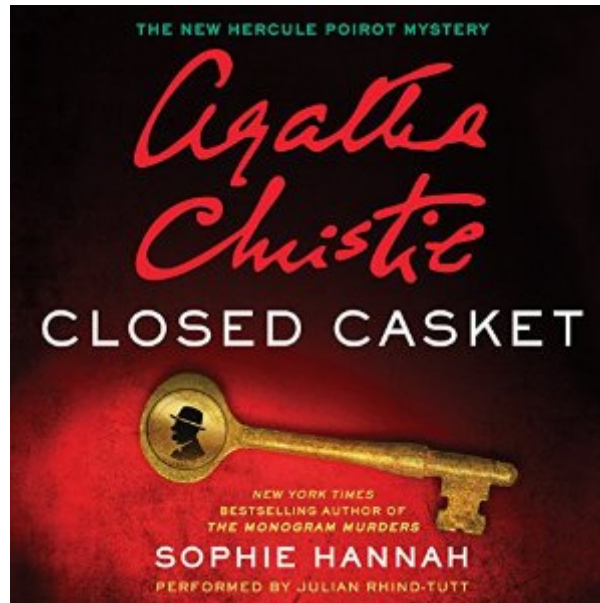


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Closed Casket: The New Hercule Poirot Mystery



Synopsis

Internationally best-selling author Sophie Hannah and the world's favorite detective, Hercule Poirot, return in this follow-up to *The Monogram Murders*, the national best seller hailed by *The Washington Post* as "literary magic".

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

At one point in the inevitable denouement, when Agatha Christie's sleuth (being channeled here, postmortem, by Sophie Hannah) Hercule Poirot has assembled all of the suspects in the murder in the drawing room to listen to the final product of the functioning of his famous "little grey cells", he refers to the murder itself being neat and tidy -- and almost simple. That made me stop and think about what frustrated me about this somewhat unsatisfactory homage to both Christie and Poirot: the original books are crisp, to the point and deceptively simple, as the police and Poirot go about their sleuthing. In contrast, this novel rambles far too much and, horror of horrors, instead of Poirot uncovering things or forcing suspects into corners, he has people sitting down to tell him and his sidekick/narrator, Scotland Yard detective Edward Catchpool, long stories about their pasts that prove critical to unraveling the crime. That kind of exposition isn't true to Christie's style, and it's not convincing to this type of mystery either. (It also succeeds in causing the pace to become still more dragging...) On the surface, there's enough here to appeal to a Christie fan. It's a classic country house crime. An elderly writer of mysteries aimed at the younger set ("*Shrimp Seddon and the Lady in the Suit*") decides to rewrite her will, and to mark the occasion, has convened a rather odd

gathering. In addition to her son, daughter, daughter-in-law and the latter's fiancé, a noted and wealthy pathologist, she has invited Poirot and Catchpool to join the crowd, together with her two lawyers, and her new beneficiary. The latter is a surprise: it's her private secretary.

This novel is the second new Poirot story written by Sophie Hannah. I haven't read Hannah's other works, but I have read *The Monogram Murders*, the first novel she wrote with Poirot. I don't know if it's a feature of her work in general, but those two novels share many inelegant commonalities: the plot device of inauthentic, contrived conversations that are conveniently overheard and misunderstood; chapters that ramble on about some event in the past that somehow set up the current situation; and epicycles upon epicycles of complications that contribute nothing beyond padding out the book length and artificially obscuring the mystery's solution. The writing in the book is fine: unremarkable, but not terribly distracting. Christie's dialogue was workmanlike but had a parsimonious efficiency to it. Here, characters just ramble on uninterestingly. The writing outside dialogue isn't much better. Catchpool is apparently psychic. When he's in conversations, we're told that his interlocutors speak as if they're concealing a secret, or that they're boiling with rage, or have some other emotion or concern. Yet there's nothing in the conversation itself to indicate that fact, and the reader isn't given any physical description or actions to corroborate it. We're just flat-out told, rather than shown, what people think. That's poor writing in general, but it's damning in a mystery novel. The reader should be drawing his own conclusions about the characters; instead, we're dependent on Catchpool not just for the facts of the case but also their interpretation. The mystery itself has some compelling points.

I read this book in a single day, I found parts that interested me, but I had to push my way through it; I felt it was overlong. What held my interest was a question: why would a very rich woman disown her two children and give her fortune to a man who she was told will die within a couple of months? When I finished the book and heard Poirot's explanation, what he called a simple solution, I found the rationale unbelievable, even absurd, certainly not simple. Poirot and his police friend are invited to the home of a very rich woman, but are not told why they are invited, and we do not find out until the end of the tale. Among other guests are the woman's son and his wife who are poor, her daughter and her daughter's rich fiancé, the rich woman's secretary who has a kidney disease and is to die within a couple of months, the sick man's nurse who seems to love him, a butler who suffered some kind of trauma and is generally unable to speak, a simple-minded maid who also loves the sick man, and a cook who improves the tale from time to time, as do the rich

woman's daughter and her fiancée as well as the son's wife, with nasty remarks. There is a murder, but it is questionable who was the murderer and how the person was killed. The rich woman's daughter said she saw the murder, but is she telling the truth and, if not, why? She seems to be telling the truth, but what she states is impossible. This is the second book in this series. The former, "Monogram Murders," received mixed reviews: about 20 percent of over 600 reviewers joined in giving 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 stars each.

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