



Agatha Webb

Anna Katharine Green

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In this elegant drama, Anna Katharine Green, one of the greatest mystery writers of all time, weaves a narrative with her usual consummate skill, and portrays her characters with exceptional sympathy. On the New England seacoast, not far from Boston, lies a staid, picturesque village called Sutherlandtown. In these tranquil surroundings, Agatha Webb and her servant are found murdered. The task of unraveling the mystery begins at once, and suspicion points to a number of persons. Agatha herself had a tragic and troubled past. She suffered the loss of six of her children who died in infancy; some of the people of the village suspected her of complicity in these deaths, while others looked upon her as a victim. Adding to the complexity of the situation, a wealthy local man is being blackmailed by someone who believes that he is guilty of Agatha's murder. The solution of the puzzle is uncovered in an intensely dramatic court scene. In addition to the attraction of the mystery, there is a great love story. One of the detectives in the case, Caleb Sweetwater, was first introduced in a minor role in *A Strange Disappearance* (1880). Here, the details of his interesting life story are revealed, considerably fleshing out and developing his character. We learn that he was raised in Sutherland-town, maturing into a talented violinist, but constrained to supporting his mother with limited means. He relinquishes his musical career in order to become a detective. In this role he stands out as a trustworthy and conscientious young man, who volunteers his services to a patron in return for past consideration. Sweetwater becomes the hero by ultimately solving the crime in *Agatha Webb*. He appears again in several other Green novels as Gryce's assistant in the New York Police Department.

Agatha Webb Details

Date : Published September 1st 2005 by Anza Publishing (first published 1899)

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From Reader Review Agatha Webb for online ebook

Cindy says

Not author's best but still worthwhile reading. Really enjoyed the narration.

Lori Killion says

I wouldn't call this a feminist story at all. Miss Page rudely butts into the investigation in the beginning then becomes a bitch who thinks she has the upper hand by using blackmail against Mr. Frederick. The story also goes into various forms of love & how strong love can be but isn't mushy by any means. Give this a try.

Pat says

Utterly preposterous. I enjoyed it quite a lot, because I do enjoy a really preposterous piece of melodrama.

It seemed, though, that Green put cards with a lot of plot elements into a bag and pulled them randomly. Let's see: a murder; an amateur sleuth; an evil young woman; secrets; the mysterious deaths of two men; more secrets; a young man with reason to commit murder; even more secrets... And then--oh, yes--let's add the amateur sleuth finding that he can't solve the crime without betraying someone who saved his life as a child, so he-- Okay, it just got completely ridiculous here. Coincidence piles onto coincidence, until we get absurdity piled onto absurdity. I couldn't tell if Green had written herself into a corner and couldn't figure out any other way to end up with a happily ever after; or if she thought this rickety stack of unbelievabilities actually holds up.

Mixed with the usual crowd of stock characters--the profligate son, the noble father, the saintly woman--are some interesting characters. Amabel is wonderfully manipulative. (Though, what happens to her at the end? She just vanishes.) Caleb Sweetwater isn't a bad amateur sleuth: he notices things and thinks everything through. Until, that is, he melodramatically decides he can't go on with his investigation, and he goes off and-- (Oh, you just have to read this part; the word "coincidence" doesn't do it justice.)

The title is interesting, given that Agatha is dead before the book even starts. But it really is her book. (Though: Agatha, Agnes, and Amabel--couldn't Green have come up with more distinctive names? I mixed up Agnes and Agatha for much of the book.) She even gives testimony at the inquest into her death, via her letters. (Though they are entirely too long.)

The twist of who's related to whom is absurd, but if you've gotten that far, you've had so many ridiculous situations thrown at you that you just roll with it. (Really?!? A sailor who speaks the language happens to pass the murder house at the exact moment a Scandinavian maid screams out an important plot point before dramatically flopping dead across a windowsill? And he doesn't wonder if he should maybe try to help? He just walks on by with his buds?)

Still, fun read.

(I read the manybooks copy, which has this cover and a number of typos.)

Maren says

American mystery writer Anna Katherine Green, deserves to be rediscovered but this was not her strongest work. It is better to start with The Leavenworth Case or The Golden Slipper and other Problems for Violet Strange. Still her given her early contributions to detective fiction and memorable characters it is strange that she is so overlooked.

France-Andrée says

I didn't like the structure of this. The story is simple enough and the twists are lame in my opinion, just not believable. Sweetwater the detective here just chases his tail in circle, at no moment did he know the big "reveal" and he was just bumbling through his investigation of Agatha Webb's murder. No character in this book is original and they probably weren't original at the time either. It was my first book by this author and I'm disappointed because I had read so many good things about her, I probably will try here again, but not in this series.

