What is a Literary Mystery?

Explanation

It does *not* mean that it is a book about books, lost parchments, libraries, librarians, or writers! Although it would not exclude those characters or settings.

It is not *just* about whether it is well written or not, or easy to read or not. Literary mysteries (like all books) can be well done or poorly written.

The key is this: a literary mystery will - to a greater extent - have some or all nine of the characteristics listed on the left side of the Rating Guide on the right. You can evaluate each of the nine elements along a continuum - as seen on the guide, using check-marks. Four to five checks far to the left of the dotted line probably qualifes it as a literary mystery.

If you end up with check-marks like those shown, it has some "literary qualities" but probably wouldn't be considered a literary mystery. I would suggest that *most of the books we read*, and most of the books marketed as mysteries/thrillers (crime fiction), *are not* literary mysteries.

Examples

- **ORDINARY GRACE,** by William Kent Krueger
- **THE FORGOTTEN GARDEN,** by Kate Morton
  A WORLD OF CURIOSITIES, by Louise Penny
- **THE LAST CHILD,** by John Hart
- **THE NAME OF THE ROSE,** by Eco Umberto
  WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING, by Delia Owens
  EVEN THE DARKEST NIGHT, by Javier Cercas
  WHAT'S DONE IN DARKNESS, by Laura McHugh
  NOTES ON AN EXECUTION, by Danya Kukafka
  MIRACLE CREEK, by Angie Kim
- **CHIEFS,** by Stuart Woods
- **BETTER THE BLOOD,** by Michael Bennett

- Books we have read in the Mystery Book Club

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Literary Mystery Rating Guide

Definitely a Literary Mystery — *Definitely NOT a Literary Mystery*

1 — This book was mostly about ideas. | This book was mostly a fun story.

2 — This book was thought-provoking | This book was a fun distraction.

3 — This book had a theme or lesson. | This book was just a story.

4 — This book had a lot of sub-text (symbolism / hidden meanings). | This book was a straightforward story.

5 — The characters in this book were deeply developed. | The characters in this book were lightly developed if at all.

6 — The main characters changed / evolved as a result of the plot. | The characters at the end of the book were about the same (except some possible injuries)

7 — The writing quality had beauty to it. | The writing quality communicated clearly.

8 — This book had several main (or sub) plots. | This book had one main plot.

9 — The ending was blurry: unsatisfying or unclear resolution. | The ending was clear and satisfying.