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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

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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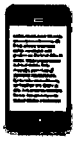

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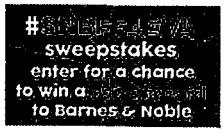

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MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

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

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

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 fist 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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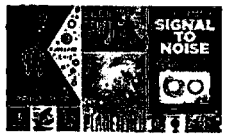

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MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

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

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 is 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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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.

Mrs. Hubbard - Really Linda Arden, famous actress and grandmother of Daisy Armstrong. Mrs. Hubbard provides constant interruption and diversion on the train and is known for her stories about her daughter. Mrs. Hubbard's compartment is next to Ratchett's.

Read an in-depth analysis of Mrs. Hubbard.

Colonel Arbuthnot - A friend of Colonel Armstrong, and father of Daisy Armstrong. Like Mary Debenham, Poirot suspects him because he called Mary by her first name on the train to Stamboul. Colonel Arbuthnot is hard-willed, polite and very "English."

Princess Dragomiroff - A Russian princess. Princess Dragomiroff is a generally despicable, ugly old lady; her yellow, toad-like face puts off Poirot. She is the owner of the famous "H" handkerchief found in Ratchett's room and tells Poirot many lies about the other passenger's identities.

Hector McQueen - Ratchett's personal secretary. Hector is truly in cahoots with the Armstrong family. McQueen tries to hard to tell Poirot that Ratchett did not speak any French—making him an immediate suspect in the case.

Ratchett - Real name Cassetti, kidnapped and murdered the young Daisy Armstrong for money. The Armstrong family murders Ratchett because he escaped punishment in the U.S. Poirot describes Ratchett as a wild animal.

Countess Andrenyi - The sister of Sonia Armstrong, did not murder Ratchett. Because the Countess is closest to the Armstrong case, she attempts to conceal her identity by dropping grease on her passport and smudging the name label on her luggage. The Countess is quite young, dark haired and beautiful.

Count Andrenyi - A very defensive man who tries to conceal the true identity of his wife, Countess Andrenyi. The Count takes his wife's place in the murder.

Cyrus Hardman - The big flamboyant American. Cyrus is a detective with a well-known detective service in New York City. He becomes involved with the Armstrongs because he was in love with Daisy's

French nurse who committed suicide after Daisy was killed. Cyrus pretends to help Poirot with the case.

Antonio Foscanelli - M. Bouc is sure that Antonio, a big menacing Italian man, had something to do with the murders, primarily because M. Bouc distrusts Italians. Revealed by Poirot, Antonio was the Armstrong's chauffer. Antonio loved dear little Daisy and tears when he speaks of her.

Greta Ohlsson - Greta Ohlsson weeps and weeps and weeps. The Swedish lady was Daisy Armstrong's nurse and is a very delicate type—not meant for murder.

Hildegarde Schmidt - Has a kindly face set in an expression of "placid stupidity." Hildegarde is rather slow-minded and unquestioningly carries out the ugly Princess's orders. Hildegarde pretends to be Princess Dragomiroff's maid, but is truly the Armstrong's cook.

Edward Henry Masterman - Ratchett's valet, brought into the murder plot by Hardman. Masterman is not a terribly colorful character, mainly referred to by his function—"the valet." Masterman is very polite and obedient, perhaps even haughty.

Pierre Michel - Father of the suicidal nursemaid of Daisy Armstrong, is the Conductor of the Orient Express. Pierre, like the other servants does not initially receive much scrutiny—he is not a top suspect. However, as the novel progresses, his involvement in the murder is proven essential.

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MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Agatha Christie

← Themes, Motifs and Symbols →

Themes

The Justice of a Jury

The Jury system has a rather unusual interpretation in *Murder on The Orient Express,* at least by Western standards. A self-appointed group of twelve, the same number of people in a jury, convicts Ratchett to death and then murder him. The idea of a "jury" or the Justness of the jury becomes thematic material. The Jury is a symbol of Justness. The Armstrong family justified killing a many because they gathered twelve people together who through that Ratchett should die. However, their idea of a jury is nothing like the courtroom jury or jury as the state intended. They like Poirot, did not rely on any sort of law or otherwise to form their "jury." The "Jury" system is simply a consensus; it puts the responsibility of one man's death on the shoulders of many, rather than one. This is what the state does, the state assigns a jury who decides the fate of a man, but there is control over who is selected to be on the jury. If juries were made up of victims family members the jury would certainly be biased. However, we cannot know for sure that Ratchett did not commit the crime. The novel states that Ratchett, or Cassetti, "gave the law the slip," but he may not have been the man who murdered Daisy Armstrong.

