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When the vicar's wife discovers that her unmarried housemaid is pregnant, sometime detective and full-time Freudian, Mrs. Bradley, undertakes an unnervingly unorthodox investigation into the mysterious pregnancy.

The Saltmarsh Murders Details

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From Reader Review The Saltmarsh Murders for online ebook

Terri says

Mrs. Bradley is an interesting, odd and slightly dark character. This was my first of these books (I LOVE the tv series with Diana Rigg -- though I have to say, other than the name, not a lot is the same). I found it very amusing and enjoyed trying to follow her logic along the way.

The story itself was interesting but not overwhelmingly so. A couple murders, a missing baby and a bunch of secrets. There was one piece of the puzzle I truly didn't get though despite explanations and it didn't make sense to me so all in all I am going with an okay but pretty funny book and I will read another.

On a final note, I did like Noel, the narrator and bit of sidekick

Sadie Slater says

I picked up Gladys Mitchell's *The Saltmarsh Murders* in the Oxfam bookshop, because I'm always interested to try new-to-me 1930s detective stories, and grabbed it off the top of my to-read pile last week when I was looking for an easy read to follow *To Lie With Lions*.

The Saltmarsh Murders is the fourth of 66 detective novels featuring Mrs Beatrice Lestrade Bradley, psychiatrist and amateur sleuth. In this novel, she turns her attention to the death of a young woman who has recently given birth to an illegitimate baby (and the disappearance of the baby) in the South Coast village of Saltmarsh, where she was paying a visit when the murder was discovered. She is aided in this by Noel Wells, the slightly dim curate of the village. Noel also narrates the novel in a first-person style which clearly owes a lot to Wodehouse, who he mentions being a fan of.

I wasn't sure the Bertie Wooster-esque narrative was a natural choice for a detective novel, and Noel is a very sloppy narrator, with events coming out of sequence in a way that made it quite hard to follow the plot at times. The book also features a black character and contains the kind of period-typical attitudes to and language about race that are pretty hard for a modern reader to stomach, as well as some period-typical attitudes to class and a couple of incidences of painfully rendered yokel accents. Most of the characters felt very two-dimensional, with the only one who really took on any life at all being the village madwoman, Mrs Gatty, and I didn't actually find the mystery plot particularly compelling. I don't think I'll be seeking out any more of Mitchell's books (although I think I might have at least one more that I bought as a Kindle bargain years ago...).

Uncle says

The offbeat and weirdly funny mysteries of Gladys Mitchell may be an acquired taste, but nonetheless can prove quite addictive. Fortunately for those addicted readers, Mitchell was an incredibly prolific writer. *The Saltmarsh Murders*, published in 1932, was her fourth mystery, and features as sleuth, her now-famous character Mrs. Bradley.

Mrs. Bradley is a wealthy widow, one with a thorough background in Freudian psychology. She is a weird character, a bit frightening, yet not without unexpected kindness and sympathy. She speaks her mind and seems to take quiet delight in ruffling feathers and hitting nerves. Her unconventional opinions frequently shock Noel Wells, the earnest young curate narrator *The Saltmarsh Murders*. Wells is an intelligent and sympathetic character, but his lack of self-awareness is irresistibly funny to Mrs. Bradley, and to the reader.

The troubles at Saltmarsh begin shortly before the village fete, when the minister's unpleasant and neurotic wife discovers her housemaid is pregnant. Cast out by her employers, the girl is taken in by a local couple, whose interest and involvement in the her troubles seems a bit sinister. A series of nasty pranks and public outbursts follow, their increasing violence ultimately leading to murder. In the mean time, well-kept secrets are revealed, and every villager's "dirty laundry" is hung out for their neighbor's perusal.

Fans of both "cozies" (mysteries set in quaint little towns) and mysteries of the "Golden Age" of crime fiction, will likely find *The Saltmarsh Murders* to be very entertaining. Mrs. Bradley is no doubt a peculiar character, but not without much humor and some sweetness. *The Saltmarsh Murders* is sweetly macabre little gem of a very English murder mystery.

