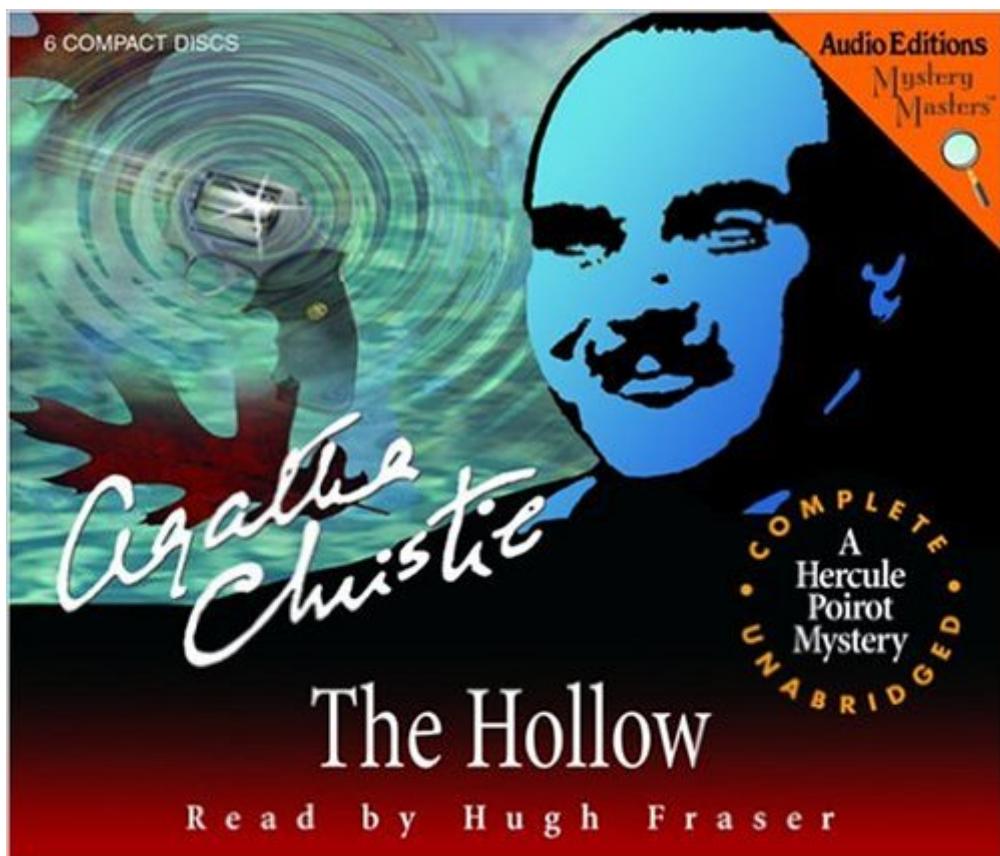


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Hollow: A Hercule Poirot Mystery (Mystery Masters)



Synopsis

Hercule Poirot arrives at The Hollow for a weekend luncheon just in time to see Gerda Christow standing, revolver in hand, over the body of her husband. It seems obvious that she has killed her wayward spouse, but Poirot doesn't believe things are that simple. What does Christow's death have to do with his current and former lovers, both of whom are nearby? What secrets are the weekend guests hiding in this case of love, deceit, mystery, and death?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I love this mystery--I'm not certain why. Normally I would hate it, but there's something in the strange eeriness of it all that really made me read.Determined scientist John Christow is dissatisfied with his life--he has a rather stupid, insecure but sweet-natured wife and two brainy kids, and an artist lover named Henrietta Savernake, whose first love is her sculptures, much to his chagrin. He wants sometimes to break away from his family and the sick people that he must deal with.When they go to an old mansion for the weekend, the coolly passionate Henrietta is not the only lover there--John's old actress girlfriend who wants him as a boy-toy is present, and she doesn't want to take "no" for an answer. Then John turns up dead.Hercule Poirot and Henrietta seek to unravel the mystery of John's death, with totally unexpected results. What's really special about this mystery is that the emotions of the characters carry it along, rather than simply following clues and giving Poirot insights. It's rather unusual for Christie to write a novel/mystery rather than a straight mystery, but it's not unenjoyable.

Mrs. Christie set out to write a novel-and she succeeded. The characters who populate the typical country-house 'The Hollow' are vivid and believable, motivated by love, jealousy, hatred or despair-but handled in a unique manner. The most important character is the victim, Dr. John Christow, whose death is the centre point of the romantic triangles amongst the eccentric Angkatell family, and who is linked with three women, all in love with him, but in very different ways: his wife, Gerda; his mistress, Henrietta Savernake; and his former fianc , Veronica Cray. Naturally, the motive is jealousy, but the themes of love and jealousy are superbly handled. The detective story elements are not, however, Christie's best. The murder is quite simple-the murderer is obvious, but the circumstances, involving several guns and a painting of Ygdrasil, are inexplicable-and the entire thing is a reworking of LORD EDGWARE DIES. Poirot is very much in the background, acting only as a deus ex machina at the end-it was a mistake, Christie later felt, to have him in the book. The result: a beautiful yet somewhat flawed masterpiece.

This book is very different from other Christie's book and is much better. For once, her characters are not simple caricatures easy to forget. They have real, deep feelings, they suffer, and the reader believe in that. The book acts like a charm that makes the reader enter in it deeper than in other Christie's work. The mystery plot is surprising but not really important. What is important is the picture of three or four key characters (only women, by the way). That makes this book closer to PD James work. Highly recommended.

Christie is often accused of being a very pragmatic writer whose work seldom contains atmosphere, three-dimensional characters, or complex emotions. There is more than a little truth to this criticism--but when dealing with a plotline that actually relies on these more literary effects Christie is more than able to meet the challenge. Such is the case with THE HOLLOW, a strange and moody mystery in which both setting and the emotional complexity of the various characters are central to both story and solution. When a woman is found standing with gun in hand over the freshly-killed body of her husband, the solution would seem obvious--but there is a great deal more going on at the house known as "The Hollow" than meets the eye, and most of it is bound in the victim's questionable love life. Although the solution to the mystery is not quite as disconcerting as one normally expects of Christie, the novel is a joy, and its characters will remain in mind long after the book is put aside.

THE HOLLOW is one of Agatha Christie's best postwar thrillers when she seemed to be trying out a new style of close psychological observation, a very delicate kind of character portrayal that was a carryover from her "straight novels" written under the pseudonym of Mary Westmacott. Another good example of this postwar style would be TAKEN AT THE FLOOD. I loved the story of Henrietta, one of Christie's few female visual artists, ruthless and driven, like Amyas Crale in FIVE LITTLE PIGS, always sacrificing everything to the good of their art, even their most basic human relationships. Over and over again Christie uses this theme, and I suspect she must have somehow identified herself with this driven artist figure. The other story that is so appealing is the love story of Midge Hardcastle, the "poor relation" of the Angkatell family, who gets to spend her weekends and holidays at the family mansion, but when the weekend's over, she has to go back to her life of genteel poverty selling clothes for a fashionable modiste who values her only for her society connections. No matter how many times I read THE HOLLOW, my throat clenches up when I reach the richly satisfying end of the book, when poor Midge gets her Cinderella wishes granted. It's very affecting, just like the end of AN OFFICER AND A GENTLEMAN. Veronica Craye is very good too. Obviously Christie was using the real life Veronica Lake as the model for Craye, just as in the 1960s she used the real life Gene Tierney for the actress in THE MIRROR CRACK'D. All in all, a book filled with wonderful female characters. Though the men aren't bad either!

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