The novel constantly questions what a jury is and

how "just," this system of justice is, especially when a jury is self-appointed. The final argument of the novel, consistent with Poirot and all the characters is that Ratchett's murder was "just." The jury they formed, and the consensus of twelve, was right and fair.

The Insufficiency of Law

From talks on Prohibition to murder laws in the United States, law is wholly insufficient in *Murder on The Orient Express.* Prohibition laws are discussed when Poirot searches Hardman's suitcase for evidence. His suitcase is lined with bottles of liquor and he tells the men that Prohibition hasn't ever "worried me any." Hardman and M. Bouc even discuss the speakeasy (the hidden, illegal bars during prohibition). Hardman is planning on concealing his alcohol by the time he gets to Paris, "what's left over of this little lot will go into a bottle labeled hairwash." Prohibition has not curbed the drinking habits of Hardman.

The insufficiency of US law is exemplified by the fact that Ratchett is able to give US cops, "the slip." By means of enormous wealth and the "secret hold he had over various persons" he was acquitted from the crime. After he was let free, Ratchett (formerly Cassetti) changed his name and went to travel on his money. The book suggests that a murderer in America can go free if he has enough money and connections.

The Morality of Murder

Because Ratchett escapes justice in the United States, the Armstrong family is determined to kill him and prevent him from hurting any more children. One of the main themes of the novel is the morality of murder-is it all right to kill a man, even if law has acquitted him? Is it ever all right to kill a man? The novel suggests, at least by Poirot and the passenger's standards, that murder is Ok under the right circumstances. If the crime is hideous, there are twelve people who agree that a person is truly guilty and that person is still on the loose, and therefore it is fine to kill him. There are obvious emotional costs, most of the servants are in tears throughout the novel, but, overall, the Armstrongs are successful and

probably will not receive punishment for their crime.

Motifs

Class

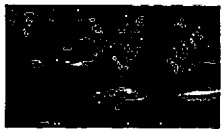
There is a strict class structure in most Christie's novels and especially in *Murder on The Orient Express*. Class not only represents one's financial well being, but emotional. The servants are much weaker characters than then the non working-class passengers. Hildegarde Schmidt, Greta Ohlsson, Antonio Foscanelli and, eventually Mary Debenham all break into tears by the novel's end. None of the other characters get so upset about the situation, perhaps because they do not have to. If they loose their jobs, it is not such a big deal, as they are independently wealthy and most are not required to work. Mary Debenham even tells Poirot she does not tell people she was associated with the Armstrongs because she is worried about securing other jobs. Although the cabin is made up of "many different classes and nationalities," it is strictly divided into working class and aristocratic passengers.

Americans

Americans, at least the two admitted, are comedic characters in the text. Both Hardman and Mrs. Hubbard use improper slang, are fairly obnoxious and think their country is the best, both caricatures of American males and females. Mrs. Hubbard prone to calling people "folks," tells people that Europe needs Western ideals and Hardman, who constantly speaks in awkward slang tells M. Bouc he would "learn a few go-ahead methods over there...Europe needs waking up. She's half asleep." Poirot agrees that America is a place of progress, but it is clear this progress isn't always positive.

Identity

One of the greatest motif is *Murder on the Orient Express* is that of identity. In the first two sections of the book, the passenger's identities are assumed to be correct, but in the third section the real identities of the passengers are revealed. The motif adds to the surprise of the book. As Poirot admits, there are no standard ways of investigating this case, so he and the reader are forced to first accept the evidence as



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the passengers as truth. There is no way to see if they are lying or not. Most of the passengers tell the truth about their names, but not their professions or association with the Armstrong family. Countess Andrenyi attempts to smudge and change her name, Heleana to Eleana, and Linda Arden makes up an entirely fictitious character to play while on board the train.

