



Envious Casca

Georgette Heyer

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A holiday party takes on a sinister aspect when the colorful assortment of guests discovers there is a killer in their midst. The owner of the substantial estate, that old Scrooge Nathaniel Herriard, is found stabbed in the back. While the delicate matter of inheritance could be the key to this crime, the real conundrum is how any of the suspects could have entered a locked room to commit the foul deed.

For Inspector Hemingway of Scotland Yard, the investigation is complicated by the fact that every guest is hiding something-throwing all of their testimony into question and casting suspicion far and wide. The clever and daring crime will mystify readers, yet the answer is in plain sight all along...

Envious Casca Details

Date : Published September 7th 2006 by Arrow (first published 1941)
ISBN : 9780099493662
Author : Georgette Heyer
Format : Paperback 384 pages
Genre : Mystery, Holiday, Christmas, Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review Envious Casca for online ebook

Susan says

Having read, and enjoyed, "No Wind of Blame," the first Inspector Hemingway mystery, I was keen to read the second. "A Christmas Party," is also known by the title, "Envious Casca," and has a similar, light and humorous touch to it, as the first mystery did.

At Lexham Manor, Nathaniel Herriard lives with his brother, Joseph, and Joseph's wife, Maud. Joseph has planned a family reunion for Christmas, although there is not really much goodwill to all men, or family members, emanating from Nathaniel. It is clear, in fact, that this party is very much the wish of Joseph alone, who seems keen to try to get the 'young people,' together for Christmas.

Guests include Nathaniel's niece, Paula, who wants her uncle to back a play she wishes to appear in and who has brought the playwright, a young man called Willoughby, as her guest. Paula's brother, Stephen, has also arrived, along with his pretty, but vacuous fiancé, Valerie. There is also distant cousin, Mathilda and Nathaniel's business partner, Edgar. Nathaniel is a difficult and argumentative man, who has rows with his business partner, objects to his nephew's fiancé and (understandably) resents having a play he is not interested in read aloud to him over Christmas. When he is killed, there are a plethora of suspects and quite a few motives, revolving around the important issue of who inherits Nathaniel's fortune.

I really enjoyed this, although I did not think it was as good as the previous Hemingway book, for the simple reason that the culprit was, in my mind, fairly obvious. I am hopeless at spotting 'whodunnit,' so, if I was sure of who was responsible, then I'm pretty sure most other readers would be too. Still, an enjoyable read and – should your own relatives drive you crazy at Christmas – you can read this and know you are not alone is objecting to having to socialise during the festive season! Personally, I felt deeply for poor Maud, who just wanted to sit by the fire and read her book...

Hannah says

Rating Clarification: 3.5 Stars

My final Heyer mystery, and while not a personal favorite like Why Shoot a Butler?, it was certainly up to par with almost all other Heyer whodunnits. This is a true "locked room" murder in every sense of the word, and while I figured out the "who" of the crime pretty early on, I never did figure out the "how" until the final reveal.

As usual with Heyer's stories, her cast of characters fulfill every "ic" I can think of: eccentric, acerbic, and sarcastic, and if her characters do come across in every book as interchangeable stereotypes (which they do), at least they are well done stereotypes; the kind you would enjoy spending a few hours of reading time with.

All in all, I'm pleased with my Heyer whodunnit reading adventure and look forward to re-reads in the distant future - perhaps in my retirement years :D

Two things that will alert the reader to the resolution of the murder (do not read the spoilers below unless you really want to be ahead of the game):

1. (view spoiler)
 2. (view spoiler)
-

Anna says

'Interesting!' said Inspector Hemingway. 'It sounds to me like a mess. I don't like the lay-out, I don't like the locality, and if I don't find a whole crowd of suspects, all telling a lot of silly lies for no reason at all, my instinct's all wrong, and that's all there is to it.'

'That's right,' said Hemingway cheerfully. 'And all the time I wouldn't be a bit surprised if the clue to the whole mystery has been under our noses from the outset. Probably something so simple that a child could have spotted it. Life's like that.'

'If it's as simple as all that it's a wonder you haven't spotted it,' said the Sergeant sceptically.

'It's very likely too simple for me,' Hemingway explained. 'I was hoping you'd hit on it.'

Georgette Heyer, *Envious Casca*

It's another country house party. It's Christmastime and the family, complete with a curmudgeonly patriarch, has been brought together to celebrate the traditional holiday. Everyone has arrived with ulterior motives and two unexpected guests.

Of course, there's a murder!

Heyer wonderfully captures the underlying tensions of the house party and the annoyance of everyone at having their Christmas disrupted by a murder.

Fun read!

Kim says

The second last in my 2011 project of reading all of Georgette Heyer's mysteries, this was a fun read. It's an old-fashioned mystery of the locked room kind, complete with an old house, cantankerous victim, eccentric suspects and plenty of red herrings.

