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Ngaio Marsh

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Inspector Roderick Alleyn has to date confined his investigations to England, but *Vintage Murder* finds him journeying to New Zealand (Ngaio Marsh's homeland). Traveling with Alleyn are the members of the Carolyn Dacres English Comedy Company. The actors' operatic intrigues offer an amusing diversion until, unexpectedly, they turn deadly. And Alleyn learns, not for the last time, that while he may be able to leave his badge back in Blighty, he's still a policeman, even on the other side of the world.

Vintage Murder Details

Date : Published December 15th 2012 by Felony & Mayhem Press (first published 1937)

ISBN :

Author : Ngaio Marsh

Format : Kindle Edition 278 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, European Literature, British Literature

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From Reader Review Vintage Murder for online ebook

Yngvild says

Vintage Murder is one of four *Ngaio Marsh* murder mysteries set in New Zealand, although there is little to show that. A Maori doctor and a couple of local policemen have walk-on parts, and there is a very nice account of a picnic trip *Commander Dalgliesh* takes into the countryside as part of his holiday. Other than that, the characters are all members of an English acting company touring New Zealand. The story might as well be set in Bournemouth.

The pleasure in this story is *Ngaio Marsh*'s description of the actors and their lives as members of a theatrical troupe. She should know; she was an actor and accomplished director herself, and the strains of making a profit in a small repertory company (even then), the tensions between artistic temperaments, and the mechanics of handling props and flats on stage all ring true.

Oh, and since I may not be the only idiot who used to pronounce the 'g' in her name, *Dame Edith Ngaio Marsh DBE* said her name as "Nio" to rhyme with "bio", not as in "ngaio tree".

Leslie says

Enjoyable outing with Alleyn in this fifth entry in the series.

Alleyn is in New Zealand, where he is on holiday recuperating from surgery (injured on the job?? I'll have to go back and look at #4!). On the boat from England, and then on the train in N.Z., he travelled along side a group of actors, including Miss Susan Max. The manager of the group is murdered after a performance one evening while Alleyn is there (amongst others) to celebrate the birthday of the leading lady (who is also the manager's wife)...

Carol ?? says

Maybe I'm going soft, but I'm getting fonder of Ngaio Marsh and her upper class sleuth, Roderick Alleyn!

This book makes it clear I've been pronouncing his name wrong all these years. It's Allen not Al-laine. & he is enjoying a holiday in Marsh's native New Zealand. Members of the Incorporated Playhouses acting troupe offer Alleyn a seat in their train carriage. They are all on their way to the fictitious town of Middleton, near Ohakune in the centre of the North Island..

**The Daylight Limited train crossing the Hapuawhenua Viaduct
north of Ohakune, ca 1930s(National Library Collection)**

Alleyn is invited to their latest production & *of course* there is a murder. Typically for Marsh the murder is staged (Ha! Staged - I kill me!) in a highly unlikely way and (also to me highly unlikely) Alleyn ends up assisting the local police.

What I liked was revisiting old fashioned kiwi slang. I'm old enough to remember some of these now dated expressions. We do still say we are "feeling crook" if we are unwell, less likely to "go crook" if we are angry.

& I promise we aren't so sensitive to criticism of "God's Own Country" as we used to be.

There are also signs of how real Alleyn is becoming to Marsh. His character changes often in the previous books - in the case of *A Man Lay Dead* often in the same chapter! This book he is more consistent - & with less of the upper class angst that is a tiresome feature in some of her later books. Marsh even has Alleyn as an author;

This reminded me so much of my made up world as a young teen that I gave an affectionate giggle!

I also liked the cast of characters and the inventively named chapters. The latter is just fun, but the former helps this reader keep a large cast straight. I wish more modern mystery writers would do this.

Lastly, I can't resist this quote from this **1937** novel.

"What do you think, Mr Alleyn? If there's another war will the young chaps come at it, same as we did, thinking it's great? And get the same jolt? What do you reckon?"

"I'm afraid to speculate," said Alleyn.

Prescient.

Dillwynia Peter says

The two things Ngaio Marsh loved were the theatre and New Zealand. Both feature in this book, and the love

shines through. Marsh started after Christie and it is obvious that Marsh learnt the craft from those writers of the time that were pushing the boundaries of crime fiction. Thus, even from the start, her novels are strong in their construction and red herrings. This one is no exception.