Symbols

Ratchett

Ratchett becomes the symbol of pure evil in the novel. From the minute Poirot sees Ratchett in the hotel restaurant, he knows that he is a bad man. Poirot describes Ratchett as a "wild animal" and tells M. Bouc that when Ratchett passed "he could not rid himself of the evil that had passed me by very close." To the Armstrongs, Ratchett is evil as well. In the evidence gathering stage, when Poirot tells each of them about the crime and Ratchett's involvement, all of the passengers are outraged. The name Ratchett becomes synonymous with evil and terror. The close association of Ratchett and evil is purposeful, and Christie wants the reader to have no sympathy for this man.

Daisy Armstrong

Daisy Armstrong is symbolic of goodness and innocence. The three-year-old child, kidnapped and brutally murdered by an evil man for money, is the picture of purity. When each of the passengers speaks of the Armstrong case or specifically of Daisy, they can hardly contain their grief and anger that such a young, perfect life was taken. It is the duty of the Armstrong family to defend the good and murder evil, and it is their duty to defend Daisy and other young children like her by killing Ratchett.

Food

Food is a symbol of society, sophistication and calm. M. Bouc, Dr. Constantine and Poirot always sit down at meals after every part of the investigation. Even after just having viewed Ratchett's dead, bloodied body, Constantine and Poirot go to the dining car and eat a full meal with M. Bouc. While eating his lunch, Poirot considers the case. When he is finished,

he tells M. Bouc and Constantine that he knows Ratchett's true identity. Christie is careful never to leave out a meal, where and when Poirot is eating. In a time of great disorder and panic, food and the process of eating is ordered and sophisticated.

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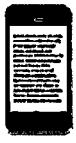

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READERS' NOTES

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MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Agatha Christie

← Important Quotations Explained →

All around us are people, of all classes, of all nationalities, of all ages

M. Bouc speaks this quote, found in Chapter 3. The two men, sitting at lunch in the dining car, discuss the diverse community gathered on the train. This quote foreshadows the ending of the novel and acts as a very important clue in the case. When Poirot "sits back and thinks," he realizes that only in America could such a collection of people exist in one place. Knowing that Ratchett murdered Daisy Armstrong and that the murder was probably connected to the Armstrong family, an American family, this idea helps Poirot figure out the identities passengers on board the train. The quote provides foreshadowing not only because it is a major clue, but also because it reveals a possible relationship or origin of the passengers. This quote and conversation gets Poirot's imagination working, he begins to wonder how the passengers might possibly be linked. Poirot even suggests to M. Bouc that the passengers are linked because of something sinister, saying, "perhaps, all these here are linked together-by death." The quote also reveals the peculiar situation of the Armstrong family; they have come together for three days to seek revenge, will part in London and possibly not see each other again.

Not now. Not now. When it's all over. When it's behind us—then—.

Mary Debenham to Colonel Arbuthnot speaks this quote, found in Chapter 1, Part 1. On the Taurus Express to Stamboul, Poirot, Mary and Arbuthnot are the only passengers aboard the train. Poirot gives the couple, acting as strangers, close scrutiny. He hears Mary say this quote to Arbuthnot when the train is stopped at a station.

This quote is a very important clue. For one, the apparent close, intimate relationship between Mary and Colonel Arbuthnot is suspicious because the two act like they are strangers. It is unclear what event Mary is talking about, what will be "over." With the unfolding of events on the Orient Express, Poirot immediately assumes the event was Ratchett's murder. Poirot's suspicions are heightened because Mary and Colonel Arbuthnot refuse to tell Poirot what they were talking about.

I asked that Swedish creature...if it was bolted and she said it was

This quote, found in Chapter 4, Part two, is Mrs. Hubbard's undoing. Mrs. Hubbard tells Poirot that she had to ask Greta Ohlsson to check if the communicating door between she and Ratchett was bolted because her sponge bag was covering the lock. When Poirot enters Mrs. Hubbard's room to examine the weapon, he notices that the door bolt is one foot above the door handle. Mrs. Hubbard is caught in a lie that reveals her guilt. Until this moment, Mrs. Hubbard seems innocent, even a victim of the terrible murder next door to her, but this little lie implicates her in the crime.

