisly and shocking sight. The local police superintendent is already at the front door, before anyone could call the police. Superintendent Sugden notices Pilar pick up something from the floor. He insists that she give the small bit of rubber and a small object made of wood to him. Sugden explains that he is at the house by prior arrangement with the victim, who confided to him the theft of a substantial quantity of uncut diamonds from his safe. Poirot accompanies Colonel Johnson to investigate this murder. The murder generates many questions. How was the victim killed inside a locked room? Was the murder connected to the theft of the diamonds? And what is the significance of the small triangle of rubber and the peg first noticed by Pilar? Poirot's investigation explores the victim's methodical and vengeful nature and the way these characteristics come out in his sons, and observes physical traits as well. Each son, and perhaps one of the wives, appears as a suspect to the investigators. When the butler mentions his confusion about the identities of the house guests, Poirot realises that the four sons of Simeon's marriage may not be Simeon's only sons present in the home. Poirot finds the uncut diamonds mixed in with the stones of a decorative outdoor garden, which takes theft away as a motive. The family lawyer reads Simeon's will, which leaves half to son Alfred, who runs the business, and the other half to be split among his other children. This leaves Pilar with nothing, as her mother died a year earlier, and his granddaughter is not specifically named. Alfred, David and Harry agree to pool their inheritances and make a share for Pilar. This warm gesture, based on what is just, as Lydia tells her, upsets Pilar, and she refuses it. The final major clue comes from Pilar. She and Stephen are playing with balloons and one bursts; she mentions that the pieces are like what she found on the floor after Simeon Lee was killed. Poirot warns her to be "on her guard", as she knows more than she realises. Soon she is almost killed in another murder attempt, of a stone cannonball perched above her bedroom door. A cable comes from South Africa reporting that the son of Simeon's partner was dead. Stephen Farr admits his name is Stephen Grant, and he is in England to meet his father, from Simeon's last trip to South Africa, five years after his marriage in England. After that, Pilar reveals the story of the death of the real Pilar as the two crossed Spain during its civil war, and her own plan to arrive in England in her stead. With this knowledge, Sugden tries to blame the murder on Pilar. Then Poirot takes over and explains the crime. Poirot reveals that Sugden was another illegitimate child of Simeon, from an affair with a local girl. Sugden hated the man who abandoned his mother, paying her off. Sugden planned his revenge carefully and murdered his father hours before he set off the noisy sound effects. David is relieved of his years of anger toward his father for mistreating his mother. Stephen takes Pilar, now Conchita Lopez, to South Africa, to marry her. Lydia will invite them to a proper English Christmas. Alfred and Lydia plan to sell off their old house to forget about the horrible murder. Alfred offers his legitimate brother David his mother's furniture, but David politely refuses. Other brothers including David leave the house one by one (Harry, David, George). Alfred and Lydia are a little sorry to leave Lydia's miniature gardens created in stone sinks. Lydia plans another miniature garden she will make in the future. Alfred wholeheartedly thanks his wife for serving him, but Lydia says that it was her duty as a wife. The story ends with a conversation between Poirot and Colonel Johnson, Chief Constable of the county, by a wood fire. Poirot declares that he much prefers central heating. Characters Hercule Poirot, the Belgian detective Colonel Johnson, Chief Constable Superintendent Sugden, the investigating police officer Simeon Lee, an old millionaire Alfred Lee, Simeon's son, who lives with his father Lydia Lee, Alfred's wife George Lee, Simeon's son and an MP Magdalene Lee, George's wife David Lee, Simeon's son, the artist Hilda Lee, David's wife Harry Lee, Simeon's son, called the prodigal son "Pilar Estravados", Simeon's only granddaughter, really Conchita Lopez "Stephen Farr", son of Simeon's former business partner, really Stephen Grant Horbury, Simeon's valet Tressilian, the butler Walter, the footman Major themes Like Appointment with Death (1938) before it, this is a novel in which the parent/victim was a sadistic tyrant, whose nature leads directly to his/her murder. This theme arises in later Christie works, such as Crooked House (1949) and Ordeal by Innocence (1958). In some editions, the novel is headed by an epigraph from Macheth that appears repeatedly in the novel itself: "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?", a statement made by Simeon Lee's daughter-in-law, Lydia, after Simeon's corpse is found by his family. Literary significance and reception In The New York Times Book Review of 12 February 1939, Isaac Anderson concluded, "Poirot has solved some puzzling mysteries in his time, but never has his mighty brain functioned more brilliantly than in Murder for Christmas" [5] In The Observer of 18 December 1938, "Torquemada" (Edward Powys Mathers) finished his review by stating defensively, "Is Hercule Poirot's Christmas a major Christie? I think it is, and that in spite of a piece of quite irrelevant tortuosity in the matter of the bewitching Pilar Estravados, and in spite of the fact that the business of the appalling shriek will probably make no mystery for the average reader. The main thing, is, surely that Agatha Christie once more abandonedly dangles the murderer before our eyes and successfully defies us to see him. I am sure that some purists will reverse my decision on the ground that the author to get her effect, has broken what they consider to be one of the major rules of detective writing; but I hold that in a Poirot tale it should be a case of caveat lector, and that the rules were not made for Agatha Christie." [6] E R Punshon of The Guardian, in his 13 January 1939 review wrote that Poirot, "by careful and acute reasoning is able to show that a convincing case can be made out against all the members of the family till the baffled