Heyer is not, in my view, the most talented of British Golden Age mystery writers. To my mind, that accolade goes to Dorothy L. Sayers, although a number of other writers of the period also deserve high praise. That said, a Heyer mystery has its attractions. This one, like the others, has lots of style and is easy and undemanding to read. It also has some snappy dialogue and witty one-liners as well as an obligatory romance. While I guessed the identity of the culprit (with luck rather than through a deductive process), I didn't work out how the murder was done until seconds before the big reveal. This was a plus, because there's nothing I hate more in crime fiction than solving the mystery before the detective has come even close to working it out.

I re-read a number of Heyer's romances fairly regularly. They are amongst my favourite comfort reads. While I may not read the mysteries again, I've had lots of fun with them over the past few months. It has been particularly good to tackle this one as a buddy read with my friend Jemidar.

Recommended for Heyer completists and fans of British Golden Age crime fiction. For me this is was a 3-1/2 star read.

Anbolyn says

What a delight! This country house, locked room mystery is a clever and savagely funny puzzle that is set during the Christmas season. How can you not enjoy a mystery that has a library book as one of the major clues to solving the murder? I'd definitely like to read more Inspector Hemingway stories by Georgette Heyer in the future.

Laura says

Murder at Christmas — hasn't it crossed everyone's mind? There may be even more motives in this family gathering than in your own, though. At the estate of crabby old Uncle Nathaniel, a disparate assortment of relatives and their even more bizarre significant others assemble to spend an awkward Christmas, made even more awkward by the unflagging cheerfulness of Uncle Matthew, who wants to put up tacky decorations and play parlor games. Naturally someone is murdered...but murdered without a weapon in a room locked from the inside! The "how" is as interesting as the "who", but the real charm of this book is in Heyer's characterizations of all the loopy relatives.

Joe says

This is a classic locked-room murder mystery. But it's the incredibly annoying - yet very entertaining - cast/suspect list that made this a five star book for me.

Carol ?? says

I read all of GH's mystery/suspense books (other than *Footsteps in the Dark*) many years ago. At the time my favourite was *Death in the Stocks*, but I have just read these two back to back & my new favourite is *Envious Casca*.

Before I start my review I'll just get two things out of the way. Many reviewers in many reviews of GH's books here have mentioned her fondness for recycling characters & it has never been more obvious than in comparing these two novels. Stephen is an even more unpleasant Kenneth Vereker, Violet becomes Valerie. This time *The Good Sort* is the breeder of Bull Terriers not *The Sister*. Did GH only like this particular breed of dog?

& maybe reading *Mary Stewart's* again has highlighted it so I'm seeing it *everywhere*, but GH was a smoker herself & smoking features heavily in this book. Changed times now, where you don't see boxes of cigarettes on tables for your guests to help themselves to (that would now be a recipe for bankruptcy)& I can't remember seeing anyone use a cigarette holder since the 70s - & it looked affected even then!

What I loved about the book was her character actors (or *dramatis personae* as Hemingway would say!) GH

clearly had a lot of fun with bumbling Joseph, blank page Maude, overbearing Mummy & the glacially correct Sturry. By GH's standards this was a well constructed mystery although (view spoiler) & the wonderful Hemingway is the lead detective!

Highly recommended!

Miriam says

[This is no exception; the only surprise is anyone actually liking the jerk back. (hide spoiler)]

Carol says

The Hook - 'Tis the season!

The Line(s) - *"It was Joseph who had been inspired to organize the house-party that was looming over Nathaniel's unwilling head this chill December. Joseph, having lived for so many years abroad, hankered wistfully after a real English Christmas. Nathaniel, regarding him with a contemptuous eye, said that a real English Christmas meant, in his experience, a series of quarrels between inimical person bound to on another only by the accident of relationship, and thrown together by a worn-out convention which decreed that at Christmas families should forgather.*

The Sinker - It's the time of year when my heart turns to Christmas stories, generally not the murderous mystery kind and yet somehow this is the second I've read this season.

I'm a fan of locked room mysteries and this one fits the genre. If you read the summary you'll know there's a murder but I'm still going to include the next passage in a spoiler.

(view spoiler)

This is the first book I've read by Georgette Heyer, now deceased. She was a prolific author who wrote many a regency romance and detective stories. Not a fan of romance, I thought Christmas Party the perfect opportunity to acquaint myself with her writing style.

In addition to my love of locked room mysteries, there were many other pluses to this somewhat cozy mystery. Written in 1941, you can imagine that it was a kinder, more genteel style of writing. All the action takes place in one setting so like a play there's lots of dialog and description of the stately home and its furnishing. I could see and hear the characters like I was in the room with them. The humor is subtle but actually funny, and the mores are purely of a time long past. The lines I quoted above are often how family get-togethers go though intentions of good-hearted souls yearn for the Christmas's of their youthful memories.