In this mystery, Marsh is the great manipulator, as she slowly removes the potential suspects with strong and plausible alibis. Unlike in many books, the least mentioned character is the murderer, here, all get equal play & one is left with determining access and opportunity. Once you realise Marsh has been manipulating you, that wry smile comes, for you are in the hands of a master writer, and you then enjoy the pleasure of the denouement. Once, I realised I was being manipulated, I did determine the killer, but it was quite a way through the book, and I didn't have to wait long for the revelation.

If the flow of the novel is anything to go by, Marsh enjoyed writing this story, for the reader gets much enjoyment from the style and narrative and character development of the book.

Lemar says

How had I missed Ngaio Marsh for so long? It must have been the silent 'g' that hinted at a dry British superiority that in fact could not be further from the truth. This is a hip, funny, clever mystery that takes place in a theater, a setting Marsh knew and brings fully to life. *Vintage Murder* unfolds in New Zealand. Wikipedia informed me that Marsh was born there so I was intrigued to read the only one of her mysteries set there.

Vintage Murder was written in 1937 and in many instances shows her unshakable egalitarian nature. One is the inclusion of an urbane doctor who is Maori and studied at Oxford. It also contains the following line, (no spoilers, I hate that) good evidence that bigotry was not universal at that time, "Mr. Liversidge added that Courtney Broadhead was a white man a phrase that Alleyn had never cared for and of which he was heartily tired". You go girl.

Another passage shows her witty descriptive incisiveness, " - was seventeen years old, dreadfully sophisticated, and entirely ignorant of everything outside the sphere of his sophistication. He had none of the awkwardness of youth and very little of its vitality, being restless rather than energetic, acquisitive rather than ambitious".

Patricio says

I didn't know Ngaio Marsh before I read *Vintage Muder*. This book is a classic enthralling crime story that Agatha Christie's fans will enjoy.

Roderick Alleyn is on vacation in New Zealand, and on the train he meets an English theater company who's in a tour in the same country.

After their debut play, in Carolyn's birthday party, her husband Alfred Meyer, is hit by a champagne bottle and he dies.

Honestly, when I read the book's synopsis for the first time, I thought it would be stupid but I had a great

surprise.

One of the few negative points in this book - for me - is that I didn't memorize the characters' names, so some parts were a bit confusing for me due to the existence of many names (please note that I'm not complaining about that, at all).

After the crime had occurred, I was very, very curious to see the end of this story. Every character had stone alibi and that made the reading pretty exciting for me.

I had a surprise in the end when I found out who was the killer because I thought it wouldn't be so obvious.

In this sort of classic crime novels I don't know the reason why I can't write big reviews, but perhaps it's just because I don't want to spoil anything. Anyway, I truly recommend you to read this book if you like Agatha Christie's books or some in the same genre.

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

Three and a half stars, rounded up to four because of the excellent audiobook narrator, who enjoyed himself mightily taking off classic British ack-tohhrs whose voices and mannerisms are recognisable to any listener of a certain age. We don't get Olivier's over-the-top emoting, but it needs only that. Some of the lower orders are certainly recognisable! His "New Zealand" accent had a tendency to slip over to Sahth Efrica, but nobody's perfect.

Classic theatre mystery which starts on a train, giving the golden-age mystery lover a twofer...which is about right for Happy Hour, as the murder weapon is a jeroboam of champers. *For the uninitiated colonial, a jeroboam is one of those huge bottles that holds six normal wine bottles' worth, and is often wasted at sporting events by being shaken and sprayed over the winning athletes. If wineries have any sense, they're probably filled with cheap plonk and sold high.* After that, it's all who was where when, and could they have been there at all. Added to the murder there's the theft of about a hundred pounds from a silly young miss (the ingenue of the company, natch--in every sense of the word). I have to admit I tried to read this one and couldn't get into it; on audiobook it was bearable, but mostly due to the reader.

