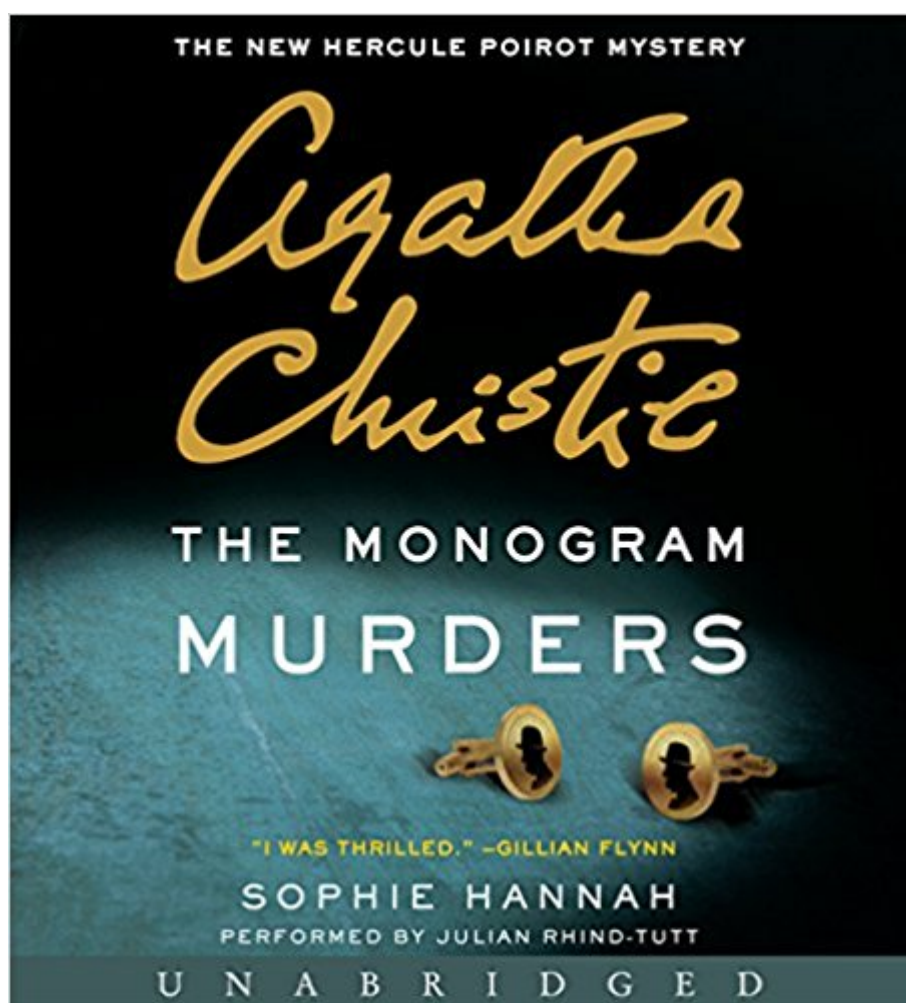




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The Monogram Murders CD: The New Hercule Poirot Mystery (Hercule Poirot Mysteries)



Synopsis

Hercule Poirot's quiet supper in a London coffeehouse is interrupted when a young woman confides to him that she is about to be murdered. She is terrified—but begs Poirot not to find and punish her killer. Once she is dead, she insists, justice will have been done. Later that night, Poirot learns that three guests at a fashionable London Hotel have been murdered, and a cufflink has been placed in each one's mouth. Could there be a connection with the frightened woman? While Poirot struggles to put together the bizarre pieces of the puzzle, the murderer prepares another hotel bedroom for a fourth victim.

Since the publication of her first novel in 1920, more than two billion copies of Agatha Christie's books have been sold around the globe. Diabolically clever, packed with style and wit, *The Monogram Murders* is a splendid addition to the world's biggest-selling series.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

S.J. Watson Interviews Sophie Hannah S.J. Watson is the New York Times bestselling author of *Before I Go to Sleep*. SJ: In *The Monogram Murders*, you channeled the voice of the legendary Hercule Poirot. How was writing a longstanding character invented by someone else different from writing your own? Sophie: Not as different as you might think. I know Poirot so well, from reading all the Christie Poirot novels lots of times. In a way, writing this book felt similar to writing about a real person I was very familiar with. It was a bit like writing an episode in the biography of someone I greatly admire. SJ: What is your all-time favorite Agatha Christie mystery? Sophie: That's

