



Towards Zero

Agatha Christie

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An elderly widow is murdered at a clifftop seaside house...What is the connection between a failed suicide attempt, a wrongful accusation of theft against a schoolgirl, and the romantic life of a famous tennis player? To the casual observer, apparently nothing. But when a houseparty gathers at Gull's Point, the seaside home of an elderly widow, earlier events come to a dramatic head. It's all part of a carefully paid plan - for murder...

Towards Zero Details

Date : Published 2002 by HarperCollins (first published June 1944)

ISBN :

Author : Agatha Christie

Format : Paperback 301 pages

Genre : Mystery, Crime, Fiction, Classics

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From Reader Review Towards Zero for online ebook

Fuad Al Fidah says

[illegible]

Nandakishore Varma says

Even though most mysteries start with a murder, actually it is the end - culmination of a lot of events at a common point. Or so says one of the characters in this novel.

This is the theme of this book - events moving towards a murder: towards zero.

That it starts with a murder is of no matter. By the time one finishes the book, one will understand the appropriateness of the title.

This book features my favourite Christie policeman, Superintendent Battle.

Lewerentz says

Je ne connaissais que l'adaptation ITV qui introduit Miss Marple et était curieuse de lire l'original.

rachel • typed truths says

This is the third Agatha Christie novel I've picked up... and the third I've enjoyed! While *Towards Zero* was certainly lacking the edge-of-your-seat levels of suspense that made her *And Then There Were None* so fantastic, it still had its merits and was worth the read. It was more in tune with *Murder on the Orient Express* in the sense that the book built up until a jaw-dropping finale, but lacked the certain addictive spark for the better part of the story.

The concept of this book was brilliant, and the idea to execute it was clever. Unfortunately, it was also a little dull and well, tedious, I guess. The 'towards zero' theory is that a murder does not truly occur in the single moment of a purposeful slaughtering of someone, but rather weeks, months or even years before hand, as a multitude of events need to occur prior to the murder in order for everyone involved to be in the place at that certain time with those motivations at the exact moment of the murder. I had never thought about murder in such a way, but it's so true and I was interested in seeing it played out... until I realised that the murder wouldn't occur until well into the book and then it would take until the very, *very* final chapter for everything to fully make sense.

This is probably the best way to create an ridiculous amount of suspense, but it also meant that there was a fair amount of waiting... and waiting for someone who isn't very patient - **guiltily points to myself** - isn't the best idea. I got bored. I knew something was going to happen, so wading through all the character development and drama was difficult.

With all that being said, this honestly was the most shocking and unexpected endings. I did *not* see it coming *at all*. I was literally so flabbergasted my mouth was hanging open in awe! I just did *not* think that that would be the ending. I mean, it made sense afterwards but still, I just... **shakes head with awe**. I have nothing more to say than it was a perfect ending.

Overall, while this wasn't my favourite Agatha Christie novel so far. The ending was mind-blowing, but the beginning was a little lackluster and I never really came to care for any of the characters. I'd definitely recommend *And Then There Were None* over this one, but I'm glad I picked this one up still.

Luffy says

It's been some time since a murder mystery has imposed on my mind so heavily. Even when this mystery had all its clothes on, you could guess the promise it contained. I kept thinking, and the question and the curiosity, the suspense and the wonder, they kept occupying my mind. As the pages flew by, the time to say goodbye to Inspector Battle came too soon. At least Miss Marple starred in 13 of her books. Poor Battle was shunted aside in the public's stampede for Poirot.

I guessed wrongly regarding the culprit. I fell for one of the many false trails painted by Mrs Christie. I react strongly to the narration of life and how it's being wasted, in more ways than one, by this great author. The main characters here are Nevile, Audrey, Kay, Ted, and Mary. The most mysterious of them was Audrey, whose secret feeling was not anger, love, or sadness, but fear. I never thought that she was the culprit, and I could have guessed rightly who was, but then I got waylaid.

I was amused by the inimitable Mr Treves. When an author like Christie has a limited number of

brushstrokes at her disposal for painting a character, then one like Treves often walks a fine line between brilliance and parody. I was very entertained by this situation, and Mr Treves played like a retarded and oblivious person who thinks he's being very observative. Finally after being slightly disappointed by the real solution, I was cheered by the downright creepy lovey dovey ending. Agatha Christie must generate a happy ending, no matter what. But then she probably knew her audience too well. Nevertheless this book has secured its perfect score, and time has come for me to escape, even if some people in the book don't want to!

