

Home → SparkNotes → Literature Study Guides → Murder on the Orient Express → Context

**CONTENTS**

Context

Plot Overview

Character List

Character Analysis

Themes, Motifs and Symbols

**Summary & Analysis**

Chapters 1–3, Part one

Chapters 4–5, Part one

Chapters 6–8, Part one

Chapter 1–3, Part two

Chapters 4–6, Part two

Chapters 7–9, Part two

Chapters 10–12, Part two

Chapters 13–15

Part three, Chapters 1–3

Chapters 4–6, Section three

Chapters 7–8, Section three

Chapter 9, Part three

Important Quotations Explained

Key Facts

Study Questions and Suggested Essay Topics

Quiz

Suggestions for Further Reading

How to Cite This SparkNote

**MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS**

Agatha Christie



Context



Agatha Christie was born in Torquay, England on September fifteen, 1890. She was the youngest of three children in an upper-middle class home. Agatha was schooled at home by a governess and tutors—a lifestyle later reflected in her novels. She was married in 1914 to Archie Christie, a W.W.I fighter pilot. While he was at war, Christie worked as a nurse. She first worked with patients, but was eventually transferred to the dispensary where she gained an extensive knowledge of poisons. Before Agatha married Archie, Agatha had discussed writing a murder mystery with her sister Madge, but Madge thought it would be too difficult her. Agatha devoted her downtime at the dispensary to proving her sister wrong.

*The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was not published until 1920. Agatha's first novel featured her most famous detective character, Hercule Poirot. Poirot became known for his eccentricities, waxy moustache and quick mind. He was a featured character in thirty of Christie's novels.

In 1926, Archie asked Agatha for a divorce. Agatha, already distressed by the recent death of her mother, drove off. Her car was found abandoned, with only a suitcase and some clothing in the backseat. Agatha's disappearance started a nation-wide manhunt, at one point 3000 people came out to look for the writer in the area her car had been found. About

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three weeks later she was found at a small hotel in a nearby town. Agatha claimed she had suffered a severe loss of memory, the British press claimed she had staged her own murder.

In 1930, Agatha married Max Mallowan, a young archeologist she met in Mesopotamia; much of Agatha's knowledge of the Middle East and archeology stems from her relationship and travels with he husband.

Christie is often regarded as the Queen of the Golden Age detective and mystery novels. *Murder on The Orient Express*, written in 1934, is considered a Golden Age, between-the-wars, or classic mystery novel. As in *Murder on The Orient Express*, also known as *Murder on the Calais Coach*, Christie's novels accurately portray the life of upper-middle class, British men and women of this period. Her novels put little emphasis on the working class; the books typically describe the lives of leisure class, rich tourists. In her later work, she attempted to script the lifestyles of the coffee bar, beat generation kids, but with less success.

*Murder on The Orient Express* was favorably reviewed and praised in England. It was made into a film in 1974 and is one of the most successful British films ever made. Even Agatha, who generally expressed dislike for film versions of her books, expressed appreciation. In 1981, a girl was murdered in Bamberg, West Germany, in the same manner Ratchett is killed in the novel and film. The murder was considered a "carbon copy" of the crime in Christie's novel.

In her lifetime, Christie wrote over sixty-six novels, short stories, screenplays and a series of romance novels under the pen of Mary Westmacott. In 1971 she was named Dame of the British Empire. Agatha Christie died on January 2, 1976.