a tough one. Currently, Sparkling Cyanide - so clever and surprising - but I change my mind all the time. My favorite Poirot novel is *After The Funeral*. SJ: What kind of research did you do prior to sitting down and writing *The Monogram Murders*? Sophie: I reread all the Christie Poirots, and I booked a week's holiday at Greenway, Agatha Christie's former holiday home in Devon. I hoped that inspiration would strike if I went there, and it did. On the first night there, I propped myself up in bed with my laptop, about five metres away from an enormous portrait of Agatha, and starting putting together my plot. By the time I left at the end of the week, I had the whole story in my mind and on my computer - every last detail. If I were a superstitious person, I would say that Agatha helped me...but of course I'm far too sensible and rational to suggest that! (Or am I?) SJ: What do you think are some of the quintessential traits of an Agatha Christie mystery? Did you try to incorporate any into *The Monogram Murders*? Sophie: I tried to incorporate what I think of as all the crucial ingredients of a Christie/Poirot novel: a gleeful delight in storytelling; an outlandish/apparently impossible opening scenario that is later revealed to be eminently possible; the perfect combination of ease and pleasure for the reader with a challenging intellectual puzzle; a profound intelligence that at no point makes the reader feel stupid or condescended to; the centrality of motive and psychology; the combination of a light/feel-good experience for readers with a sophisticated awareness of the dark depravity of human beings. Christie, more than any other crime writer, is able to include polar opposites in her novels - light-dark, easy-difficult - without either ever detracting from the other. SJ: Do you think Agatha Christie would have been pleased with *The Monogram Murders*? Sophie: I can't speak for her. I fervently hope so! Wherever she is, I hope she's pleased! --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

“Sophie Hannah does an egoless, silky job of reviving Agatha Christie’s beloved Belgian detective Hercule Poirot...enough so to hope that Hannah turns to Miss Marple next.” (USA Today) “Christie herself, some might say, could do no better.... Enough twists, turns, revelations and suspects to cook up a most satisfying red-herring stew. Literary magic.” (Washington Post) “Does Sophie Hannah’s Poirot live up to our expectations? Yes, he does, and markedly so.... As tricky as anything written by Agatha Christie. *The Monogram Murders* has a life and freshness of its own. Poirot is still Poirot. Poirot is back.” (Alexander McCall Smith, New York Times bestselling author of *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency*) “Perfect...a pure treat.” (Tana French, New York Times bestselling author of *The Secret Place*) “Terrific.... uncanny. As Hercule Poirot himself would say, Bravo, Madame Hannah. Bravo.” (Boston

Globe)“Sophie Hannah is a prodigious talent. I can’t wait to see what she does next.” (Laura Lippman)“Sophie Hannah’s idea for a plot line was so compelling and her passion for my grandmother’s work so strong, that we felt that the time was right for a new Christie to be written.” (Mathew Prichard, grandson of Agatha Christie)“Sharply written and rigorously plotted, this Poirot mystery rivals many of Christie’s own.” (NPR)“Equal parts charming and ingenious, dark and quirky and utterly engaging”I was thrilled to see Poirot in such very, very good hands. Reading *The Monogram Murders* was like returning to a favorite room of a long-lost home.” (Gillian Flynn, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Gone Girl*)“Sophie Hannah’s *The Monogram Murders* does Christie proud. Our favorite detective is back and in impeccable form!” (Charles Todd, New York Times bestselling author of *An Unwilling Accomplice*) --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Regardless of the glowing praise on the back of the dust jacket, Sophie Hannah has not written "a new Christie" novel. The beauty of the genuine Christie mysteries, and of the Poirot novels in particular, is their elegance of plot and character. Though she utilized the occasional red herring and sudden appearances of new characters to turn a plot, Agatha Christie’s writing and plot lines were graceful and not unnecessarily complicated. Her dialogue sparkled and snapped, and her famous detectives were imbued with charm and life. Sophie Hannah, on the other hand, has written a ham-fisted pastiche of a Poirot mystery that dwells unnecessarily on useless and obscure clues, far too many red herrings and a convoluted plot line that stretches credibility. Her Poirot is charmless and flat, the Japp/Hastings substitute so bland and characterless as to be completely superfluous and forgettable. I generally enjoy Sophie Hannah’s mystery work, but have found that the last two or three of her books have been tiresome in their overwrought attempts at psychologically twisted cleverness. This attempt was as irritating as her last few books have been. Hannah’s choice to set much of the story in the Culver Valley, as she has done with all her "own" mysteries, is, frankly, jarring and pointlessly twee. Finally, the conceit of splashing Agatha Christie’s name across fully half the book’s cover and listing all Agatha Christie’s books at the back of the novel strikes me as in the poorest of taste. This is NOT an Agatha Christie novel, and the use of Christie’s name and the inclusion of the list of her own works smacks of presumption and crassness on the part of Hannah and the publisher.

