



Murder at the 42nd Street Library

Con Lehane

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This first book in an irresistible new series introduces librarian and reluctant sleuth Raymond Ambler, a doggedly curious fellow who uncovers murderous secrets hidden behind the majestic marble façade of New York City's landmark 42nd Street Library.

Murder at the 42nd Street Library follows Ambler and his partners in crime-solving as they track down a killer, shining a light on the dark deeds and secret relationships that are hidden deep inside the famous flagship building at the corner of 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue.

In their search for the reasons behind the murder, Ambler and his crew uncover sinister, and profoundly disturbing, relationships among the scholars studying in the iconic library. Included among the players are a celebrated mystery writer who has donated his papers to the library's crime fiction collection; that writer's long-missing daughter, a prominent New York society woman with a hidden past, and more than one of Ambler's colleagues at the library. Shocking revelations lead inexorably to the traumatic events that follow—the reading room will never be the same.

Murder at the 42nd Street Library Details

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Author : Con Lehane

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From Reader Review Murder at the 42nd Street Library for online ebook

Betty says

I found the plot engrossing and original. I was disappointed that much of the story was mixed and a lot of unnecessary verbiages. It was necessary to repeat the reading in order to know which character and location the words talking about. I found the characters one side.

Disclosure: I received a free copy from St Martin's Press through NetGalley for an honest review. I would like to thank them for this opportunity to read and review the book. The opinions are my own.

Matt says

First and foremost, a large thank you to NetGalley, Con Lehane, and St. Martin's Press for providing me with a copy of this book, which allows me to provide you with this review.

In an interesting mystery premise, Lehane takes readers inside the famed 42 Street Library to discover that there is more than reading taking place. As the novel opens, a man is murdered for reasons unknown and the only witness, Director of the Library, Harry Larkin, is unable to identify the assailant. This does not stop Ray Ambler, curator of the crime fiction collection, from honing his amateur sleuth skills. When it becomes clear that there is some connection between the murder and a recently acquired collection of documents from famed author, Nelson Yates, the plot thickens a little more. Ambler tries piecing things together, but is cautioned by a friend serving as homicide detective on the case. With numerous potential suspects, all tied to the library in some way, the case takes many turns and leaves the reader to wonder who could have the ultimate motive. After a series of events finds Nelson Yates killed as well, the suspect list intensifies and there are deep secrets that come out, some of which have been simmering for decades. At the heart of it all is the director, whose past life as a Catholic priest serves to offer more mystery than answers in the story. As Ambler works to follow the clues, he, too, becomes trapped in a web that he did not see and could find himself in a situation that none of his fictional counterparts could have seen coming. An interesting premise tackled by Lehane, though delivery has its own pitfalls, which might leave readers feeling tepid.

This is my first experience with Lehane, so I am unable to judge this book against any of his other work. I am also not a professional writer or editor, so it is easy for me to toss out issues, having never fought the war to create a published work. However, as I have been asked for some honest sentiments about the piece, I would be remiss if I did not bring a few things to the reader's attention (as well as the author and editorial staff). While it is enriching to have a number of characters in a mystery novel, Lehane fails to compartmentalise them, which has them popping up here and there, albeit briefly, and had me reaching for a scratch pad to keep them all straight. While this may seem like a weak criticism, tied to the second issue I will raise below, it does prove onerous on the reader who seeks to push through the novel and get to the heart of the matter. Secondly, and tied to the first, is the scattered use of all the characters in vignettes through each chapter. Rather than focussing attention on a small collection, building the drama and character development, Lehane plunges readers into these small dialogues or narratives best suited for stage plays, and confuses the reader rather than providing a much needed flow. I will admit, the ever-alternating scenes does have its place and when Lehane uses them towards the end of the story, it does provide dramatic effect to build to the murder revelations. I was not able to feel any connection to the characters, other than Ray

Ambler and perhaps one other, whose mention here would prove to be a spoiler. On the positive side, Lehane is able to utilise a wonderful setting (both the library and New York City) to keep the story moving ahead. I would have liked more of a sleuth-centric novel, with Ray using his day job to offset his personal passion, rather than have him offer less than 100%. Call it a desire to see more of a Jessica Fletcher character (for those old enough to remember *Murder, She Wrote*) whereby the character is completely involved and offering the police crumbs as needed. While I had some issues in the early stages of the book, I was able to find enjoyment as the mystery unfolded and enjoyed how it all came together in the end, even with that little twist to keep the reader curious. Would I rush back if this became a series? I think I would give it a second try to see if I could find comfort in more of Lehane's writing. As of now, I remain firmly rooted to the fence.