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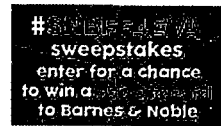
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Home → SparkNotes → Literature Study Guides → Murder on the Orient Express → Plot Overview

## CONTENTS

Context

Plot Overview

Character List

Character Analysis

Themes, Motifs and Symbols

### Summary & Analysis

Chapters 1–3, Part one

Chapters 4–5, Part one

Chapters 6–8, Part one

Chapter 1–3, Part two

Chapters 4–6, Part two

Chapters 7–9, Part two

Chapters 10–12, Part two

Chapters 13–15

Part three, Chapters 1–3

Chapters 4–6, Section three

Chapters 7–8, Section three

Chapter 9, Part three

Important Quotations Explained

Key Facts

Study Questions and Suggested Essay Topics

Quiz

Suggestions for Further Reading

How to Cite This SparkNote

## MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Agatha Christie



Plot Overview



Hercule Poirot, private detective and retired Belgian police officer, boards the Taurus Express train to Stamboul (Istanbul). On the train there are two other passengers, Mary Debenham and Colonel Arbuthnot. The two act as if they are strangers, but Poirot observes behavior that suggests that they are not. Poirot is suspicious of the couple. The train arrives in Stamboul and Poirot checks in at the Tokatlian Hotel. As soon as Poirot arrives he receives a telegram summoning him back to London. While waiting at the hotel for the next train, Poirot bumps into an old friend, M. Bouc, head of the Wagon Lit. M. Bouc arranges a space for Poirot on the Orient Express. In the dining room of the Tokatlian Hotel, Poirot first spots Ratchett and Hector McQueen eating dinner. Poirot know that Ratchett is an evil man and he describes him to M. Bouc as an animal.

Poirot board the Orient Express. He is forced to ride in a second-class cabin because the train is unusually full. Ratchett and Hector McQueen are also aboard the train. Ratchett approaches Poirot and asks if he will work for him, Ratchett tells Poirot he has been receiving threatening letters and that someone is trying to kill him. Poirot refuses the case. M. Bouc has taken the last first class cabin, but arranges to be moved to a separate coach and gives Poirot his space in first class. The first night Poirot sleeps in first class, he observes some strange

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occurrences. Early in the morning, Poirot is wakened by a cry from Ratchett's compartment next to him. The wagon lit conductor responds knocks on Ratchett's door and a voice from inside responds, "Ce n'est rien. Je me suis trompe" (It is nothing. I am mistaken). Poirot has difficulty sleeping because there is a peculiar silence on the train. Mrs. Hubbard rings her bell and tells the conductor a man is in her room. Poirot rings his bell for water and is informed by the conductor that the train is stuck in a snow bank. Poirot hears a loud thump next door.

The next morning, the train still stopped, M. Bouc informs Poirot that Ratchett has been murdered and the murderer is still aboard the train. Poirot tells M. Bouc he will investigate the case. Poirot first examines Ratchett's body and compartment. Ratchett has twelve stab wounds. The window is left open in Ratchett's compartment, presumably to make the investigators think the murderer escaped out the window, but there are no footprints outside the window in the snow. A handkerchief with the initial "H" is found in the compartment, a pipe cleaner, a round match different from the matches Ratchett used and a charred piece of paper with the name "Armstrong" on it.

The piece of paper with the word Armstrong on it helps Poirot figure out who Ratchett really is and why someone would want to murder him. A few years back, a man named Cassetti kidnapped a three-year old girl, Daisy Armstrong. Cassetti collected a ransom from the wealthy Armstrong family, but killed the child anyways. Poirot concludes that Ratchett is Cassetti.

The interviews start with the Wagon Lit conductor, then Hector McQueen. Poirot knows that McQueen is involved with the case because he knows about the Armstrong note found in Ratchett's compartment, Hector is surprised that Poirot found the note because he thought it had been completely destroyed. He interviews Masterman and then Mrs. Hubbard. Mrs. Hubbard claims that the murderer was in her cabin. All of the passengers give Poirot suitable alibis during their interviews, although a few suspicious elements are brought to light: many passengers observed a woman in a red kimono



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walking down the hallway the night of the murder, but no one admits they have a red kimono. Mrs. Hubbard tells Poirot she had Greta Ohlsson lock the communicating door between she and Ratchett. Hildegarde Schmidt bumped into a stranger wearing a Wagon Lit jacket.