Orinoco Womble (tidy bag and all) says

My first Mrs Bradley. Imagine Miss Marple with a degree and an attitude. All the classic ingredients of the English village cozy mystery--with a touch of MacBeth's wierd witches. I'm not saying there's anything paranormal in the book, there isn't. But Mrs Bradley is decidedly odd. Having come in at Number 4, I may have missed something in the character buildup, but she is not endearing. Few of the characters are, really, from the bumbling Watson stand-in to the principal suspects; even the "nice" village folk are a bit hard on each other.

The writer's time and personal mentality are very much in evidence in her use of language to pigeonhole people and personalities, even when Mrs Bradley is not speaking--and of course the British class system is alive and well. So you have the vicar and curate referring to their parishioners as "the rustics" (hardly a compliment), and everyone of the upper village echelon referring to "women of her type", "men of that type" do this or that, or think this or that. I did rather object to being informed repeatedly, in the mouths of different characters, that "women of that type" (ie showgirls and other working-class lasses) apparently *don't mind being knocked about by their men, in fact they expect it*. After all, as Bradley blithely asserts, she could leave him if she really minded. For all her "psychology", la Bradley doesn't seem to know much about the dynamics of abusive relationships. Oh, and BTW--the author's idea of "black English" was just music-hall stupid. Ugh.

All right as a bedtime read, but a little convoluted and involved. A few too many subthreads, and the end was rather silly; I'm used to "library scene" reveals, with someone telling how it all happened, but this was...um, yeah. I'm also used to Holmes and Poirot setting themselves up as judge and jury, but...yeah. The fact that the author had to have an "appendix" with Bradley's personal diary, explaining her ideas and elucubrations along the way, tells me that I'm not the only person who found it confusing. Apparently the author did, too.

Alan Marston-Gill says

They get better and better!

Just finished this book, number 4 in the series and it's the best so far. The previous one, number 3, went on for a long time before Mrs B came on the scene. It had got a bit turgid by then, couldn't quite work out where it was going, but came to life when she popped up. But this one had me chuckling from start to finish, even more outrageous characters than in the first three books. Can't wait to see what wondrous twists and turns number 5 will have for me. Perfect reading later for cold winter days and nights!

Whistlers Mom says

If you love classic British mysteries, you MUST read the Mrs. Bradley series.

Few people today know the name Gladys Mitchell, although those who watch PBS are familiar with her most famous detective - Mrs. Bradley. For decades, however, Mitchell ranked with Christie, Sayers, Marsh, and others as a popular mystery writer. From 1929 until her death in 1983, she cranked out at least one book a year and frequently more. Most of them featured the "reptilian" psychiatrist and detective, Beatrice Lestrade Bradley.

There seem to be no biographies of Miss Mitchell, which is a shame. I'd like to know how a girl whose father was a "market gardener" was able to go to university in 1919, a time when the English working class had almost no access to anything but primary education and also a time when the higher education of women was still violently controversial. But go she did and became a teacher of English, history, and games (P.E.) She started writing in the mid-twenties and published her first Mrs. Bradley mystery in 1929.

For years she continued to teach from necessity, since her books earned her only about fifty pounds each. In the 1950's writing became a bit more lucrative and she stopped teaching. Within three years, she was so bored she went back to teaching and kept at it until she finally retired for good in 1961. Maybe she agreed with Edmund Crispin that working with young people is the best possible occupation for learning about criminal tendencies.

THE SALTMARSH MURDERS (published in 1932) was the fourth Mrs. Bradley mystery and is generally considered to be one of the best. A number of Mitchell fans have compiled lists of her books from best to worst, although there are so many that by the time you read them all you've forgotten the first ones you read (if you haven't died of old age.) I think it's interesting that most of Mitchell's books are written in third person, but SALTMARSH and THE RISING OF THE MOON (another general favorite) have narrators. Perhaps that's a technique the author should have used more frequently.