Julia says

Highly enjoyable old-fashioned melodramatic murder-mystery. Written in the 1890s, this story is chock full of twists and turns, secrets and lies, love and honor, and compelling characters acting for good or ill. No one seems to have all the threads of this tangled web in hand, until the cleverness of a talented amateur detective gets a helping hand from Fate. You find yourself rooting for the "good guys" and wishing ill on the "bad 'uns"---even though you can't always tell which is which! All in all, though certainly not the Great American Novel, it's a very fun read.

Lee F. says

eh

PenNPaper52 says

When I first started reading Agatha Webb, it was mildly amusing, a rich brat goes off the night, a pious woman dies and then all of a sudden the brat changes into a good guy, shuns the vampy gf and tries to woo the good girl. A soap opera in the making if ever I saw. The Days of Our Lives or that even more irritating Bold and the Beautiful. The nuances though does make a difference. As I read, I started yearning, wanting to know more, started really caring for the brat, hated the vamp and cheered for the good girl. Moreover I wanted to know the most important detail... did he really kill Agatha Webb. If you hate soap operas, can't stand the sight of them, then do pls. read this book. Its that one off soap opera that you love to hate in the

beginning, but ends up making you its most ardent fan.

Chandini says

I don't know why I continually try to read Green's books. I guess I hope to enjoy one of the few female authors of mystery novels of this time, however I am always disappointed with the actuality. This is a basic who-dunnit - woman is found stabbed to the heart but with an exceptionally serene countenance, her servant lying half out of the window dead with an expression of terror on her face but no wounds, and the husband of the stabbing victim asleep in the next room.

Aside from the melodrama, which is always present in Green's work, this particular book was unusually heavy on the religion. If there had been any redeeming features I could have dealt with that but the mystery was more than a little anemic. For the first third or so of the book I had high hopes but those hopes were soon dashed. For a little while it wasn't completely obvious who had killed Agatha Webb and the developments came fast and thick. But it all came to an end when none of the characters were anything but what they seemed. The characters were trite and predictable - the saintly victim, her pathetic unstable husband, the dead servant woman, the dissolute young man, his upright father, the pretty but evil girl, the plain but virtuous girl, the two brothers who are old friends of the victim, the pompous big city detective, the various city elders, the eager amateur detective, a few townspeople and various shady characters sent in to confuse issues. The servant's death is glossed over in favor of her employer; she seems to be used as a plot device to further the horror of the real crime and offer a last minute solution to the crime. Now, I didn't expect this to be literature with a capital "L" but I did expect an interesting story line and, at the very least, passable writing.

Tl;dr

Green's sentence structure was convoluted at best, the solution to the mystery contrived, and the denouement far too long-winded. Definitely not worth a re-read or even continued space on my phone.

Jenny Yates says

It's a little melodramatic. The women are either evil temptresses or pure as snow. The hero is given to sinful excesses, which are never quite named, until he is reformed. But, hey, it was first published in 1899. Anna Katherine Green is considered very influential in the development of the detective fiction genre, and her modest but clever hero here gets into a lot of trouble (including being thrown overboard in the middle of the ocean) before he finally solves the case.

It's a fun read. I certainly didn't guess the solution, which is improbable, unexpected and as melodramatic as the rest of the book.

Judy says

This plot seemed contrived but I believe it was the first of Caleb Sweetwater, and his bright mind and intuition added an interesting sidelight -- he gets better in later tales.

Kimberly says

Good mystery with many colorful and unexpected twists. Love reading AKG's descriptions of life at the turn of the 20th century. Very moving ending, if not a bit verbose.

Julia says

First published in 1899, this enjoyable murder mystery takes numerous twists and turns. Colorful characters.

Meghan says

Lovely and chilling murder of well to do woman named Agatha Webb. The author is supposedly to influence the great mystery writers like Agatha Christie, et cetera. The time period is mostly 1890s to 1910s. I am currently reading other her works.

Tria says

Not Ms. Green's best work, sadly. The pace is erratic and the tale often slows to a point where it struggles to hold interest in the reader. That doesn't hold true for much of her writing, so why it should do so here, I confess I don't understand; she could write far better than this when she tried.

The solution to the ultimate crime feels a bit "humbled-up", but I shan't say more about that. The apparent revelation leading to it? Well, it removes much confidence in the investigator to see that he almost had to be told outright to understand or imagine the link, when I as a reader had worked it out a long time previously from exactly the same information the investigating party had been given.

Reading this tale a century or so after its original publication, many of the plot devices that have since become tropes of the genre are easily recognised. Unfortunately, that has a detrimental effect on the story itself for modern-day readers. I imagine it might have been more of a mystery in its original time; that's why I give it 3 stars, as while the story drags and the of-its-time sexism annoys me, when it was written it was, to a certain degree, quite fresh and innovative, so it deserves a little credit for that.