In a word, nostalgic; two words, classic mystery; three words, jolly good fun.

Katrina says

Despite being fairly predictable and having unlikeable characters this is a good read.
<https://piningforthewest.co.uk/2017/1...>

Sophia says

A Holiday Whodunnit with a behind locked door country house party setting was a delicious prospect. I eagerly turned this audio version on and settled in for some enjoyment. It wasn't as sparkling as I expected in that it was draggy and some of the characters came across as annoying more than humorous many times, but still afforded me a good mystery. I figured out quickly enough who did it and why, but I was pleasantly surprised as to the how.

The jocular old uncle staying with his crotchety brother at Nat's country house is determined to have a Christmas house party. Joseph pulls together a motley group of people and there is no hope that his naive attempt will end in disaster. Nat's niece, Paula, brings with her a promising young playwright and hopes to convince him to back a play when he doesn't even care for such stuff and definitely doesn't want Paula involved. His nephew, Stephen, an argumentative young man brings down his fiance' whom Nat sees as a little gold-digger and can't stand. Then there is Nat's business partner who irritates him with the latest business proposal. Joseph and his distant wife Maude along with family friend, Matilda round out the party. It is ghastly from the start and then this is compounded by Nat's murder behind the locked door of his room. Inspector Hemingway has his work cut out for him with so many suspects and motives, but stuck on the means and opportunity with that frustrating locked door.

As I said, it was a teaser, but I worked out some of it. The characters were mostly cantankerous types, but yet I did find their rancor fascinating. It was amusing to have the vapid, stunning yet a bit cunning Valerie and her histrionics set against her opposite, the placid and uninterested Maude always looking to bore people over her book on Elisabeth of Austria. It was a low-key murder and mayhem piece that I found engaging.

The narrator, Ulli Birve, did a splendid job once again with the second book in the Inspector Hemingway series. She had a large cast of quirky characters and she produced them well. She is a great storyteller.

All in all, this was a good period mystery. Not the best by the author, but still engaging.

Nicole says

Deviously deceiving characters depicted with acerbic wit. The title is perfect because it must be taken from Shakespeare's play Julius Cæsar. Mark Antony, in Act 3, scene 2, says "See what a rent the envious Casca made: Through this the well-beloved Brutus stabb'd; And as he pluck'd his cursed steel away, Mark how the blood of Caesar follow'd it"

A locked door mystery with excellent clues. This is the first book I've read by Heyer with a woman of character. Heyer often projects her characters one way then fills them in so you see them and change how you see them. This is true of Uncle Joe's wife Maud in this one and unusual for Heyer's older female

characters.

Uncle Joe had collected her from the chorus line at some point in his travels but now she is plump, comfortable and unwilling to bend or conform to others expectations just because she is a woman. She simply allows the barbed comments and bickering to flow around her staying focused on her interests. No one listens to her so she doesn't bother trying to talk to them any more.

Sheri South says

Definitely not Heyer's best, or even the best of the mysteries. Supposedly this is a Christmas book, but when all the characters except Uncle Joseph are just too, too sophisticated to do anything but sneer at the prospect of decorating a tree or putting up decorations, it loses whatever holiday atmosphere it might have had. Speaking of the characters, I understand that in a mystery, SOMEONE--preferably several someones--has to be capable of committing murder. But in this book, not one character is particularly likable. Even Matilda, while sympathetically drawn, lacked sufficient personality for me to really warm up to her. Other reviewers have pointed out Stephen's nastiness, so I'll just note that, while many of Heyer's Regency heroes have this same quality, for some reason I find it more forgivable in them. I'm not quite sure why this is; maybe because they possess a sense of humor that is sadly lacking in Stephen. On a related note, I was never convinced that Stephen would succumb to the wiles of a lovely airhead or, more specifically, her mother. We're told repeatedly that Stephen cares for no one's opinion, and we see his rudeness toward just about everyone except Matilda, so it's difficult to imagine how he could be manipulated into offering marriage. (It's interesting to note that Heyer doesn't offer any specifics; maybe she couldn't think of a plausible scenario either, and so left it vague.) This book is useful for rounding out one's Heyer collection, but it isn't one I'll be returning to very often, even at Christmas.

Dawn says

I'd say I'm of average intelligence (no comments on this please!), but I checked the percentage when I was fairly certain who the murderer was and it was only 22% (basically when the body was discovered). I then sat (bored and a little irritated) and read the remaining 78% - 'Why?' you may well ask. Well, firstly because it was actually Christmas time whilst I was reading it, and secondly I thought (hoped) 'perhaps there will be an ingenious twist at the end and I'll be wrong'. But I wasn't, so the remaining 80% was quite excruciating as it seemed *so* obvious to me.