Mike says

As far as Christie mysteries go somewhat forgettable. Heck, I don't even remember when I started this. It was only due to an unexpected road trip and many hours in a car that resulted in this book getting completed. It has all the hallmarks of a classic Christie mystery: colorful characters, mysterious murders, secret pasts, and so on and so forth. But no aspect of it really stood out, especially compared to all of Christie's other, better mysteries. It may be because Superintendent Brattle just isn't as interesting as Poirot or Marple and no one character really stole the story. It was a perfectly serviceable story but not one of Christie's highlights.

Oh, and if you can get a version of this story (or really any Christie mystery) voiced by Hugh Fraser do it. The man does a fantastic job with all the different British accents and voices, makes even a middling book enjoyable to listen to.

Eustacia Tan says

I love Agatha Christie, really love her. And you know, Towards Zero is really different from her other books, in a good way. It sort of stars Superintendent Battle as our lead detective, and has a very unique sort of murders.

You see, Towards Zero postulates (that's a word that should be used more often) that a murder begins before someone dies. After all, it starts when someone decides to kill. And so, a murder occurs, and it's not as simple as it seems. There is Mr Strange, his first wife Audrey and his second wife Kay, all visiting his elderly relative when she's murdered. Add in a whole cast of characters and you have so many suspects you don't know what you're going to do.

The book is generally, really good, with interesting characters and a strong plot, except for two things:

One, Mr Treves, the guy who introduces the idea of "Zero Hour" dies halfway through the book. WHY???? - sobs-

Two, in the last few chapters, some dude called MacWhirther suddenly appears, falls in love with Audrey and proceeds to become the key to solving this case. Again, WHYYYY????

I thought Agatha Christie was above cheap plot tricks like this. Why couldn't she just keep Mr Treves alive till the end, and let him help the police? I don't mind if Audrey ends up alone forever, she's not a favourite character of mine anyway.

Basically, this was a generally awesome book because it was a departure from Agatha Christie's normal

books. I just wish that there wasn't this sort of plot trick inside (ok, but since it introduces a character and not a new piece of evidence at the last minute, I can sort of overlook it).

First posted at Inside the mind of a Bibliophile

Amorfna says

Ono kad se poklopi slobodna nedelja, prazan splav, ladno pivo s limunom i odlična knjiga. Sasvim pristojan letnji dan u Beogradu.

Da stvar bude neobičajna, jedna napomena vezana isključivo za ovo jeftino izdanje uz Blic Ženu, Prevod opet Liber Novus (s kojima već vodih rat ovde zbog očajnih prevoda). Ovaj put prevodilac potpisan i prevod mnogo kvalitetniji nego u prethodnim izdanjima.

Sve ide na bolje.

Roxana-Melina Chirilă says

I'm starting to get a pretty good idea of what Agatha Christie's narrative style is: you take a cast of characters, give them some motivation, have a murder, and solve it all through talking and *psychology*, more or less. And "**Towards Zero**" is no exception - but it feels like it focuses more on motivation and the mindset of a murderer than others.

The philosophical point of "Towards Zero" is that murders begin long before they're committed - all the pieces start being set into place long before anyone dies. It's an interesting idea and Agatha Christie takes care to show us events months before the murder and how the characters slowly make their way to the isolated house where someone will be killed.

I'm not sure if it was me or the less than stellar translation (I unfortunately read the Rao edition), but I found "Towards Zero" a bit difficult to follow in the beginning, as I got lost in the who's who of characters. Even so, eventually the love triangles became interesting: the most obvious one is Audrey-Nevile-Kay; Nevile was married to Audrey, but divorced her to marry younger and prettier Kay. However, both women are courted by (childhood) friends, with dubious success.

Christie plants a number of red herrings in this one and some are quite convincing - I kept wondering what was going on and why the victim was the person who actually died. Good stuff. What I'm less convinced by is the side details: the near-suicide of a character who's told he won't try to kill himself again because nobody ever does (?!), the random plot about a girl being accused of theft at her school, a random love story at the end and a woman deciding that the other guy who loves her doesn't really know what he wants, so never mind him... They felt like false notes in an otherwise good book.

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Hirdesh says

REVIEW SOON.

Very much intriguing one.

Emma 1 says

I loved *Towards Zero*. It was such a page turner and the title gives the novel a feeling a movement and destination. I loved the detail that was given to the back story to the murder and the anticipation of who was going to be murdered, due to the delay of the actual murder. I thought this was an excellent novel structure.