Poirot checks every passenger's luggage. During the check he notices a few interesting things: the label on Countess Andrenyi's luggage is wet, a Wagon Lit uniform is found in Hildegarde Schmidt's bag and, lastly, the red kimono is found in Poirot's own luggage.

After the luggage check, Poirot, Dr. Constantine and M. Bouc review the facts of the case and develop a list of questions. With the evidence and questions in mind, Poirot sits and thinks about the case. When he surfaces from a somewhat trance-like state, Poirot has discovered the solution to the case. Before he reveals this solution in full, he calls in several people and reveals their true identities. Poirot discovers Countess Andrenyi is Helena Goldenberg, aunt of Daisy Armstrong. She wet her luggage label and obscured her name, in an effort to conceal her identity. Also, Mary Debenham was Daisy's governess, Antonio Foscanelli was the Armstrong's chaffer, Masterman the valet, and Greta Ohlsson was Daisy Armstrong's nurse. Princess Dragomiroff claims her handkerchief from Poirot, the same found in Ratchett's compartment.

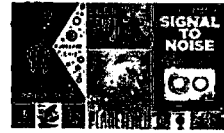
Poirot gathers all of the passengers into the dining car and propounds two possible solutions. The first solution is that a stranger entered the train at Vincovci and killed Ratchett. The second solution is that all of the passengers aboard the Orient Express were involved with the murder. He argues that twelve of the thirteen passengers, all close to the Armstrong case, killed Ratchett to avenge the murder of Daisy Armstrong. Mrs. Hubbard, revealed as Linda Arden, admits that the second solution is correct. Poirot suggests that M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine tell the police that the first solution is correct to protect the family. M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine accept Poirot's suggestion.



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Home → SparkNotes → Literature Study Guides → Murder on the Orient Express → Character Analysis

## CONTENTS

Context

Plot Overview

Character List

Character Analysis

Themes, Motifs and Symbols

### Summary & Analysis

Chapters 1–3, Part one

Chapters 4–5, Part one

Chapters 6–8, Part one

Chapter 1–3, Part two

Chapters 4–6, Part two

Chapters 7–9, Part two

Chapters 10–12, Part two

Chapters 13–15

Part three, Chapters 1–3

Chapters 4–6, Section three

Chapters 7–8, Section three

Chapter 9, Part three

Important Quotations Explained

Key Facts

Study Questions and Suggested Essay Topics

Quiz

Suggestions for Further Reading

How to Cite This SparkNote

## MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Agatha Christie

### ← Character Analysis →

#### Hercule Poirot

Hercule Poirot, a recurring Christie character, has become one of the most famous fictional detectives. Poirot is a retired Belgian police officer turned private detective. As a private detective he tours Europe and the Mid-East solving murder mysteries. Because he is a private detective and has no apparent family, Hercule Poirot has a great deal of freedom. He is independently wealthy and the decisions he makes are not subject to law or otherwise. As exemplified in *Murder on The Orient Express*, Poirot does not always follow the law—he lets the real murderers go. This novel is one of two Christie books where the murder is let off. While Poirot does not always obey the law, he always abides his conscience and his sense moral law. "Moral Law" is somewhat like religious law or the law of God, it is a general sense of right and wrong that supersedes any man-made written laws. In the case of the Armstrong family, Poirot put moral law first. The private detective is an arbiter of morals; he has the power and the brains to fight evil.

Poirot is moral and intellectual superhero. He is quite clearly smarter than any of the other passengers, especially M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine. In the beginning of Section three, Christie includes a humorous comparison of the thoughts of the three men. While Poirot sits motionless thinking and concentrating on the case, M. Bouc's thoughts

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wander to the repair of the train and Dr. Constantine's waver into pornography. Poirot's greatest task as a detective is to be the smartest person around; he must intellectually defeat the murderer. The Armstrongs purposefully attempt to confuse and fool Poirot. They set an elaborate set of clues and misleading evidence to veer him from the truth, but Poirot still wins. From the time he sits down and "thinks" with Dr. Constantine and M. Bouc, Poirot knows the solution of the case—it is merely a matter of confirming his suspicions.