It is, like all "cozy" mysteries, a faithful retelling of day-to-day life in its setting and its time. If you want to know how life really was, read a mystery written by a woman. What's notable here is the strict observance of class lines, the friction between the generations (the "Roaring Twenties" having reached even this isolated village,) and the shocking (to us) acceptance of racism, economic inequalities, and domestic violence Mrs.

Bradley's state-of-the-art (for the time) psychiatric pronouncements don't stand the test of time, but she's an endlessly fascinating old dame all the same.

As to the plot, it's full of twists and turns and red herrings. I wasn't really sure whodunit until the end, and several other characters were just as plausible as the guilty party. The real charm is the eccentric characters and the likable (if pompous) narrator who says of his beloved's younger brother's antics, "But of course fourteen year old boys just don't think along the same lines as other human beings...." The experienced school teacher speaks!

Ivonne Rovira says

I love the classic detectives of the Golden Age of British cozies: Miss Jane Marple, Miss Maud Silver, and Lord Roderick Alleyn. But I have a new favorite: Mrs. Beatrice Bradley. She's considerably less likable than any of the aforementioned, what with her yellowed, shriveled looks, her cackling laugh, her domineering personality, and her malicious wit. Yet, she's so sly, and the satire of early 20th century refined society is so delicious, that I think she may well dethrone Miss Marple in my heart. (Forgive me, Dame Agatha!)

In this novel, Mrs. Bradley sleuths out the murderer of a "ruined" housemaid who had been keeping the father of her illegitimate baby a secret. Needless to say, police officials leap at the obvious, only to be shown up by "the Bradley," as curate Noël Wells calls her. The curate narrates the tale, and his timidity and conformity to the conventional thinking of his day only add to the fun. So does his lack of self-awareness, which lead Reverend Wells to make some unintentionally funny remarks.

Of course, I love the television version of Mrs. Bradley; however, that production, featuring a more chic and less quirky Mrs. Bradley, is quite, quite different from the books. You can view the television programs without ruining in the least the enjoyment of the novels.

Ali says

I have read many books from the "Golden age of crime" before, not to mention many other novels written in the years between the wars, and certainly there are many times when attitudes of the time jar terribly with what is acceptable today. However generally speaking - it is at least explainable, and the reader can set things in the context in which they were written and move on. However in this book - which is the first Gladys Mitchell I have read - there was language and attitudes particularly to race - which I actually found offensive. There is a black servant character in the book, and so I would hope that other Gladys Mitchell novels - not featuring black characters wouldn't be so overtly racist. The story itself was really quite readable - but it was spoiled for me by the stereotyping of this minor character. Alongside that issue - was the fact that some years ago I saw the TV adaptations of The Mrs Bradley Mysteries - which I thoroughly enjoyed - and now know bore no relation whatsoever to the books, why Dame Diana Rigg was ever cast, as the wizened, shrieking, yellow skinned elderly sleuth beggars belief.

Alexander Inglis says

The Saltmarsh Murders by Gladys Mitchell, is a series and an author -- incredibly -- I did not know before. Mitchell began her mystery writing career in 1929 and is pretty much a contemporary of Agatha Christie. Her heroine ... through 66 novels! ... is Beatrice Adela Lestrade Bradley, or "Mrs Bradley" as she is referred to in this early outing, first published in 1932.

Random House Vintage has reissued a half dozen of the (mostly) early titles. This one bears the tagline: "A quick-witted, clever mystery from the Golden Age of crime writing" and that sums it up nicely. It is quaint in some ways, but also unexpectedly funny in other places. There are vicars, and pubs, and secret passages ... and murder. Like a number of Christie novels, this one has a fairly long lead in of facts and characters before the story really starts to take off. So prepare yourself for a leisurely entrée into the world of Saltmarsh, as narrated by the young deacon, Noel Wells, and the surprising characters that inhabit this town.