Ce n'est rien. Je me suis trompe

An unknown person speaks this quote; found in the conclusion of Chapter 4, Part I. Translated from French, the quote means, "It is nothing. I am mistaken." Poirot hears someone say this quote from inside Ratchett's room the night of the murder. Poirot hears Ratchett's bell go off, the conductor responds, knocks on his door and the person inside tells him that, "It is nothing..." Hector McQueen, Ratchett's secretary, repeatedly tells Poirot that Ratchett spoke

no French. Thus, it is clear that whoever was speaking to the conductor, in French, through Ratchett's door was not Ratchett, but was most likely the murderer. McQueen's insistence that Ratchett knew no French implicates him in the murder, McQueen not only knew that someone had spoken in French to the conductor from Ratchett's room on the night of the murder, but he knew it was an important element in the investigation. This is another tactical element the Armstrong family uses to obscure the case, apparently another unexplainable element in the case pointing to an outside intruder.

Say what you like, trial by jury is a sound system

This quote, spoken by Colonel Arbuthnot in Chapter 8, Part two, foreshadows the conclusion of the novel and also reveals subtext of the novel. Poirot and Arbuthnot discuss the validity of the jury system, whether rules and law is better than "private vengeance." When Arbuthnot expresses no remorse or distress when he hears Ratchett was killed and even suggests, "the swine deserved what he got" and would have preferred to have seen him hung, Poirot asks Arbuthnot whether he thinks murder is better than law. Arbuthnot's responds that there shouldn't be "blood feuds," but that trial by jury is a "sound system." Arbuthnot is not referring to law; he is referring to the murder of Ratchett by twelve people claiming to be a jury. Although Poirot doesn't officially crack the case until he "sits down and thinks," it seems he understands Arbuthnot's meaning perfectly. Poirot responds like he knows what Arbuthnot is talking about, "I'm sure that would be your view."

The trial by jury system or justification of so-called "private vengeance" is a pressing subtext of the novel. Because the Armstrong's are let free in the end of the book, it seems the book endorses murder or at least the murder of murderers. The book suggests that the law was useless in the capture of Ratchett; he was able to escape because of his enormous wealth and contacts. Therefore, it is up to citizens like the Armstrong's to "right" the situation and protect society from monsters like Ratchett. This eye for an eye, Roman mentality, is certainly not what one might


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expect from a British popular fiction novelist like Agatha Christie. The 12-person rag-tag "jury" is not in the same spirit of "trial by jury" as known in the US; a jury is never made up of the victim's family. *Murder on The Orient Express* suggests that there is a law higher than that of the state, one that permits the vengeful murder of a terrible killer.

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Agatha Christie

← Key Facts →

FULL TITLE · Murder on the Orient Express or Murder on the Calais Coach

AUTHOR · Agatha Christie

TYPE OF WORK · Novel

GENRE · Mystery

LANGUAGE · English

TIME AND PLACE WRITTEN · 1925–1933, England

DATE OF FIRST PUBLICATION · 1933

PUBLISHER · Berkley Books

NARRATOR · Anonymous

POINT OF VIEW · The narrator speaks in the third person, focusing on the thoughts and actions of Poirot. The narrator is fairly objective in her observations, but the text is peppered with juicy, subjective details of each character. All observations seem to be consistent with Poirot, what the narrator thinks is the same as Poirot. There is one instance that first person is used. In Chapter 3, Part three, there is a brief moment where the reader is privy to the comical thoughts of M.Bouc and Dr.Constantine.

TONE · The narrator is amused by the passengers aboard the Orient Express and seems to take

pleasure in describing their predicament.

TENSE · Present

SETTING (TIME) · Winter, 1925–1933

SETTING (PLACE) · The setting is first aboard a train headed to Stamboul, then Stamboul and then on a train from Stamboul to London, the Orient Express.

PROTAGONIST · Hercule Poirot

MAJOR CONFLICT · A man is murdered aboard a train headed to London from Stamboul called the Orient Express. The morning after, the train gets stuck in the snow and it is up to Hercule Poirot to figure out which passenger was the murderer.