Can't win them all, at least it was a quick read!

Nicole D. says

At the Christmas house party in his house(one he didn't want but his brother made him have)Nathaniel Herriard is found murdered stabbed in a locked room. Who could have done it? His business partner Mottisfont who he didn't see eye to eye with or maybe it was his ill-tempered nephew Stephen or could it be his niece the actress who wanted her uncle to give her money for a play or the playwright Roydon or the pretty little idiot engaged to Stephen. There is no shortage of people who could have murdered Nathaniel.

I always love Heyer's characters. She makes them all come to life even the housemaids that you don't even know the names of. With a paragraph Heyer can tell you more about a character than some authors can do in 2 or 3 books. My favorite scene was the reading of the play Wormwood. It was pure genius.

Maud, Nathaniel's sister-in-law and her book the Empress Elizabeth kept me laughing. Mathilda was my favorite character. She has a sharp tongue but is also kind. I did like Stephen against my better judgement. He really is a jerk but his wit was always great. I do wish Heyer had kept Hemingway the detective with his other partner. I don't like his new partner and they don't have as great a chemistry together as him and his other partner. Overall a nice fun Christmas mystery.

Rating: 4 out 5

Content Rating: PG

Keeper: Yes

Siria says

A quick and undemanding read, though not one of Heyer's better novels. I'd worked out whodunnit and the method before the first detective showed up to investigate. In the absence of mystery, the dialogue and the characters had better be top-notch, and here they simply weren't.

WhiskeyintheJar/Kyraryker says

"Damn it, he was in here with the door locked!" Stephen said. "He can't have been stabbed!"

I think Heyer wrote a story about people she hated in real life, relished and had a hell of a time making them (an exaggerated version) vapid, insipid, and whiney; but oh so highly quotable. This is second in the Inspector Hemingway series and god love the man for the testimonies and evidence he has to shift through to discover the killer. As a locked door mystery, it's pretty good. The cast of characters is varied but small enough to keep track of and most work as plausible red herrings, I was wrong with my first guess as to who the villain was. The first half is mostly setting the scene with introductions and glimpses into characters' personalities and hints to possible murder motivations as they arrive to the house party. The second half is where the murder occurs and the whodunit gets going. It's a bit slow going as first the sergeant and then Inspector Hemingway arriving on the scene talk to everyone but then the clues start rolling in and the story starts to make headway. How the murder occurs was a little goofy but I would classify this as a cozy mystery with some romance inspirations sprinkled in, so it's all in good fun.

The following quote is a bit of a spoiler and my little comment after it, you'd know who ends up pairing up and probably figure out two characters who aren't the killer. Beware! You can pick back up at the Bonus :)

Lest you forget this is a Heyer and those romance inspirations I was talking about,

He pulled her rather roughly into his arms. "O God, Mathilda, do keep me in order!" he said, in a suddenly thickened voice. "I need you! I need you damnably!"

She found that her own voice was unsteady. "I know. You are such a fool, Stephen: such a dear impossible fool!"

"So are you, to care a damn for me," he said. "I never thought you did. I can't think why you do."

She took his face between her hands, looking up at him a little mistily. "I like savage creatures. Bull-terriers and Stephen Herriard."

Hey, you leave bull-terriers out of this! I had a contentious relationship with Stephen but he, somewhat, redeemed himself in the end. But seriously, bless her heart and all the Mathildas in the world who take these men on.

Bonus:

Heyer provides us with your next time you want to leave work early excuse. If someone accidentally brushes up against you:

Nathaniel at once became a cripple. He said: "My lumbago! Damn you, don't do that!" and tottered to a chair, one hand to the small of his back and his manly form bent with suffering.

Lumbago! Works every time.

Julie says

Envious Casca by Georgette Heyer was written in 1941.

Joseph wants to be have a holiday party and has invited his niece and nephew, and their current significant others, as well as his brother Nathan's business partner. Apparently old uncle "Nat" was not the holiday cheer type and was up and down with a painful malady, making him grumpier than usual. Having all these people under one roof proved not to be such a grand idea when Uncle Nat was murdered in his bed.

This is a classic "locked door" mystery set during the holidays, making this a good mystery to pull out this time of year. Suspects and motives abound as Inspector Hemingway tries to sort through the evidence and alibi's.

This classic mystery might have you thinking twice about congregating your family under one roof for a little holiday gathering.

This book is a part of my personal book collection and one I've always wanted to read, but somehow never got around to. I'm glad I decided to sneak it in my holiday reading list this year.

This one would appeal to all mystery lovers, but especially to those that enjoy British mysteries and classic mysteries. A+

Ange H says

Did not finish/no review.

This was the worst party ever. I left early.