Kudos, Mr. Lehane for this interesting novel. While I can be a fickle reader, I do enjoy how you were able to present your story and think there is potential for more success.

Like/hate the review? An ever-growing collection of others appears at:
<http://pecheyponderings.wordpress.com/>

Carol says

I find that I will probably not be you all's favorite friend in GR. I've noted that there are many fans of Con Lehane in this group, and my introduction at least through this book "Murder at the 42nd Street Library" comes across as a bust. One would think that with a title like that, it would be a dream book the kind everyone just loves to read. I'm sure I'll get poo-pooed. I'm ready!!! Don't know why this one was so unappealing to me. Don't know if I'll try another or not. Again I'm sorry if I offended you.

BookBrowse says

"Oh that 42nd Street Library! Even after the immense pleasure of knowing many of these people, the descriptions of the library, its stacks, and its offices are even more reason to read this mystery. There are continuous sighs of envy as more and more of it is revealed, imagining oneself there, and realizing that Lehane got to essentially live in this library twice – once for research, and then again in the writing of the novel. This will certainly happen a third time when the second book comes out, and there's no doubt that Lehane has a lot more to mine, both in the library and in mysteries to come. Library lovers are welcome here." - Rory Aronsky, BookBrowse.com. Full review at: <https://www.bookbrowse.com/reviews/in...>

Carlos says

This book is as simple as it gets, the main characters are predictable, the mystery is simple , not a good book but not as bad as other librarians I work with led me to think. This is a beach read if there ever was one. Very easy read .

Steven Z. says

A murder that takes place at the 42nd Street Public Library in Manhattan is an unusual venue for a mystery concept. However, this is exactly what Con Lehane has created in his new and very effective novel, *MURDER AT THE 42ND STREET LIBRARY*. One afternoon, Dr. James Donnelly enters the office of Harry Larkin, the Director of Special Collections at the library and is shot dead. Larkin, a medieval historian and former Jesuit priest becomes very defensive about the murder he has witnessed when questioned by his friend Raymond Ambler, the curator in the collection of crime fiction, and a Tai Chi aficionado. Ambler, who dabbles in solving real crimes is friends with Mike Cosgrove, the NYPD detective who is in charge of the new investigation. It seems that the elderly author, Nelson Yates, who suffers from dementia, has donated his papers to the library and a number of characters cross paths over the new collection. There is Donnelley's ex-wife, Kay; biographer, Maximilian Wagner; Wagner's wife, Laura Lee McGlynn; Adele Morgan, a colleague of Amblers at the library; Benny Barone, a library researcher; Yates' young wife Mary, the elderly Yates, and Dominic Salerno, a mob type. All of these people are key to the web Lehane creates as he spins his tale, particularly when feelings are ruffled when Yates decided to give his collection to the library as opposed to other bidders.

Yates is very concerned about his collection because there are letters he has written to his estranged daughter Emily who left home at fifteen. Yates fears that if Wagner, who is writing a new biography of him gets hold of the letters it will destroy any hope of a reconciliation with his daughter, as well as his literary reputation. The library staff has not followed library protocol and has allowed Wagner access to Yates' papers before they were catalogued. The papers, the intermingling of a number of characters, and their personal secrets form the basis of an extremely well-conceived and entertaining plot, particularly when Yates is murdered outside the library.

It is extremely interesting as Lehane lays out the different characters and how their pasts intersect. It seems that at one time Yates was a visiting professor at Hudson Highlands University in Rockledge, at the same time Max Wagner was an assistant professor of English, as was James Donnelley. Further, Kay Donnelly was an English graduate student along with Laura Lee McGlynn who was married to an English professor whose death is linked to Yates' daughter Emily. Just this brief snapshot in time raises some interesting questions about the two murders that have taken place and what these past relationships expose. By this juncture Lehane's plot should captivate the reader and lead to a very satisfying murder mystery experience.

Lehane writes in a very smooth prose and has not created the overly sarcastic main characters that other mystery writers rely on. Ray Ambler is a sensitive and somewhat intellectual type, and Mike Cosgrove is career NYPD who is trying to get his private life in order. As the novel progresses Lehane has the ability to drop a number of bombshells in a very subtle manner that the reader would never expect, and this approach adds to the story. My only criticism of the novel is that the final ending is somewhat farfetched but it does lend itself to another installment of Ambler and Cosgrove's approach to crime, which I look forward to.

