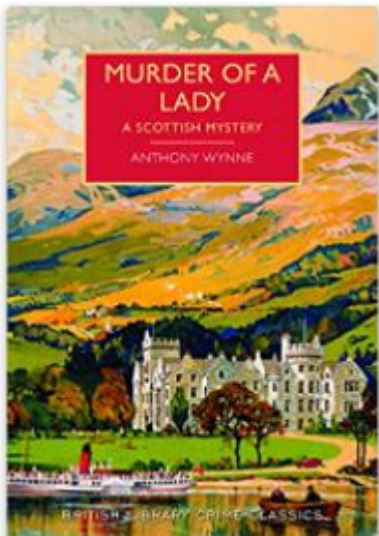


**Anthony Wynne**  
*Murder of a Lady*



**Angela**

This book proclaimed itself from the start as a 'locked room mystery,' the so called 'impossible crime,' so I had an idea of the form it would take. To start with I really enjoyed it, I thought the Scottish castle setting was atmospheric, dramatic and very apt for a murder mystery. The writing was good and the characters interesting. However, the longer things went on and the corpses piled up, the more repetitive I found it. No new clues came to light by which one might actually solve the problem and the same lack of solution and circumstances were recycled. When we finally reached the conclusion I felt that it bypassed any likely clues entirely and the solution seemed to stand separately from the rest of the book. Nonetheless, overall I did find the book an easy and enjoyable read even if I did think the end was weak (and of course the solution has now been used in many guises for this type of crime novel). Good fun.

**Ann**

This murder mystery hinges on the behaviour of a bigoted old woman with fanatical ideas about loyalty to her family name and status. This leads her to controlling behaviour, which destroys the marriages of two families. She seemed to be behaving in an altruistic way, which turned out to be very evil indeed. Did she realise how wrong were her motives? She is murdered and we are left to discover the killer and the history of this impoverished, aristocratic family, and to solve the mystery of a murder in a secure room.

I love a detective story and was looking forward to this read. Written in the 1930s and set in Scotland, I was expecting to enjoy it, but found it rather slow; although four murders took place, including two detectives sent to investigate the murder of this apparently saintly lady. Mary Gregor believed she was doing what she thought was best for everyone, but was horribly misguided and controlling in a particularly nasty way. I was glad when she got stabbed! She was unmarried, didn't have any children of her own and felt compelled to take charge of her young relatives, against the wishes of their legitimate mothers. I found this part of the story very weak and unconvincing.

I thought the fish scale clue implausible, and the problem of the locked room where Mary Gregor was killed, became confused and muddled in my mind. In the end, after all the solutions presented, I rather lost interest in the conclusion.

### **Chris**

This is a “locked room “ murder mystery committed at the castle home of the Scottish Highlands laird Hamish Duchan. Written in 1931, the style and language is very old fashioned to modern eyes, with rather overbearing and misogynist male characters, the whole cast superstitious and class conscious. The storyline is ponderous and the dialogue melodramatic, almost like a stage play.

The book begins with the brutal murder of the laird’s allegedly kind and generous sister Mary and the crime is rapidly pinned on the allegedly flighty daughter-in-law Oonagh who lives in the castle unwillingly with her husband and son, as also are claims of her infidelity with the local doctor – all quite false.

The entire family are dependent financially on Mary, and it becomes apparent she has manipulated everyone around her to ensure it stays that way, with herself as the titular “Lady” of the castle and no-one else. It turns out that her cruel and mean spirit disguised as kindness ensures other women in the family are pushed aside, perhaps to their deaths, all to protect her own influence in the family, even to wanting parental control over the sick grandchild of the family Hamish. A visiting doctor who is an amateur sleuth completes the circle of cliché characters who search for clues, for me: a below par Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson meets Agatha Christie, with Dr Finlay’s Casebook dialogue stirred together with shades of Du Maurier’s Rebecca.

After the opening murder, the story rather plods on quite boringly amid red herrings and cries of “we’re all doomed!” (Aye, with almost laughable “something nasty in the woodshed” overtones, and mermaids too!). There are more strange murders at the castle within a short time, including even the police detective, until hardly anyone is left! Abruptly and unexpectedly the story comes to a hardly credible conclusion drawn by the visiting doctor-sleuth with little commentary. The solving of the mystery of the locked room I thought was ingenious but beyond belief, I was just glad the thing was over.

### **Jean**

This is an interesting novel by Anthony Wynn (the pseudonym of Robert McNair Wilson.) He wrote more than 25 mysteries but much of his work vanished.

In ‘Murder of a Lady’ there is a small cast of characters and I was left somewhat bewildered by the intriguing twists. The story moves fast and the novel held my attention.

There are faults, however, i.e. when the bruises around Mary Gregor’s throat are ignored for much of the plot.

The herring scale theme is fascinating but I’m not too impressed by the method of hiding the killer. Hailey, too, comes across, sometimes, as somewhat dull.

Nevertheless, I feel that the novel is a page-turner, and I was impressed by the Highland atmosphere.

The cruel character of the dead lady pervades Duchlan Castle and I feel that her punishment was justified.

Hailey is drawn into the case, if only to defend people he believes to be innocent of Dundas’s accusations.

The killer strikes again and again, without trace.

On reading the novel, I noted the frequent use of Latin phrases, and it occurred to me that Latin was more widely understood in the 1930’s amongst the educated classes.

On a scale of 1 to 10 I’d probably rate this novel as a 7.

### **Margaret**

This is a crime novel taking place in the nineteen thirties and three people are murdered including two detectives who had been sent to solve the first one!