RISING ACTION · Hercule Poirot goes to Stamboul and must return to London on business, he rides the Orient Express back to London, the train stops in a snow bank

CLIMAX · Ratchett is murdered

FALLING ACTION · Poirot is asked to launch an investigation of passengers on the train; he interviews passengers, makes observations, and propounds two solutions.

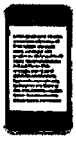
THEMES · The Justice of a Jury, The Insufficency of Law, The Morality of Murder

MOTIFS · Class, Americans, Identity

SYMBOLS · Ratchett, Daisy, Food

FORESHADOWING · Conversation overheard by Poirot between Mary Debenham and Colonel Arbuthnot on the way to Stamboul, Ratchett tells Poirot someone is going to murder him, Princess Dragomiroff tells Poirot her arms are not strong and looks at her arms.

MORE HELP



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MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS

Agatha Christie

← Study Questions and Suggested Essay Topics →

Study Questions

Before she is revealed as Linda Arden, what behavior or descriptions might indicate Mrs. Hubbard is an actress?

There are several moments in the text that suggest Mrs. Hubbard may be an actress: she is constantly described in dramatic terms, she makes entrances and exits in all of her "scenes" and is finally caught in a grand lie. Mrs. Hubbard is always described in terms that are typically reserved for actors on the stage. In her speech and physical movements she is always dramatic. When Mrs. Hubbard is first interviewed by Poirot she is said to give "dramatic emphasis to her words" and when she tells her story about the disappearance of the mysterious man in her compartment, "to Mrs. Hubbard...a dramatic climax rather than and anticlimax." Everything Mrs. Hubbard does or says is evaluated as if they were an actor's lines in a play. Mrs. Hubbard always makes specific entrances and exits in all of her scenes. In her first interview, she bursts into see Poirot, breathless and excited and leaves with confidence flair as if she had just completed a wonderful performance, "Mrs. Hubbard sailed out triumphantly." Possibly the biggest indication that Mrs. Hubbard is an actress is her lie about the handbag. Mrs. Hubbard tells Poirot that she had to

have Greta Ohlsson check to see if the communicating door between she and Ratchett was properly locked. Poirot discovers that she was obviously lying because the bolt of the lock, a metal protrusion from the door itself, was a foot above the door handle, and Mrs. Hubbard could see it just fine from her bed. This moment reveals that Mrs. Hubbard is hiding something substantial—her true identity.

Name two comedic characters in *Murder on the Orient Express*. How are they comedic and how do they help propel the plot?

M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine are comedic characters in the novel. Their constant bewilderment, by comparison to Poirot's shrewdness, makes them comical. They help propel the plot because they bring the reader closer to Poirot. The reader knows she is not smart as Poirot, but certainly is not as dumb as Dr. Constantine and M. Bouc. Thus, the reader naturally sides with Poirot and her attention is kept throughout the book—she does not get too frustrated with the case because there are two characters who are eternally more frustrated than she is with the situation. The clearest example of M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine's stupefaction is in Chapter 3, Part three when both of these men sit and think out the case with Poirot. In this section, the narration consciously changes to the first person and the reader knows exactly what the men are thinking from their perspective. M. Bouc attempts to think about the case, but gets very confused and his mind wanders into thoughts about unapproachable English and when the train will get out of the snow bank. Dr. Constantine thinks about how odd Poirot is, the impossibility of the case and then meanders into thoughts about a woman named Zia that he apparently had an affair with. M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine are not especially smart characters, and they cannot even concentrate for a few moments on the case. For the readers benefit, they exist as comic characters that have the least insight on the case.

How are working-class people portrayed in the novel? What differences do you see between working class peoples and non-working-class individuals?

With the exception of Mary Debenham, working-class men and women are generally weaker than the aristocratic characters in *Murder on the Orient Express*. Under Poirot's scrutiny and the pressure of the situation, most all of them eventually break into tears, most notably Greta Ohlsson who is an emotional mess throughout much of the novel. Again, with the exception of Mary Debenham, there are no bad or evil servants—all of them are sweet and kind and caring, devoted to the Armstrong family.

Greta Van Ohlsson, for one, epitomizes the weak servant. Greta is the dutiful servant of Mrs. Hubbard and apparently the last person to see Ratchett alive. When interviewed, Greta is fairly calm and put together, but from the moment Poirot mentions Daisy Armstrong, she can hardly contain her tears.