reader is ready to believe them all guilty in turn and till Poirot in one of his famous confrontation scenes indicates who is, in fact, the culprit. In this kind of detective novel, depending almost entirely for its interest on accuracy of logical deduction from recorded fact and yet with the drama played out by recognisable human beings, Mrs Christie remains supreme. One may grumble...that she depends a little too much upon coincidence and manufactured effect...but how small are such blemishes compared with the brilliance of the whole conception!" [4] Maurice Percy Ashley in the Times Literary Supplement (17 December 1938) had a complaint to make after summarising the plot: "Mrs Christie's detective stories tend to follow a pattern. First, there is always a group of suspects each of whom has something to conceal about his or her past; second, there is a generous use of coincidence in the circumstances of the crime; third, there is a concession to sentiment which does not necessarily simplify the solution. Mrs Christie makes one departure here from her recent practice, as she explains in her dedicatory foreword. The complaint had been uttered that her murders were getting too refined – anaemic, in fact. So this is 'a good violent murder with lots of blood.' But there is, on the other hand, another departure from Mrs Christie's earlier stories which must be regretted. M. Poirot in his retirement is becoming too much of a colourless expert. One feels a nostalgic longing for the days when he baited his 'good friend' and butt, Hastings, when he spoke malaprop English and astonished strangers by his intellectual arrogance." [1] Robert Barnard summarized the novel as a "Welcome interruption to the festive season as mischievous old patriarch, tyrant and sinner gets his desserts". His judgment of the novel was stated in two words: "Magnificently clued." [7] References to other works The character of Colonel Johnson previously appeared in Three Act Tragedy (1935) and he mentions that case in Part 3, section v of this novel. Publication history 1938, Collins Crime Club (London), 19 December 1938, Hardback, 256 pp 1939, Dodd Mead and Company (New York), (under the title Murder for Christmas,[3] February 1939, Hardback, 272 pp 1947, Avon Books, Paperback, Avon number 124, under the title A Holiday For Murder,[3] 255 pp 1957, Fontana Books (Imprint of HarperCollins), Paperback, 189 pp 1962, Bantam Books, Paperback, 167 pp 1967, Pan Books, Paperback, 204 pp 1972, Fontana Books, Paperback, 189 pp 1973, Greenway edition of collected works (William Collins), Hardcover, 253 pp ISBN 0-00-231309-X 1974, Greenway edition of collected works (Dodd Mead), Hardcover, 253 pp 1985, W. Clement Stone, P M A Communications, Hardback, ISBN 0-396-06963-0 1987, Ulverscroft Large-print Edition, Hardcover 2000, Berkley Books (New York), 2000, Paperback, ISBN 0-425-17741-6 2006, Poirot Facsimile Edition (Facsimile of 1938 UK First Edition), HarperCollins, 6 November 2006, Hardback, ISBN 0-00-723450-3 The book was first serialised in the US in Collier's Weekly in ten parts from 12 November 1938 (Volume 102, Number 20) to 14 January 1939 (Volume 103, Number 2) under the title Murder for Christmas with illustrations by Mario Cooper. The UK serialisation was in twenty parts in the Daily Express from Monday, 14 November to Saturday, 10 December 1938 under the title of Murder at Christmas. Most of the instalments carried an uncredited illustration. This version did not contain any chapter divisions.[8] Adaptations Chilham Castle was used as Gorston Hall. Television 1994 British adaptation The story was adapted for television in 1994 in a special episode of Agatha Christie's Poirot starring David Suchet as Hercule Poirot, first aired (in the UK) on 25 December 1994.[9] The adaptation is generally faithful to the novel, although some characters have been left out. Chief Constable Colonel Johnson, who features in the novel, is replaced in the television adaptation by regular Poirot character Chief Inspector Japp. Stephen Farr is also missing, and his romantic interests in Pilar are given to Harry. Sugden in this adaptation comes from South Africa. Hilda and David Lee do not appear in the adaptation. The exterior scenes were filmed in Chilham, Kent and Chilham Castle was used as Gorston Hall. A small backstory is given explaining Poirot's reluctance to go, due to the fact that he stays at home at Christmas and prefers central heating. But his radiator has given out and the attendants at Whitehaven Mansions won't repair it until after Christmas. Before he leaves, he asked Simeon Lee if they have central heating.[10] Cast: David Suchet as Hercule Poirot Philip Jackson as Chief Inspector Japp Mark Tandy as Superintendent Sugden Vernon Dobtcheff as Simeon Lee Simon Roberts as Alfred Lee Catherine Rabett as Lydia Lee Eric Carte as George Lee Andrée Bernard as Magdalene Lee Brian Gwaspari as Harry Lee Sasha Behar as Pilar Estravados Olga Lowe as Stella Ayub Khan-Din as Horbury John Horsley as Tressilian Scott Handy as Young Simeon Liese Benjamin as Young Stella 2006 French adaptation The story was also adapted for the French television in a four-parts series entitled *Petits Meurtres en famille* [fr], broadcast by France 2 in 2006 and 2009, with the notable replacement of Poirot by a duet of newly created characters, both of whom have nothing to do with Poirot. On top of that, none of the characters match their names from those that are in the novel. The plot is only vaguely adapted, with great expansion to the novel and change to its characters. Nevertheless, Mathew Prichard himself, grandson of Agatha Christie, was quoted by Télérama as calling it the best TV adaptation he had seen. 2018 French adaptation The novel was adapted as a 2018 episode of the French television series *Les Petits Meurtres d'Agatha Christie*. In this version there is no Christmas theme. Radio Hercule Poirot's Christmas was adapted for radio by BBC Radio 4, featuring Peter Sallis as Poirot. This was the second adaptation of a Poirot story for radio, aired 24 December 1986.[11] References ^ a b c Ashley, Maurice Percy (17 December 1938). "Review". The Times Literary Supplement. p. 805. ^ a b Peers, Chris; Spurrier, Ralph; Sturgeon, Jamie (1999). Collins Crime Club: a checklist of the first editions (2nd ed.). 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