



Magpie Murders, by Anthony Horowitz
Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, February 2019

Winter is a fine time of year to curl up with a bracing British murder mystery. Anthony Horowitz's *Magpie Murders* would be an excellent choice for a cozy winter read.

Indeed, Horowitz, the accomplished screenwriter of TV murder series *Midsomer Murders* and *Foyle's War*, knows how to spin an intriguing yarn. *Magpie Murders* delivers quite a punch. Two murder mysteries in one, *Magpie Murders* is a "whodunit" inside another "whodunit."

As *Magpie Murders* begins, London-based editor Susan Ryland settles in to read the manuscript of Alan Conway's latest mystery novel. Susan works for Cloverleaf Press, a small publishing house which depends on cankerous author Conway to stay afloat. Entitled "Magpie Murders," the manuscript is to be the ninth and final book in Conway's popular mystery series. "I opened the wine," Susan muses. "I lit a cigarette. I began to read the book as you are about to. But before you do that, I have to warn you. This book changed my life."

The narrative then switches to the "Magpie Murders" manuscript, which is set in 1950s English countryside. Its storyline contains the requisite sleepy village, an imposing manor house, and eccentric characters. Intrepid detective Atticus Pund is called upon to investigate an incident at Pye Hall. It appears that busybody housekeeper Mary Blakiston had a fatal accident while the manor's lord, Sir Magnus Pye, and his social-climbing wife were away on holiday. Apparently, Mary was estranged from her son Robert. Sir Magnus and his twin sister Clarissa are also on the outs. Other villagers harbor dark secrets of their own.

As Susan continues reading the "Magpie Murders" manuscript, she is struck by similarities between its characters and some people in Alan Conway's inner circle. For example, the names of the sisters and sons of Sir Magnus and Conway are

similar, and Conway's manor home Abbey Grange resembles Pye Hall. When Susan begins to suspect that something sinister is in the works, her own life is threatened.

In style and in structure, *Magpie Murders* is reminiscent of Agatha Christie's classic murders mysteries. There are puzzles within puzzles, anagrams, and red herrings here and there. *Magpie Murders* is so cleverly constructed that even Dame Christie might approve.