Ian says

One of the classic 'Golden Age' crime mysteries.

I really like the Gladys Mitchell Mrs. Bradley books. For that period, Gladys Mitchell touched subjects that many authors would never go near. But she managed it with such panache, that she pulled it off time and time again.

I enjoyed my third or is it my fourth reading/listening of the book...oh well, no matter. These books are always a joy to read or listen to (we need more audiobooks, please). If you like quirky, off the beaten track mysteries, these will fill the spot.

If you like the review and would like to read my other reviews on books I have read, visit my blog at www.finalchapterreadersgroup.wordpress.com..... like, comment and follow.

Kelvin says

An early Mrs. Bradley story in the classic cozy style set in a small village called Saltmarsh. Mrs. Bradley was visiting the village when a number of oddball incidents happened, together with two murders. Like most Mrs. Bradley stories, there are a lot of psychoanalysis stuff as well as description of Mrs. Bradley's odd features. There are quite a few subplots going around. However, I find the story long-winded and tedious, especially the first half. The book has a useful village map that lays out the geography of the key buildings and roads. It would be more useful had the map been put at the beginning of the book like so many of her contemporaries do instead of hidden in the end with the denouement. At the very end of the book is an appendix, which is Mrs. Bradley's diary on the case. That serves as a very useful short summary on the whole case from beginning to end. This is also the second case Mrs. Bradley claims credit for murdering a person (in this case shock a murderer with a weak heart to death through uncovering the crime and identifying the murderer).

Meo says

Mrs Bradley is a strange detective, but engaging and entertaining. The Saltmarsh Murders hinges upon pregnancy, murder, smuggling and a village fete. It is unlike many "Golden Age" whodunnits, relying on psychology and anecdote over interrogation and fingerprints. It's a heady mix - perhaps, written in the 1930's, it needs some of the racial elements toned down - but seriously in need of rediscovery and reappraisal.

Debbie says

Enjoyable for anyone who likes classic mysteries, but with its archaic language, rude stereotype of a black character and dated take on psychology, in many ways a hard go. Mrs. Bradley is definitely an odd duck, a unique character in a field of eccentric great detectives. The plot gets curiouser and curiouser, and although I wanted to know the answer to all the riddles, I was a little disappointed with the outcome, especially as it depended on a most bizarre psychological evaluation of the culprit. Mrs. Bradley is always a character somewhat in the background and we hear about everything through the rather thick head of the young curate, Noel Wells. Mrs Bradley's journal entries at the very end of the book are amusing since we get her take on Noel as well as other characters. For a book published in 1932 I was somewhat surprised at the central place an illegitimate child and the presence of incest took in the plot.

Julie Barrett says

Another strange Mitchell mystery. I like it but I don't like it. Her books are odd and unsettling but in a sort of fascinating way.

This book was both dated and ahead of it's time. The straight faced Freudian talk is a hoot. Yet in other ways the book prefigures the amoral lurid aspect of many modern thrillers. The wildly broad stereotype of the one black character is cringe worthy. Yikes! However it's depiction of women's sexuality is so different from the usual 1930's mores.

A creepy book that I kind of like except when I don't.

Lydia Ruth says

I really enjoy Mrs. Bradley as a different take on the clever old lady solving the murder, but I get tired of the description of Mrs. Bradley and her cackle. I think it takes away from the crime. Additionally, I wasn't a fan of the narrator, because his arrogance really got to me after a while.

The case was interesting, but when it got to the end, and you learned the full story. It fell a little flat to me. Maybe at the time it was unique and sensational, but to read as a modern reader, it felt like an overdone plot to me.

All of that is negative, I still think Gladys Mitchell is a phenomenal writer and crafts great mysteries and characters, so I will definitely be reading more in this series.