Ngaio Marsh shows of the glories of New Zealand as seen through the eyes of our Inspector, who is meant to be very open-minded about the Maori character...and yet. There's a little too much reference to his "savageness" and how light his colour is, and how all the good Maoris are "aristocrats" for my taste. I know it's all very 1930s, and one really can't superimpose Third Millenium attitudes on a period piece which was *written* in the period, but her superior attitudes get the better of her, even in Alleyn's mind.

Sharla says

This book involves two things particularly close to the heart of Ngaio Marsh, New Zealand and the theatre. Perhaps that is why Vintage Murder seems to have extra depth and was such a pleasure to read. The mystery itself and the plot were nothing terribly special but the setting and the characters were a joy.

Sara says

A nicely plotted murder, with a satisfying number of red herrings and some fun theatrical characters! The thing about Marsh is, she really could write. And she knew her theater inside out, and liked the right stuff.

For instance, this quote: "when he spoke, one forgot his age, for his voice was quite beautiful: deep, and exquisitely modulated. He was one of that company of old actors that are only found in the West End of London. They still believe in using their voices as instruments, they speak without affectation, and they are indeed actors."

The scene is New Zealand, Alleyn is on holiday and at first he's incognito. But he teams up collegially with the local detectives, and here they are at two in the morning: "they stayed on talking. A kind of perverseness kept them wedded to their discomfort. They grew more and more wakeful and their ideas seemed to grow sharper. Their thoughts cleared. Alleyn spoke for a long time and the other two listened to him eagerly. Quite suddenly he stopped and shivered. The virtue went out of them. They felt dirty, and dog-tired. Wade began to gather up his papers."

Spare, precise, vivid...and even poetic, in an entirely non-precious way.

Here is Alleyn watching the line of a mountain at dawn.

"the peak of the mountain was flooded with thin rose colour, too austere to be theatrical, but so vivid that its beauty was painful. He felt that kind of impatience and disquietude that sudden beauty brings. He could not stand and watch the flood of warmth flow down the flanks of the mountain nor the intolerable transfiguration of the sky. He rang the night bell and was admitted by the porter."

The writer who can make me read and enjoy descriptions of landscape is rare. Marsh is one. And when Alleyn interrogates suspects, the intricacies of their reactions are purest pleasure.

Adrian says

Review to follow, but suffice to say it only just scraped 4 stars

And here is the review that followed. As numerous people have said before me, and I'm sure will continue to do so, "if only we had halves ". This would then be a solid 3.5 stars. As it is, it isn't 3, so it has to be 4 .

(As a complete aside before I continue, why is GR so awful on kindles when they are both Amazon ??)

Ok, back to the book, there was nothing intrinsically wrong with it, it just never seemed to get going, and if I'm honest I struggled with some of the characters under suspicion so had to keep referring back to remind myself who they were.

I missed Fox and the London link, and just never really connected with the case.

Well I am, for a few days, only one book behind now, and I'm looking forward to the introduction of Troy.

S Dizzy says

Reading about the theater setting was enlightening and interesting. The characters came alive as well. I very much like Inspector Alleyn's personality.

"...there are people to whom one need not show off. It's a great comfort sometimes. I've got one of that kind."

"Your wife! But I didn't know---"

Alleyn sat back on his heels and laughed. *No, no. I'm talking about a certain Detective-Inspector Fox. He's a large and slow and innocently straight-forward. He works with me at the Yard. I never have to show off to old Fox, bless him...*

Mary says

A whodunnit of the old school. Set in the author's homeland, ?? New Zealand and involving the author's favorite subject, the theater. Roderick Alleyn is on a rest cure from New Scotland Yard and attends the after theater party where the murder takes place because of his friendship with the actress Susan Max from a previous case. This book would be appealing to a reader who is very familiar the operations backstage. It is essentially a parade of clues: who was where when, how did the "accident" happen. I found it tedious but then I'm not conversant with the inner secrets of the theater ? and it was a stretch.

Susan says

This year I have embarked on a Ngaio Marsh challenge and, so far, am finding her books a little mixed. So far I have really enjoyed some and others, like this one, have left me a little underwhelmed.

Roderick Alleyn is on holiday, with the suggestion that he is 'recovering,' from an illness, or injury. However, he is not destined to get much relaxation after falling in with the Carolyn Dacres English Comedy Company, who are on tour in New Zealand. One of the players is Susan Max, a character actress who appeared in an earlier novel, which gives some suggestion as to why he is travelling with them.

