



The Yellow Room Conspiracy

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Gerry Grantworth died mysteriously in the gas-filled Yellow Room at the Vereker family mansion. Gerry had been the passion of Lucy Vereker and the best friend of her lover, Paul. Now, 36 years later, as the two compare accounts of that fatal day, along with war years, sexual liaisons, political scandals and intimate secrets, they will piece together a deadly puzzle.

The Yellow Room Conspiracy Details

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Author : Peter Dickinson

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Lynn says

The story is told by alternating narrators, but fortunately in chronological order (not a big fan of flashbacks). Intriguing plot device is that the mystery is obliquely referenced in the first chapter, but not actually revealed until the ending chapters - so you couldn't guess "who" it was as you went along because you didn't know "what" it was. So it read as more of a novel with a little mystery, than a true mystery - but I found that refreshing and enjoyable.

Two critical comments:

1. The preface was unnecessary and confusing.
2. If you are not familiar with the game of cricket (I'm not), it can be distracting trying to figure out what is going on.

I plan to read more of his books.

Marilyn Brooks says

Rounding up from a 2.5. This book was interesting in the parts that covered the wartime activities of some of the characters but not a great plot overall. I found the English upper class lifestyle insights of interest as well. But the couple trading off telling the tale did not hit home, having not examined the affair until one was about to die? Maybe that is the difference between English toffs and Americans: I doubt that would happen here. We are more likely to rehash something to death.

Val says

This was a wonderful period piece and mystery set over many years in England. It was written from two viewpoints, which was very well done. The mystery is referred to at the very beginning, but then unfolds slowly through the memories of two people. I thought it was fascinating and could barely put it down.

Alison says

I'd read this before, and completely forgot how it ended, since I have an excellent ability for forgetting murder mysteries. It's a good story, but it's rather annoyingly told, in a back-and-forth manner that relies on diary-memories of two of the people implicated in what is, essentially, a spy-murder-mystery. It's like a John Le Carré told rather sloppily by the protagonists, rather than by the omniscient narrator. I say 'sloppily' because that's how people remember; they aren't going to tell their story in anything like a linear manner, they tell the story the way they remember it. In that way, it's brilliantly done, as an attempt at realism; but if you just want to read a proper story, this won't be it.

I think if you enjoy looking at the contents of people's heads, as they try to remember what happened to them 36 years ago, who were both involved, to some extent, in the 'spy-service' that developed in England after WWII, then you'll have a good time letting these characters unravel what they're trying to remember about someone important to both of them who died. Why did the man die? Who killed him? That's what they try to piece together through their memories.

For me, personally, I seem to have really liked this book when I initially read it about ten years ago, and that's presumably why I kept it, but I can't remember what it was I liked so much about it that made me remember it as worthwhile to keep this long to re-read. It's a good enough story, though, and it makes me want to hunt down other Peter Dickinson's and see what they're like, but I'm a sucker for murder mysteries that involve spying.

Tony says

THE YELLOW ROOM CONSPIRACY. (1994). Peter Dickinson. **.

If this had been the first novel by Dickinson that I tried to read, there would never have been another one. The plot is obscured by changes in the identity of the speaker and shifts in the time references from which they speak. It involves a relationship between a man and a woman – once lovers – each of whom thinks that the other had committed murder. In a kind of diary form, each one writes his/her part of the story based on their recollection of events. The plot line is so confused that I wonder what got into Dickinson on this one. His mysteries are normally clearly written and his characters well-defined. This novel throws all that to the wind. Normally, Dickinson is one of the English writers at the top of my wish list when I'm looking for a good read. This is not one of them.

Nancy Oakes says

"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.

Dr T says

A very British book told entirely in flashback about what boils down to a locked-room murder. The story revolves around a large upper class family and their country estate, involving many other people along the way. Foreign intrigue, dubious financial dealings, and cricket are all integral parts of the story, told by two of the participants toward the end of their lives.

Miriam says

Nearing the end of their lives, an elderly couple decides to bring up the question they have always avoided: How did you kill Gerry?

Yes, the same question from both Paul and Lucy. Turns out they have each spent decades believing the other to be responsible. But if it wasn't either of them, then...?

I thought this was a very interesting hook, and Dickinson's writing really pulled me in. However, there is a LOT of lead-up before we get anywhere near the meat of the mystery, and although it was nicely complicated I quickly grew tired of the narrators' voices and if the long series of meaningless affairs engaged in by the main characters and their sisters (I think inspired by the Mitfords) and friends. That's not moral prudery, I just found it uninteresting as a spectator to hear about the joyless personal lives of a bunch of unlikable people having it off with other unlikable people, who mostly don't even appear to like one another or be having any fun. Why they bothered beat me.

Still, a smart book, different from the run-of-the-mill mystery. I'll have a look at his other novels and see if any of them look more to my taste.

Ruthie says

Peter Dickinson is one of Britain's most celebrated mystery authors, and it shows. In "The Yellow Room Conspiracy" we find a tale as complex and confusing as anything Agatha Christie or Sir. Arthur Conan Doyle ever wrote.

This mystery is written in the form of a memoir written by two of the main characters in the mystery. Through their notes about the events we learn that Paul and Lucy are now elderly. Lucy is rapidly succumbing to a disease that sounds a lot like Parkinson's, although it's never actually named, and she finally asks Paul about what happened when they were much younger. The police had never solved the murder, and they have lived and loved for years each assuming they knew what happened, and coming to different conclusions.

As they individually recount their memories of the events leading up to the murder of Gerry, we are taking deep inside their lives; through the deprivations of World War II, inside Lucy's family of five sisters, and their hopes, dreams, and loves.