Lizabeth Tucker says

When there's a murder at the New York Public Library, Raymond Ambler, curator of their crime fiction collection, finds himself involved in finding out who was responsible. He uncovers a festering cesspool of secrets in the process.

A good start that soon becomes bogged down by too many coincidences. A reader who isn't bothered by them will probably enjoy this book. Sadly I'm not that reader. Even the name of the main character, Raymond Abler, was a bit too "cute" for my tastes. For those unaware, it appears to be the combination of Raymond Chandler and Eric Ambler, two noir style mystery writers. Chandler was prolific in the 1930s-50s with hardboiled-style books. Ambler was more spy and thriller style in the 1930s-70s.

Ruined lives, sick love, pedophilia, child abuse and neglect, adultery, murder, all packed into 307 pages. The best thing about this book? The setting. Which is also why I picked this book up. However, I don't believe that I'll be reading the rest of the series or trying the McNulty series by this same author. It gained a .5 simply due to the cover and the location. Which we barely got to see. 3.5 out of 5.

Sara says

Good god above what a mess this book is.

I'm sorry but sometimes I just don't know how else to start a review.

I'm a reference librarian at a public library and I assure you I was positively giddy with excitement when I started seeing this book pop up in the catalogs and I put it on hold right away so I'd get it as soon as it arrived.

I mean seriously it just sounded marvelous. A murder in the famed New York Public Library where a curator in the crime collection lends his librarian skills to solve the case!? That's like every reference librarians wet dream! And what better setting then this ancient, gorgeous landmark to the noble profession of library science. There's so much history in just the building itself and I could only imagine the great characters the author could come up with. I mean can you imagine the kind of odd ball awesome patrons that probably come in on a daily basis? And its got to be like right on the front lines of the ongoing librarian war between the old guard that longs for card catalogs and number 2 pencils and the younger generation out to digitize everything in sight! Could you seriously come up with a better setting for a good murder mystery!?

I was excited about this is what I'm trying to say. Which is probably why I found so damn disappointing.

I'll try to sum up the story but honestly? Between the large and largely unidentifiable cast of characters, constant and very jarring changes in narrator, random sex scenes straight out of a bad porn, an overwhelming number of dubious red herrings, and no clear ending (seriously I re-read the end like ten times and I'm STILL not sure who murdered who) I'm not sure I can give you an accurate account of anything.

So we're introduced to Raymond Ambler who's a librarian in charge of the "crime room" at the NYPL. It should be noted, and author Con Lehane does, that the flagship of the NYPL is primarily a research library. Scholars, authors, students etc can come here looking for specific research or like a collection of a particular authors papers and get access to them. This isn't the sort of library where you wander the stacks, take books out etc. So Ambler is in charge of anything to do with crimes. For this reason he fancies himself something of a detective. The example we're given of his sleuthing prowess is that he once figured out that a death the police had decided was an accident was really a murder because he realized that the dead guys wife had a weird look on her face so obviously she was in cahoots with the family attorney.

Clearly criminal investigation skills in the NYPD are at an all time low if they're tapping this guy as the next

Sherlock.

Anyway one morning some writer is coming into Ambler's bosses office when he's suddenly shot to death. Harry, the boss, dives under his desk narrowly avoiding the murderer who runs off. The dead man in question is a writer who was doing research on another writer who's papers have just been purchased for the NYPL by an unknown donor. Lots of people, it turns out, want access to these papers or want to keep anyone else from getting them.

I know, I know you're already confused. So was I.

This book was just a mess. From the bizarre choice to have the main character go by Raymond, Ray or Ambler depending on who was talking to or thinking about him to the constant shift in narrators mid chapter to the endless cast of way too similar characters and just really bad writing I was constantly flipping back and forth trying to figure out who was talking and what the hell they were doing.

Lehane seems to have cobbled together a multitude of different mystery genre's into one book that simply does not work. You're initially thinking that you're going to read a cozy with a neat setting about a clever librarian solving a case and then WHAM! people are having porn sex and KAPOW! a bunch of guys are molesting a teenager and ZING! there's a secret love child of an alcoholic and a drug addict murderer!!! and suddenly its trying to be some sort of hard boiled noir where the local bartender might know a guy who can hook Ray/Raymond/Ambler up with a clue see and then we're hanging out with Ray/Raymond/Ambler's co-worker who's totally in love with him!!! if only he'd look at her!!!!