After arriving by ship, the company are travelling by train to their first stop, when Alfred Meyer, Proprietor and Managing Director of the company, says that someone tried to push him off the train. His wife, and leading lady, Carolyn Dacres, is upset, but as she is having a long time flirtation with leading man, Hailey Hambleton, perhaps she is not as upset as she says. Then, a silly young girl, Valerie Gaynes, who has been taken on by the company as a favour to her rich father, has a lot of money stolen. It is not the best start and then, when the company arrive, their initial on stage success is dampened by murder.

All throughout her life, author Ngaio Marsh was heavily involved in the theatre and so this is obviously a world she knows well – as well as being set in her native New Zealand – so possibly I anticipated more from this. There are a number of suspects and motives; from love, jealousy, greed and secrets. Alleyn is present at the murder and, when the local detectives discover who he is, he is immediately involved in the investigation. Personally, though, the mystery seemed a fairly unsatisfactory cataloguing of endless motives. Which got somewhat bogged down in loose ends, alibi's and timings and did not have a particularly

satisfying ending. Still, I have really enjoyed some of the series, so look forward to reading on and exploring more of her work.

FangirlNation says

Vintage Murder takes us readers on our first trip with Ngaio Marsh to her home of New Zealand. Ordered abroad for his health, Detective Chief Inspector Roderick Alleyn joins up with the Carolyn Dacres English Comedy Company, managed by Dacres's husband, Alfred Mayor. Arriving in Middleton, the troupe performs to sold-out audiences, and on day three of the visit, Mayor throws a large birthday party for his wife. He has rigged up a fancy apparatus that, using stage techniques, will cause a lot of champagne bottles to descend when Carolyn cuts a cord. But something goes wrong, and a bottle lands hard on top of Mayor's head, killing him. Thus Alleyn gets forced into yet another case, this time from a new culture.

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Bev says

Vintage Murder (1937) by Ngaio Marsh finds Inspector Roderick Alleyn on a rest cure holiday in the large island country of New Zealand. He's recovering from some unnamed injury acquired in the line of duty and he's hoping for a trip full of nothing but peace and quiet. However, while traveling cross-country by train he encounters a touring acting company which includes one familiar face (found in the earlier story Enter a Murderer) and he makes friends with others. This results in an invitation to a performance and the company's after-party--which will also honor the leading lady's birthday.

He should have known that he was in for a very different sort of drama when said leading lady Carolyn Dacres's husband is nearly shoved off the train and a large sum of money is stolen from another cast member. It definitely doesn't surprise the reader that murder strikes during the birthday party and Alfred Meyer, the husband, is the victim. One might be surprised that the murder weapon is huge jeroboam of champagne that drops unceremoniously upon his head during what is supposed to be a pleasant surprise for the birthday girl.

The local police assume it is an accident--a slight miscalculation of the angle of descent. But Alleyn is forced to gently lead them to the clues he's already spotted which point to a more sinister explanation. He then treads a narrow path--trying not to step on official toes--on a busman's holiday to help discover who had the opportunity to tamper with the champagne surprise package as well as a motive to kill the inoffensive company producer. They wind their way through suspect interviews looking for anyone who lacks an alibi for the critical time period and find themselves with several motives, but apparently no one with opportunity. It will take a careful review of the time table and looking at the scene of action from another point of view before Alleyn finally spots the culprit.

I really enjoy the Marsh books set in the theater world. As I mentioned in my review of Enter a Murderer,

her interest in and love of the acting world really shows in the detail she provides and the treatment of the characters. Favorite bits are the journey on the train and Alleyn's interactions with Dr. Rangi Te Pokiha, a Maori doctor. The plot style is a bit repetitive (from the earlier theater book)--relying again on who was where during the critical period and who had access to the equipment--but still interesting and well-done. The critical draw-back for me was the lack of Inspector Fox--though Alleyn does consult him by telegram and address him in letters. The Alleyn/Fox duo is a partnership I enjoy seeing in action. ★★★ and a half stars. [rounded to four here]

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