Poirot is a very likable character, despite his moral and intellectual greatness. He is over concerned with appearance, distracted by his moustache and has a liking for strong-willed British women (a.k.a. Ms. Debenham). He is rather short, slightly snobby and probably lonely at times. It is good Christie gives him cases so often. Hercule Poirot, through Christie's novels, is said to have aged to 105.

**Mrs. Hubbard**

Mrs. Hubbard, the character played on board the Orient Express by Linda Arden, famous actress and grandmother to Daisy Armstrong, is a comedy of the "American woman." Mrs. Hubbard is the only admittedly American woman on the train. Linda Arden heightens the character's Americanisms, Mrs. Hubbard is loud, need constant attention and espouses Western ideals. The first time Poirot encounters Mrs. Hubbard she is talking about the US, "you can't just apply American methods in this country. It's natural here for folks to be indolent. They haven't got the hustle in them...We've got to apply our Western ideals and teach the East to recognize them." Mrs. Hubbard uses less slang than Hardman, but still throws in an occasional "folks."

The character of Mrs. Hubbard is instrumental in the planning and carrying out of the murder. Mrs. Hubbard's cabin is right next to Ratchett and shares a communicating door with him. The night of the murder Mrs. Hubbard tells Poirot that Ratchett is a monster and that she is scared of him, she plants the idea that Ratchett is a bad person in Poirot's mind. The reader knows that Poirot already suspects Ratchett of evildoings, but Mrs. Hubbard does not. Mrs. Hubbard's call to the conductor in the early

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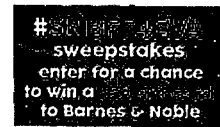
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Home → SparkNotes → Literature Study Guides → Murder on the Orient Express → Character List

## CONTENTS

Context

Plot Overview

Character List

Character Analysis

Themes, Motifs and Symbols

### Summary & Analysis

Chapters 1–3, Part one

Chapters 4–5, Part one

Chapters 6–8, Part one

Chapter 1–3, Part two

Chapters 4–6, Part two

Chapters 7–9, Part two

Chapters 10–12, Part two

Chapters 13–15

Part three, Chapters 1–3

Chapters 4–6, Section three

Chapters 7–8, Section three

Chapter 9, Part three

Important Quotations Explained

Key Facts

Study Questions and Suggested Essay Topics

Quiz

Suggestions for Further Reading

How to Cite This SparkNote

## MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Agatha Christie

### ← Character List →

**Hercule Poirot** - A retired Belgian police officer. Poirot is Christie's most famous detective and is known for his short stature and long, curly moustache. Poirot is very intelligent, extremely aware and instinctual and is a brilliant detective. The novel is generally written from his perspective.

Read an in-depth analysis of Hercule Poirot.

**M. Bouc** - The director of the Compagnie Wagon Lits and formerly worked for the Belgian police force with Poirot. Traveling on the Orient Express, M. Bouc asks Poirot to take the case. M. Bouc provides comic relief in the novel, constantly frustrated with the case and confused by Poirot.

**Dr. Constantine** - The coroner aboard the Orient Express. Dr. Constantine is often Poirot or M. Bouc's sidekick and is present for most of the evidence gathering. Dr. Constantine examines Ratchett's body and determines when he could have been killed.

**Mary Debenham** - Daisy Armstrong's governess. Mary Debenham is a calm, cool and unruffled lady, instrumental in the planning of Ratchett's murder. Poirot is most suspicious of Mary because of conversation he overhears between herself and Colonel Arbuthnot on the train to Stamboul.

Read an in-depth analysis of Mary Debenham.

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