I found the structure of this novel interesting and wonder if anyone reading it guessed the murderer or worked it out? I found there were very little clues in this novel. I found there was only one real clue and this was revealed very late in the novel. For me, the murderer's identity was kept 'hidden' and it was difficult for the reader to work it out. It was an interesting way to structure the novel and keep the novel such a page turned.

I loved the character of Mr Treves, he was intriguing to me and someone I wish I heard more from. I'd love to see him in more of Agatha Christie's novels. Superintendent Battle is a wonderful character, a very logical thinker not easily taken in by fads. He reminded me a little bit of Miss Maple in that solving this crime involved his observing behaviour he had seen before in someone else (something Miss Maple often refers to when explaining her thinking).

James says

I'm breaking all the rules here. I had been reading my way through the Agatha Christie canon book-by-book in chronological order. Generally I was managing to get through a couple, or more, books per year. Suddenly – and very generously – my parents bought me a copy of *Towards Zero* for Christmas. As the fifth of the Superintendent Battle books – and the thirty-fourth published Christie novel – it was going to take me a while to get to. In fact, based on my current reading pace somewhere between 10 and 15 years. When I pointed this out my parents suggested that they couldn't really guarantee to be around to hear what I thought of it by then; so, seeing as most Christie novels aren't really interlinked as a series, it seemed fairer to bend the rules slightly and read this one out of order...

The story itself jumps straight into classic Christie fare: a large number of people (read: suspects) are gathered together for an unimportant (to us) reason. Some of them obviously have pre-existing histories with each other; some of them (we believe) are meeting for the first time; and, of course, not everybody is necessarily who they claim to be. The zero of the title, it is explained, is the time of the murder we are

moving towards. The murder itself is the time zero, the events and reasons that lead up to this point are as important as the murder itself.

However, this is a book that could have been so much better. It has all the teasers and all the fantastic suspects we love; all the twists and turns; all the suspects briefly in the spotlight of suspicion before the story moves on. But, ultimately, Battle is a non-detective in this. He barely influences the resolution at all. The crime is actually wrapped up by some random passer by who happens to be in the area for a totally unconnected reason. With this being Christie's last outing for Battle maybe she just wasn't feeling the love any more. Up until the unsatisfactory ending though, it was thoroughly enjoyable.

BrokenTune says

'I like a good detective story,' he said. 'But, you know, they begin in the wrong place! They begin with the murder. But the murder is the end. The story begins long before that— years before sometimes— with all the causes and events that bring certain people to a certain place at a certain time on a certain day.'

What makes a good detective story? Suspense? Atmosphere? An outrageous plot? Memorable characters? Twists?

As with many others of Christie's stories, *Towards Zero* relies on a set of characters, the type of which is already familiar to Christie's readers. The setting (a version of country house) and plot (erm....murder), is also in line with the expectation of the "typical" Christie novel. What I had not expected was for Christie to actually question the whole setup of her "typical" story by proclaiming that the story cannot stop with the detection of the murderer but that it needs to reveal the background in order for the story of the murder to be understood.

It's almost like Christie used this story to prove that the police investigation needs to include an understanding of the psychology of the characters involved in order to successfully solve the crime. But did she need to do this? Surely, the fact that her Marple and Poirot act as the psychologists to aid the inspectors in her other books is proof enough that there is a partnership between the two?

Towards Zero does not feature Marple or Poirot but instead has Inspector Battle, who takes on the role of the "enlightened" policeman. We learn early on that he has little time for amateur psychology, and later we learn that he is also capable of trickery - although, Christie stays away from implying that there is a member of the police who would use trickery to get a murderer to confess. No, she added a different character to do this.

Which brings me to one of the few complaints I have about the story - the multitude of characters. There are so many of them that it is hard to keep track of. Some are mentioned, but then disappear in almost the next scene - with no relevance to the story.

Were they included to merely bulk out the pages?

I mean, I really enjoyed the main plot and characters, but I wish she had spent more time fleshing them out, rather than just throwing new characters in the mix. Maybe getting to learn more about the characters would have also helped the ending, which reminded me of the somewhat creepy relationship in Du Maurier's

Rebecca:

(view spoiler)

Clare Snow says

TW: Suicide

Want a love triangle and insta-love in one book? Christie was all over that before we were born.

Not her best work - things got stupidly convoluted by the end. And I think this may be the most red herrings she's ever packed into one book.

My 2010 copy is a reprint of the 1944 first edition. On the flyleaf is some hilarious WWII propaganda telling the reader to listen to the BBC because that's the only place you'll get truth in reporting. None of this false news the enemy sends out. Trump would be proud.