A terrified woman bursts into the coffee house where Hercule Poirot is partaking of the best coffee

in London. When Poirot tells her he is a detective, she seems tempted to share her worries but in the end tells him only that she is about to be murdered and that, once she is dead, justice will have been done. Pausing only to beg him to prevent the police from investigating, she pleads cryptically 'Oh, please let no one open their mouths' and flees back into the night. Meantime Mr Catchpool of Scotland Yard, who lives in the same lodging house as Poirot, has been called to the Bloxham Hotel where three guests have been found murdered. Poirot (psychically) suspects there may be a link...In fact, I hadn't ever before realised just how psychic Poirot was. How remiss of Ms Christie never to reveal this fact! All these years she led us to believe he came to his conclusions based on his reading of the clues, his ability to see through the red herrings to the facts, the superior power of his little grey cells. Ms Hannah kindly lets us in on the true secret though. Clues are unnecessary. Poirot just knows what has happened. At each stage, as other people flounder to make sense of the plot (well, I certainly did!), Poirot sees straight through to the truth without the need for any pesky evidence or suchlike nonsense. What a gift! Unfortunately not one that makes a detective novel work very well though...If this book had been written about a detective called Smith, it might have rated maybe three stars. The plot is convoluted, psychologically unconvincing and over-padded. The list of suspects is far too small, meaning that there are no big surprises come the reveal. But the writing style is quite good, some of the characterisation is fine and the descriptions of the places involved in the plot are done reasonably well. BUT...there is a great big 'Agatha Christie' on the front of the book, so this should really read like one of hers, shouldn't it? It doesn't. From the very beginning Poirot is not right. For a start, he has moved into a lodging house because he wants to escape from his fame for a while and be anonymous. Doesn't sound like the Poirot I know! Secondly we hear almost nothing about his little foibles - his vanity, his moustaches, his rotundity, his endearingly egg-shaped head, his patent leather shoes. We do get to hear a little about his passion for order but just as a sop. Thirdly he goes about searching rooms and seeking out physical clues like Holmes on an eager day. The real Poirot, as we know, is actually much more interested in the psychology of the crime. Fourthly, when the real Poirot speaks French, he kindly only uses words we're all going to get without resorting to a French-English dictionary - mais pas ce problème. Fifthly, at the end he actually participates in a formal police interview in a police station - but I was past the stage of caring long before then anyway. So I'll be kind and spare you sixthly, seventhly...etc. I saw Sophie Hannah being interviewed about the book on the BBC News channel, and she said that she had decided not to try to recreate Christie's style. So she created a new character, Catchpool, to be the narrator so that he could bring a new voice to the story. I was willing to go along with this idea, though it seemed a shame not to have Hastings along for the ride. But

firstly (sorry), Catchpool is extremely annoying. He can't stand dead bodies, keeps walking away from the investigation, is as thick as a brick and basically hands the entire investigation over to Poirot (mind you, with Poirot's amazing supernatural abilities, who wouldn't?). Secondly, he's struggling not to reveal that he's gay - that's never spelled out, but it's quite clear from the unsubtle hints that are dropped all over the place. Now I know it's obligatory that every police officer in detective fiction is either gay or drunk these days, or both, (I suppose I should be glad that at least he was sober), but this is supposed to be a Christie-style book. I'm certainly not arguing that all gay men should be portrayed like Mr Pye in *The Moving Finger*, but the idea of Ms Christie having a gay policeman is frankly ridiculous. And Poirot's psychic powers let him down on that one, since he seems determined to pair Catchpool off with a nice woman. Thirdly, Catchpool tells the story in the first-person (past tense, thankfully), and yet knows every detail of what happens when he's not there. So he can describe all of Poirot's conversations verbatim, tells us when people stand up, sit down, blush, etc. - clearly Poirot's psychic abilities are catching. The last fifth of the book is taken up with the traditional get-together where Poirot reveals what happened, but it goes on for ever and is mainly just Poirot telling us the whole story, with no reference as to how he came by all these amazing insights. As I said before, he just knows! And considering how silly and unlikely the plot is, that seems beyond miraculous. I can only say that I sincerely hope there won't be another of these. If there is, even I will be able to resist the temptation next time. Because now (cue spooky music), FictionFan just knows too...

While I was excited about reading another Poirot mystery, this book turned out to be a disappointment. The underlying problem is that the author missed the fundamental idea and appeal of Agatha Christie's stories, specifically the ones featuring Poirot. The superficial details are faithfully reproduced: Poirot's verbal tics, his obsession with order and detail, the substitute for Captain Hastings, the interbellum London setting, etc. What's missing is the talent Christie had that distinguishes her from other mystery authors: the ability to create and develop a clever plot. Consider, in contrast, works like *"The Murder of Roger Ackroyd"*, *"Lord Edgware Dies"*, *"Peril at End House"*, *"The ABC Murders"*, *"Evil Under the Sun"*, etc. The solutions to Christie's mysteries were always brilliant and elegant but fair to the reader. The mystery in Hannah's novel is a mess. It's unnecessarily complicated, it involves too many uninteresting characters, it requires no insight or trick to solve, and it's unsatisfying after it's revealed. Although all the superficial details are there, this new novel fails completely to capture the mood of the original. It's not a drawing-room or village murder, or even a locked-room mystery or murder-in-retrospect. If anything, it's a modern crime

thriller or even something like a police procedural (with a private investigator rather than a police officer) disguised as an older novel. We watch Poirot conduct an investigation, interrogate forgettable witnesses, and gradually piece together a bloated, convoluted mystery. The novel lacks the cleverness of Christie's work and her ingenious solutions, and adding Poirot to an otherwise forgettable modern thriller isn't enough to redeem it.

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