And the writing...ugh...I'm sorry its just awful. Fragmented sentences that I'm guessing are meant to show how tough Ray/Raymond/Ambler is are just that, fragmented sentences that make no sense. The dialogue is totally wooden. Bad guys are all "you don't know who you're up against smart guy!" and the lead detective is perfectly happy to share confidential information with a librarian and use him to interrogate suspects!? Meanwhile Ray/Raymond/Ambler seems to have Aspergers between his total failure to get basic social cues and his ham handed (police authorized!) "interrogations" that generally boil down to "you're hiding something. tell me what it is."

Then we have the descriptions. Here's a sample. Ray/Raymond/Ambler is on the subway;

"Black and Latina women; many of them he'd seen often enough to nod hello to and receive a small indication of recognition."

That, apparently, is a sentence.

In this scene Ray/Raymond/Ambler is describing to someone his deep insight into why murderer's murder;

"Sometimes, it's being in the wrong place at the wrong time; other times, a split-second choice, an impulsive act followed by a lifetime of regret. There are calculated, cold murders-for benefit, financial or otherwise; murders from hatred or rage, for slights real or imagined; some people murder because it's their job. Others, I guess, are the sad ones, from pain...of betrayal, unrequited love, or love that's too intense to bear."

So to sum up; people murder other people for literally any reason you can think of. Deeply insightful right?

Oh and by the way!? Could we have spent some time in the titular library!? You've given yourself like the coolest setting ever and we get to spend like no time in it at all. I think the most description we get is in the

prologue where the first murder victim walks up the grand staircase to his death. That's it! No time wandering in the collections or sitting with Ray/Raymond/Ambler while he admires some cool old texts or while someone archives some hundred year old papers. I was heartbroken. Seriously.

This book is a mess. In an effort to appeal to every mystery genre it appeals to none. Honestly? It made me angry because I was super excited about it and just the idea had so much potential.

Blech.

Lisa Ahlstedt says

I'm a librarian and bibliophile, but I've never heard of the 42nd Street Library in NYC, a fact that would surely shock and scandalize the author of this book. All throughout the story we get little asides along the lines of how even the most isolated tribes of the Amazon know about the 42nd Street library (eye roll). Aside from all the NYC locations, eateries and streets mentioned, the story is this: a murder is committed in the library, and librarian and amateur sleuth Raymond Ambler is determined to get to the bottom of it. The murder actually took place in the office of his boss, Harry Larkin, who was present but claims not to have seen anything (?). The murder seems to somehow revolve around the writing of a biography of author Nelson Yates. A whole crowd of people with various connections to Yates is current parked in the library doing "research" for the biography. Yates himself is still alive (although not for long) and is apparently unhappy about the man who is writing the biography. There follows a long stretch of not much happening, other than Ambler and his co-worker Adele becoming involved with a young boy and his single mother. The story never did really drew me in, and there were absolutely too many characters to keep up with. The final "twist" at the end also seemed a little cutesy and contrived. All in all, I wouldn't recommend this book, even with its tenuous library connections.

I received a free download of this book from NetGalley in exchange for this review

Amy says

A blurb on the front cover says, "Not to be missed." Well, I'm telling you -- you can miss it. If you're hankering for a story about a body in a library, try "The Paris Librarian" by Mark Pryor instead. The Pryor wasn't the most amazing book ever, but it was far better than the Lehane. I read both these titles back-to-back, which probably emphasized their differences.

Judy Lesley says

When I get set to read a novel written by an author I'm unfamiliar with I try to find some biographical information that makes me "see" that person. One of the uh-oh moments for me was when I read that author

Con Lehane teaches fiction and mystery writing. I'm about 50/50 in my enjoyment ratio of novels when I've found that information about an author. But, after all, this was a mystery novel about the 42nd Street library where those iconic lions help ground photographic evidence of New York City. So I began to read. Actually, except for some problems (mainly caused by his choice of such an iconic location) with pacing, it wasn't a bad read at all.

