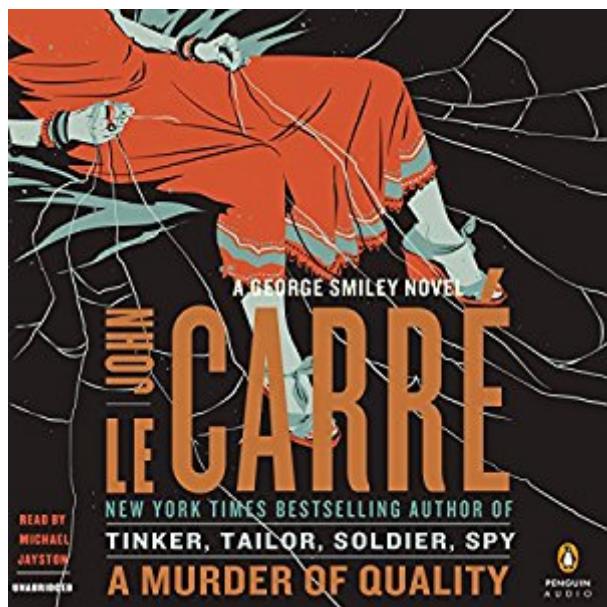


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A Murder Of Quality: A George Smiley Novel



Synopsis

John le Carré's second novel, *A Murder of Quality*, offers an exquisite, satirical look at an elite private school as it chronicles the early development of George Smiley. Miss Ailsa Brimley is in a quandary. She's received a peculiar letter from Mrs. Stella Rode, saying that she fears her husband - an assistant master at Carne School - is trying to kill her. Reluctant to go to the police, Miss Brimley calls upon her old wartime colleague, George Smiley. Unfortunately, it's too late. Mrs. Rode has just been murdered. As Smiley takes up the investigation, he realizes that in life - as in espionage - "nothing is quite what it appears."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This slim book is fascinating as an introduction to le Carré's earliest writing. It was written in the 60's and preceded by "Call For the Dead." Both books feature George Smiley but are not of the spy venue, but are more classic mysteries. His unfortunate marriage is referred to and there is a hint of the work he had done and is perhaps still doing in the spy field. But we must wait for future works to get a true taste of Smiley. A murder in the prestigious private school, Carne, propels Smiley into a search for the murderer. There are many twists and turns and a dramatic denouement at the end. The story in all is quite dated but one must remember that it was written in the 60's. As a fan of the later le Carré, I found the book interesting and really quite a neat mystery story but when you compare with his later work, it is quite innocuous. I am indeed grateful that he swerved to go into the espionage field and give us so many truly fascinating books.

A Murder of Quality is the second of LeCarre's novels that feature George Smiley. Unlike the others in the series this novel is not about the Cold War and espionage, at least not overtly. In this one; a woman with whom Smiley worked during the war contacts him. She publishes a small Christian paper and has a subscriber who fears that she will be murdered. Smiley investigates and eventually finds the murderer. It is a classic murder story but not a spy story or is it? I did find myself wondering why the paper was kept in business by the owners. Is it owned by British intelligence? There might be more to this murder mystery than meets the eye or perhaps not. Smiley has to solve a murder and also face his wife's past. It's ironic that the basically decent and brilliant Smiley is considered unsuitable for his higher class but serially unfaithful wife. LeCarre includes much social comment about Britain as he leads Smiley to the solution of the crime. Things are not what they seem and Smiley's investigations lead to truly nasty revelations. The twists, turns and betrayal that are LeCarre constants are present in A Murder of Quality. The reader gets to see the author as he is developing his craft. A Murder of Quality is a murder mystery and perhaps LeCarre was considering pursuing this genre. Instead he reinvented the spy story incorporating seaminess and betrayal. A Murder of Quality shows us how deep his talents as a writer are.

Having first read Absolute Friends, by John LeCarre, I decided to go back to the beginning and read all of the author's works in chronological order. The first in the Smiley series was Call for the Dead. In that novel, we learn much about Smiley and get a glimpse into the world of spycraft. In the second Smiley novel, A Murder of Quality, spycraft takes a backseat to an average murder mystery. I look forward to reading the 3rd Smiley novel, The Spy Who Came In From The Cold, because I expect that it will be continue in the same manner as Call for the Dead. I rated this book 3 stars as it is not a bad read. It is simply a read. Not great, not bad, but just a touch above average. This is not a knock on the author's style, as he is clearly gifted. This is more so a knock on a novel that lacks much suspense and intrigue. In a genre (the British Murder mystery) clearly dominated by the likes of Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, P.D. James, Martha Grimes, and the like... this story pales in comparison. I would certainly suggest reading the book if you, like me, are interested in reading the entire Smiley series; however, I would temper your expectations if you are looking for an enthralling read. A solid 3 stars.

A Murder of Quality is a mystery in the admirable tradition of English murder mysteries with the addition of an extra character, the English Public School System. Usually novels in the genre "English Murder Mystery" are full of quirky British characters and quaint English villages. To these

Le Carre has added another hallmark of Britain, the institution of the British Public School. All the best people, particularly men, are products of these exclusive boarding schools, and for better and worse, they mold the character of their charges and leave life-long impressions. The pleasure of this novel is the finely drawn characters it serves up. Le Carre is a master of revealing character with dialogue and descriptions that, in a sentence or two, say all that needs be said about the weakness and strength of a subject. This is an early novel in Le Carre's career. The skillful portraits of character drawn here are a preview of the genius later to be fully realized in his later works with George Smiley as the protagonist. While more direct, and less complex and subtle than his best works, it still delivers the pleasures of a good tale, memorable characters and a work prepared with craft and intelligence.

George Smiley, formerly of the British Secret Intelligence Service, now fidgeting in unhappy retirement, gets a call from a wartime colleague. Miss Ailsa Brimley runs a small newspaper; one of her subscribers has sent a letter predicting her own murder. On the heels of the letter comes news that the woman in question has been brutally murdered at Carne, a very old and very private school. Who else should take the puzzling case but a former spymaster? Such is the premise of "A Murder of Quality", John LeCarre's very decent second novel, first published in 1962. Smiley, who has connections at Carne, undertakes a private investigation with the tacit approval of the local police, who suspect a local mentally disturbed woman. Smiley's investigation leads him deep into the plotting, petty politics, and jealousies of the school staff, where he finds many suspects and more than a few lies. The murder mystery is carefully plotted; the solution may not be obvious until late in the novel. LeCarre works in some harsh satire on private schools, but the real fun may be watching him fill out the character of the non-heroic Smiley, who would go on to feature in several of LeCarre's hard-edged but excellent espionage novels. "A Murder of Quality" is highly recommended to fans of LeCarre and of George Smiley.

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