The body of Mary Gregor, is found in Duchlan Castle, stabbed to death in her bedroom, but the

room is locked from within and the windows are barred. The only clue to the culprit is a silver fish's scale, left on the floor next to Mary's body. The murder victim had ruled Oonagh, her nephew's wife, with an iron hand as she had also previously taken over Oonagh's husband's life, Eoghan, from his Irish mother. She had also attempted to do the same with their own son Hamish's care.

The two suspects were Dr McDonald and Oonagh whom the detectives had assumed were having an affair. In the end the conundrum was solved by Dr Hailey, an amateur sleuth. The reader is kept guessing until the end following the unlikely culprits being accused. The way the murders were done and why they were done would certainly have been far fetched in a contemporary crime novel but *maybe* it could just about have been plausible, in the early twentieth century, or could the same thing happen to so many victims? The characters, apart from Dr Hailey and Dr McDonald were not particularly likable and the lady who was murdered initially, Mary Gregor, appeared to be especially dreadful and her brother, the laird of Duchlan was a weak man who wasn't much better than his sister.

But who would have suspected the old nurse, Christina, who was cutting ice at the time, and dropped it on the victim thus causing the splash that had previously been heard in the burn and had added to the mystery..

### ***Sharon***

I find this book difficult to review as I enjoyed some parts more than others. I liked the period detail and the Highland setting and found that most of the characters were quite well developed, though we never found out much about the background of the amateur detective. The women were portrayed as quite strong people, though they seemed a little too keen to leap into the burn! The first victim was initially described as something of a saintly personality but one soon realized that, in fact, she was quite a controlling and reprehensible character. Her brother, the Laird seemed completely under her control.

As time went on and other victims emerged, there seemed very few characters left who could have committed the murders and I wondered about Christina but certainly did not see the twist with the ice shards coming. It still seems a bit implausible.

In spite of that, it was an easy and enjoyable read.

### ***Stephanie***

*Murder of a lady* was published in 1931 and was one of a series of 27 (or maybe 28) novels featuring the amateur sleuth Eustace Hailey. This book, and indeed Anthony Wynne's multiple books on impossible crime mysteries, were very highly regarded in the 'golden age of murder mysteries', however I felt that, 90 years after *Murder of a Lady* was written, it comes across as very dated. I was interested to see that it has been selected by the British museum to be published as one of the British Library Crime Classics so is, I assume, a good example either of the genre of the period or, more specifically, of the works of Scottish authors of the period and that I am failing to appreciate its finer points.

I thought that, to the modern-day reader the character development seemed rather weak resulting in very two dimensional characters and the final solution of the crimes was totally unbelievable. I feel that the works of other writers of a similar period seem to have stood the test of time rather better; Sir Arthur Canon Doyle was writing slightly earlier and his skill at both character development and building up the appropriate atmosphere is still enjoyable as are the works of Dorothy L Sayers and Agatha Christie.

Overall a worthwhile read because it made me think about the changing nature of the genre both from the point of view of the authors and the readers.

## ***William***

This title has not been the most compelling mystery story I have ever read. I found the plot to be rather strange and inconsistent. The medical duo knew more about solving crime than the professionals and I'm still unsure how the murders were committed and with what weaponry. The story ends rather abruptly, with no mention made of what will happen to the main characters and I lost count of the number of times Dr. Hailey 'took snuff' and 'readjusted his eyeglass'. On the plus side I did admire the quality of the text and the strong characterisation but the plot was very ponderous and convoluted. Is the 'whodunit' genre designed to keep the reader guessing? Aren't we expected to attempt to identify the miscreants before their identity is eventually revealed in the text? I am usually wide of the mark when determining the guilty party in fiction but I was convinced that access to the locked-room scenes of crime were either via secret passages in the old house or the discovery of a priest-hole that nobody else knew existed.

Both ideas seemed plausible but turned out to be inaccurate. However, the facts when revealed were even more unbelievable. At one point I started considering that Hamish the baby could have carried out the crimes. I wouldn't have been surprised if Miss Marple had put in an appearance and to my mind she would have become my prime suspect. The only confidence I held was that the crimes had not been committed by an aquatic beast that was half seal and half herring. The latter element leaving apparent clues at the scenes of crime designed to confuse the investigators, although I did review my thinking several times and later reinstated 'the beast' as a possible suspect.

Chapter XXV 'A Process of Elimination' was no help - followed by Chapter XXXI 'The Invisible Slayer' whose eponymous title just about summed up the investigation. The disadvantages of working entirely from instinct is that its incongruities are not conditioned by reason. What I require is a new direction to focus my nuanced mindset. If I had had a career in CID - the criminal fraternity would have become untouchable.

Two chapters stood out for me. The initial cross-examination of 'suspects' by Inspector Dundas and later the interviews conducted by Inspector Barley. Both were very well-written and quite believable given the book's timeframe and character - the former especially.

As always, some lines from the text impressed me, they included:

*He had the air of a modern jerry builder visiting a Gothic cathedral with no recognition of its beauty.*

*His wet clothes clung to his body inhospitably.*

*These good people lived within the ring-fence of a lie.*

*His comb, and his method of polishing his pipe on his nose, supplied the element of vulgarity which is necessary to the success of every charlatan.*

*Barley was transported already by self-congratulation where no whisper of doubt or criticism could penetrate.*

When I had finished reading the book I still wasn't sure who had committed the murders and had to wait until the final paragraph to discover the source of the herring scales.

I have to admit that on this occasion I lost the plot ..... literally.