I found the story enthralling. Dickinson does a good job of explaining how each of the characters in his large cast behaved and thought, and how they changed over time. The actual murder doesn't take place until nearly the end of the book, and by that time the motivations and confusion behind who done it, is both clear and confusing. In the end Lucy shares with us what she thinks really happened, and while she says it with certainty, the reader is left wondering if she's right or if there is yet another conclusion that we'll never know.

Bev says

Once upon a time I read a book by Peter Dickinson. I don't know what it was, except that it was a mystery. I don't have the title logged. The only thing I have noted by Peter Dickinson's name is "NO NO NO NO NO NO NO!!!!!!!" One might wonder then why I decided to read *The Yellow Room Conspiracy* by Dickinson when I found that I needed one more book with word beginning with "Y" for my Monthly Mix-up Mania Challenge book list. After all, there must be lots of other books with a "Y" out there. Well, somehow the title floated into my range (I can't remember if someone mentioned it out in the blogging world or on Facebook or what). But what I heard/saw was interesting, so I did a search for it online at my library. And discovered that it was by Dickinson. And thought, "Uh-oh." But then I read the synopsis and was hooked. I decided to give him another try. After all, was it really fair to judge an author based on one book--especially when I can't even remember what it was?

I'm glad I gave Dickinson another chance. Not that this is an awesome mystery in the strictest sense of the word. It's not. And maybe that's why I had a severe reaction to Dickinson last time. Maybe I was a bit more of a purist when it came to mysteries then. What this is, is an awesome character study of people during the late-30s through the mid-50s. The story begins with an elderly couple--Paul Ackerly and Lucy Seddon. Lovers and partners--never married, but living together. Paul is out in the yard preparing plants for his garden when a radio quiz show comes on and begins to ask the players questions about the "Seddon Affair." Lucy has heard it on the radio inside as well. We're not told the extent of the "Affair" right away, but we do learn that Gerry Grantworth--Paul's friend and Lucy's passionate obsession--was killed and each believed the other to be responsible. When they realize that neither of them was the culprit, they decide to record their memories separately and see if they can piece together what really happened. The remainder of the book is given to us in alternating reminiscences as they slowly work their way to the fateful day when Grantworth died.

I was never really caught up in the who-dunnit part of this book. That's why it didn't wow me as a mystery. But the voices of Paul and Lucy are so clear and their stories are so well-told that I didn't mind. In this book, Dickinson really knows how to give us people and a sense of place. I really felt like I was getting to know all of these characters. There were people that I really like and rooted for and there were people that I know would never have wanted to meet. And I really felt like I was there in the British countryside. As a historical period piece, it's a wonderful bit of writing. Three and a half stars...nearly four.

Shelley says

This was my first Peter Dickinson book. I thought it was well worth the read and something very different in terms of a mystery novel. The male characters were well drawn, but I was not as certain about the female ones. The family of girls seem to lack the depth that his main male character is given. I am not sure if that is just who these people are or if it is a trait of the author. It would be necessary to read more of his books to

find out. I thought that telling the story from two vantage points really adds an extra dimension to the story.

Cat. says

I always forget how much I love Peter Dickinson, which is one reason I (mostly subconsciously) don't read him back-to-back. His stories are just all of a piece and consistently good. They transport me, usually to another time, certainly to another place.

In this book, the transportation is back to the years surrounding World War II, up to about 1955. For those of us born well after the war, and in another place, it is sometimes hard to remember what a watershed the war years were, how much changed because of it. And, in truly confusing fashion, the book starts in the 'now' and then cuts back to 'then' between two aging lovers, both of whom have always believed the other one killed their friend Gerry. Gerry, who was his best friend, and her erstwhile lover, the one she always returns to, if only in her mind.

This is a mystery as only Dickinson writes: a locked-room story, a deep character study of several individuals, a decidedly twisted humor, with Time and Place as much characters as the people, and betrayal of personal and national trusts. At the end, Gerry's death not only brings his life down, but destroys a family treasure and marks the end of an era that really ended decades before.

The Yellow Room: part of the house but not really; approachable easily through the proper hall door; and not-so-easily through a labyrinthine and ultimately destructive hidden staircase; not quite on the same level as the rest of the house; the place where The Men retire to talk after dinner; dangerous but deceptively homey.

Complicated story, wonderfully 'sticky' (as in "stuck in my head") characters, good history lesson.

Deirdre says

I mostly got into Peter Dickinson because he was married to Robin McKinley and she raved about his books (naturally). But they are pretty darn good. His writing is very assured, fluid, at time sparse. Always vivid. I liked this book (although I didn't much like the people in it) for its sense of place and time, well portrayed. I always come back around to reading another one of his books every so often, and they rarely disappoint.

Jenny says

This book was very compelling although I'm not sure why I liked it so much. I liked that the viewpoints alternated between Lucy and Paul (I rather liked Lucy's chapters). The ending I have more of a beef with. I'm not sure what this book was meant to be: mystery? character study? a sports review of cricket (which I didn't much follow AT ALL)? It seems like it was meant to show one man's struggle with staying true to himself and why was it such a mystery about the murder? DUH.

Anyway, good book but I'm not sure I'd read more of Dickinson's work in the future. I think it was all very time-based so unfortunately the references to the war and cricket and places in England were over my head.

Like I say, I'm not sure why I liked it, but I finished it in 2 days.

Donn Headley says

What a convoluted plot, embracing everything! Somehow, Dickinson draws it all together by the end. This is really based on the Mitford-type aristocracy of the early 20th century in Britain: a bunch of intellectual but torpid people with too much time on their hands and no compunction to do anything good for anyone but themselves. Fascinating read that is hard slogging at times, but ultimately worth it.