This library is for research only, it isn't a circulating library so anybody wanting to do research has to stay there and work in the various reading rooms devoted to specific subjects. That fact alone guaranteed that the characters in the novel would be present on the premises of the library for the greater part of the book. If they weren't actually inside, they were sitting on the front steps, sitting in the park adjoining the library, or walking around the library to hold private conversations. It got to be rather heavy on the "location" side of the novel after some time. It was also necessary for characters such as Ray Ambler - main character - to leave his job at all times of the day to pursue the mystery of the man murdered in the office of his boss. Obviously nobody is on the time clock at that job site. This man is so devoted to his job he even worked Saturday and Sunday. Hmm. So, as the story goes, there is a mystery novelist who has donated all his private papers to the crime fiction department of the 42nd Street library. Trouble is, now he doesn't want a famous biographer to have access to the papers because he expects a hatchet job revealing all his secrets. (So why did he give those specific papers to the library in the first place?) As the story begins a man enters the office of a library employee, the door opens, the man is shot twice and two shots are fired at the employee seated at his desk and yet he doesn't identify the shooter? There is history connecting everybody in this story going back to the 1970s at least and it all gets very twisty and turny as the investigation proceeds.

I liked the book, even though what I've already written may make you question that, but it made me wonder about some aspects of it. There is no way to specifically date when the story takes place, I think in modern day, but then why refer to one character as Mrs. and do it every time she's mentioned? It made me wonder. Do New Yorkers not eat at home? Never just pick up a sandwich from a deli on the way home and eat it in front of the television? You couldn't prove it by this novel with the exception of maybe once or twice so restaurant name dropping happens a lot. There is a tavern close to the library where some of the employees go after work andguess what....the bartender is the main character in another series of mystery novels by this author. Maybe that's when Ray solved the mysteries in the past which are mentioned in passing in this story? As I said, I liked this one and would be willing to read a second, but I'm not interested enough to check out the three books in the bartender, Brian McNulty, series.

I received an e-ARC of this novel through NetGalley and St. Martin's Press.

Kaye says

I very much enjoyed this first entry in a new series by Con Lehane. The protagonist, Ray Ambler, is a character I found to be very appealing, very interesting and who has, I think, many more secrets and stories to share with us. I look forward to following his story. I also am intrigued by the supporting characters, who are presented, warts and all, in a manner that I found to be believable and hope to see in future entries to the series. This book ended with a scene of hopefulness on many levels that I'm going to be impatient to read more about. I enjoy Mr. Lehane's writing style and wry humor, and the way he shared bits of New York with us was a delightful part of the story.

Melissa says

This book lost 2 full stars for being traditionally published by a wealthy corporation and yet skipping the final copy edit/proofreading stage.

As a librarian, I was excited to read a mystery with a librarian sleuth and a librarian protagonist. Only the librarians at the supposed NYPL Manhattan flagship - where I have been - seem to have very little to do and unlimited lunch hours, unlike actual librarians who get paid way too little and work way too much. On top of that, there are too many subplots and minor characters. A good mystery novel has a murder plot and the sleuth that solves it with maybe one subplot involving the sleuth and/or the victim. This has several subplots and a number of secondary characters who are supposed to be red herrings to the murderer but just clutter the story line.

The pacing is stop and go which is frustrating as well. Also, two plus two generally equals four - even in murder - so the fact that nobody in this book - the supposedly smart librarians, the homicide detective, the writer, etc. - figured out that certain people were THOSE people is ridiculous. All in all, I doubt I will read another book by this author and I certainly won't bother reading another mystery in the series that this launches.

Stacy says

Well, that was a twisty little pile of plot. Good book, great twists.

Clare O'Beara says

For a book set in a library, we spend no time in the actual library, looking at books. Which is very sad because I imagine the title has attracted all the readers. The writing isn't great and two main characters have letters A starting their first names; one of them also is called by his surname and short form of his surname.

This is a research library which means the building hosts collections of material either bought or donated and we get examples of both. The main character has a (fictionalised) section of crime books to organise but is not expecting a man to be shot dead as he enters the office. We spend a lot of time in that office, also in the park, the neighbourhood, the subway.

The main people we meet seem asexual and soft around the edges, which might happen if you spend your days sorting papers and filing on computer. So don't expect any kind of action scenes. The police detective sharing confidential information with a librarian and asking him to assist in enquiries is ludicrous. Police want the public not to interfere. I thought another reason should have been provided for the man continuing to be nosy. Or the author could just say he was nosy, or concerned in case a serial killer was going to kill library visitors at random. Actually, that's the strangest point. Nobody saw who did it, so no cameras protecting all this valuable material, and nobody even wonders if the rest of them are in danger. If someone gets shot in a public place with tourists outside, this isn't your average domestic dispute or drug deal, more like a madman.

Anyway there are some good points and we can learn about what a research library does.

I downloaded an e-ARC from Fresh Fiction. This is an unbiased review.