Veronique says

4.5

What a devilish book this is!

It is no secret that Agatha Christie is one of my favourite authors, and in this novel, she truly excels. Slowly, inexorably, all the pieces of the chess, or mystery, are put in place awaiting the final scene - the murder - but things are of course not what they appear. The tension grows while all these characters meet, cross and finally come together. No Poirot present, although mentioned, but a very competent Superintendent Battle.

This is definitely one of her best. The less you know, the better the experience :0)

Jaksen says

Did you ever notice if you're channel-surfing on TV and you pause in the middle of a CSI or Law and Order type show that people are just talking-talking-talking? Around a desk. Walking down a corridor. Standing in a police garage or the morgue. They TALK. And talk, and move and talk some more, always explaining something to someone about something they've discovered or guessed or figured out. The writers try to make all this TALK interesting by having the actors move and use different locations, but it's just one big ole info-dump played out on the screen. Constantly explaining STUFF.

That's this book. TALK. Dialogue. Incessant. With lots of exclamation points! My these English do shout a lot. Never seen so many of these - !!!!!

So between the talking, about the deaths of two people, and descriptions of the multiple suspects, this novel is a continuous info-dump. Okay, a lot of murder mysteries are like this, especially those featuring a lot of suspects who are altogether in a house, or on an island, or on a train. (In this case it's a mansion on a cliff overlooking the water.)

(Had Christie lived a little longer she could have had a murder on a space station, where all the suspects are stuck together for months on end. Or on a reality show in a house they supposedly can't leave until they get voted - or killed - off.)

Anyhow, in this story the talkers/murder suspects include a tennis star, his wife, his former wife, her friend, his friend, the wealthy lady's companion and a handful of servants. The police don't enter the scene until rather late but then they talk, too. A lot. In fact I'd say about 75% of this book is talking.

There's also a would-be suicide who's introduced late in the story and I was like, what? Who is this guy? Where did HE come from. (A little bit contrived in my opinion, even for a Christie story.) Anyhow, not my favorite of Dame Agatha's, so it's gets only three stars from me.

But maybe for a talkie, info-dumpy mystery, not half bad.

Ramya (Idea Smith) says

Towards Zero could be called a classic whodunit - a murder mystery, multiple suspects each with the motive and the means. Agatha Christie's charming manner of introducing her characters and defining them with their individual quirks engages the reader. The setup of the plot seemed a little obvious. Midway through, I was already constructing situations in my head over which character would be murdered in order to deliver the maximum tension, so crucial to a book of this genre. The case analysis, clue-finding, examining suspects, building logical scenarios are what draw me most to mysteries & whodunits. Here the book started to lose me. It felt too obvious, too simplistic, even superficial. The ending was quite disappointing, not for what it was but how it was presented. Twists and unexpected endings are practically expected in this genre. But Towards Zero's conclusion felt too thin, too up-in-the-air for my taste. It's a book for a long train journey. But it's really not a book that I'd recommend as a must-read or one that promises great learning/stimulation or anything more than the most superficial of reading pleasure.

<http://ideasmithy.wordpress.com/2011/...>

Sophie Hannah says

Brilliant. Elegant and spare like The Body in the Library. No Poirot or Marple, and I did slightly miss them - Superintendent Battle doesn't work as well for me - but is still one of Agatha's best, most well-plotted stories.

Suvi says

Re-read 23.09.2017 From 4 to 5 stars.

None of the books I'm currently reading have been drawing me in during the past few days, making me watch movies and BuzzFeed Unsolved instead, so I felt like continuing my little project of re-reading a few of my favorite Christies.

Towards Zero is a bit different with Superintendent Battle as the main crime solver (mind you, influenced by Poirot's methods), and although he comes across as a bit bland with no distinct personality, the case itself is excellent (despite the creepy and pointless ending). The mood feels a bit darker for some reason, and the weather descriptions and the big house as the murder scene reminded me of *And Then There Were None* (1939). The relationships between the characters and the idea that certain events ultimately come together to point zero, the murder, add a little extra spice into the mix. The psychology in general behind people's behavior is at its best here.

At first, when I thought I remembered the murderer and things started to take an obvious route, I wondered what had appealed to me the first time around, but soon the genius of it all became clear. Bluffing not once, not twice, but three times? Yes, please. So satisfying. I breezed through this in two days, and now I feel a bit jittery. I. Want. More.
