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The Yellow Room Conspiracy: A Crime Novel (The James Pibble Mysteries)



Synopsis

An aging aristocrat on her deathbed and her longtime devoted lover explore the dark events of their shared past in hopes of uncovering a tragic, elusive truth in this masterfully evocative British mystery from CWA Gold Dagger winner Peter Dickinson. Lady Lucy Vereker Seddon is dying of a terminal illness when something she hears on the radio reminds her of her younger, darker days and inspires her to question her dearest friend and former lover, Paul Ackerley, about his role in a series of past family tragedies. There was the strange death of Lucy's brother-in-law, the brute Gerry Grantworth, in the Yellow Room of Blatchards "the huge and ugly Vereker estate" and the subsequent destruction by fire of the sprawling manor house. And then there was the infamous Seddon Affair, the sordid scandal that rocked Great Britain in the midst of the Suez Crisis. Surprised to hear that the woman he has always loved suspects him to be the culprit behind these events "especially since he always assumed Lucy herself helped engineer them" Paul suggests that they each record their memories and compare them. By doing so, perhaps they will both find their way to the long-hidden and terrible truth. Told through an alternating series of memories and flashbacks, *The Yellow Room Conspiracy* brilliantly re-creates a post-war era and a world of privilege corrupted by greed, jealousy, lust, and lies. The astonishing Peter Dickinson, one of Britain's greatest suspense novelists of the late twentieth century, ingeniously wraps a love story around a mystery and once again solidifies his position alongside luminaries such as P. D. James, Ruth Rendell, Peter Lovesey, and Reginald Hill.

Book Information

File Size: 927 KB

Print Length: 250 pages

Publisher: Open Road Media Mystery & Thriller (May 5, 2015)

Publication Date: May 5, 2015

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00VSLI6JM

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #191,398 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #357 in Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Humor & Satire #513 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Thrillers > Historical #614 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Mystery, Thriller & Suspense > Suspense > Political

Customer Reviews

"The Yellow Room Conspiracy" begins in 1992, after a radio program has a quiz show that features what was known as "The Seddon Affair" in 1956. Paul Ackerley hears the show while working in his garden and promptly breaks the radio. Lucy (Vereker) Seddon, his companion is suffering from a terminal disease, and asks Paul to marry her. She also asks him to tell her how he managed to kill Gerry Grantworth years ago, considering that the door to the room he was in was locked, at which point he tells her that he'd always thought she had done it. He decides that independently they should write down their individual stories leading up to that fateful night, and thus begins a tale which spans two world wars, brings the reader into politics, and into the lives of a group of sisters of the English country-home set. The story presented is done from two viewpoints, Lucy's and Paul's, told via flashbacks, and isn't a very pretty one. This book was phenomenal. This is my first book by this author, but it most definitely will not be my last. It is well written, the characters are incredibly alive, and the story will hold you in its grip until the very end. This author definitely has a talent for story telling. I'd definitely recommend it to people who want something way above average in their reading, or to people who enjoy books that span a lifetime. Readers of British crime fiction should absolutely not miss this one. At times the story may seem a bit convoluted, but eventually all is explained and clarified, keeping the reader turning pages. I started this book at 8 pm last night and finished it around midnight because I absolutely could not put it down -- and that, for me, is a sign of a fantastic book. Highly recommended.

Peter Dickinson reminds me of two other British novelists, Robert Barnard and J.I.M. Stewart. His works usually contain mysteries, as do Barnard's, and are usually novels of manners, as are Stewart's. And like both, he is at his best when delineating complicated and ambiguous relationships whose history and roots illuminate present events. In addition, Dickinson shares the satirical wit and polished style of the other two. "The Yellow Room Conspiracy" is a mystery and a novel of manners. Narrated alternately by an aged couple looking back on critical events of their youth, Paul Ackerley and Lucy Vereker, the novel evokes a between-the-wars world of Eton and country house parties followed by a post-war empire whose decline culminates in the Suez

crisis. The double narration Dickinson employs is an effective technique. Between them, Lucy, the society beauty, and Paul Ackerley, the archetypal outsider, recreate a series of events that climax in the death of another outsider, Gerry Grantworth, and the burning down of Lucy's family home. Who killed Gerry? Who burned the house? These are the questions that Paul and Lucy finally explore after spending a lifetime together -- each secretly believing the other had. Dickinson makes you care about the answers.

I first read this book almost fifteen years ago and still think about it. Dickinson is a very talented writer and this is one of his better works. The juxtaposition of the present and the past in which the tale occurs is handled very well. Many people have gone down the path of this convention of two tracked stories, but few handle it with the aplomb of Dickinson. One other thing stands out in my mind is the restrained way that Dickinson portrays base behavior and emotion. There's a tremendous amount of unavenged evil in the book, more so than in many noir novels. Yet, unlike them, it is all handled very smoothly. It is up to the reader to realize just how evil an act has been perpetrated and how justice does not always happen in a straight forward manner. Highly recommended.

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