As mentioned earlier, Mary Debenham is the only working-class character that seems as strong as the aristocratic passengers. However, by the end of the novel, she too breaks down in tears. When Poirot questions Mary for the second time and reveals her true identity, she crumbles under the pressure. Mary is also finally a weak servant character.

Suggested Essay Topics

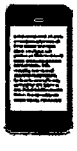
What set of morals are endorsed by the book?

What is the significance of law and the jury system in the novel?

How does *Murder on the Orient Express* differ from other murder mysteries? What format rules does it break? Why is it unique?

Characterize the detective figure as suggested by *Murder on The Orient Express*. Is Poirot's character morally superior to the other characters in the text?

MORE HELP



Hercule Poirot

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Hercule Poirot (/ɜːrˈkjuːl pwɑːrˈoʊ/; French pronunciation: [ɛʁkyl pwaʁo]) is a fictional Belgian detective, created by Agatha Christie. Poirot is one of Christie's most famous and long-lived characters, appearing in 33 novels, one play (*Black Coffee*), and more than 50 short stories published between 1920 and 1975.

Poirot has been portrayed on radio, in film and on television by various actors, including John Moffatt, Albert Finney, Sir Peter Ustinov, Sir Ian Holm, Tony Randall, Alfred Molina, Orson Welles and, most notably, David Suchet.

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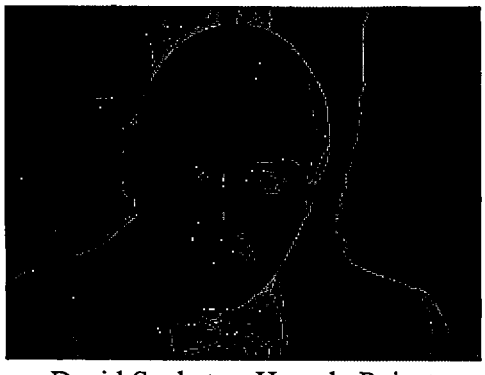
Hercule Poirot



David Suchet as Hercule Poirot

First appearance	*The Mysterious Affair at Styles*
Last appearance	*Curtain*
Created by	Agatha Christie
Portrayed by	David Suchet Peter Ustinov Albert Finney Orson Welles See below
Information	
Aliases	"Monsieur Poirot"
Gender	Male
Spouse(s)	*Unmarried*
Religion	Roman Catholic
Nationality	Belgian
Birth date and place	Ca. 1854-1873[1] Spa, Wallonia, Belgium
Death date and place	Ca. 1950 Styles Court, Essex, UK

Overview

Influences

Poirot's name was derived from two other fictional detectives of the time: Marie Belloc Lowndes' Hercule Popeau and Frank Howel Evans' Monsieur Poiret, a retired Belgian police officer living in London.[2]

A more obvious influence on the early Poirot stories is that of Arthur Conan Doyle. In *An Autobiography*, Christie states, "I was still writing in the Sherlock Holmes tradition – eccentric detective, stooge assistant, with a Lestrade-type Scotland Yard detective, Inspector Japp".[3] For his part, Conan Doyle acknowledged basing his detective stories on the model of Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin and his anonymous narrator, and basing his character Sherlock Holmes on Joseph Bell, who in his use of "ratiocination" prefigured Poirot's reliance on his "little grey cells".

Poirot also bears a striking resemblance to A. E. W. Mason's fictional detective, Inspector Hanaud of the French Sûreté, who first appeared in the 1910 novel *At the Villa Rose* and predates the first Poirot novel by ten years.

Unlike the models mentioned above, Christie's Poirot was clearly the result of her early development of the detective in her first book, written in 1916 and published in 1920. His Belgian nationality was interesting because of Belgium's occupation by Germany, which also provided a plausible explanation of why such a skilled detective would be out of work and available to solve mysteries at an English country house.[4] At the time of Christie's writing, it was considered patriotic to express sympathy towards the Belgians,[5] since the invasion of their country had constituted Britain's *casus belli* for entering World War I, and British wartime propaganda emphasised the "Rape of Belgium".

Popularity

Poirot first appeared in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (published in 1920) and exited in *Curtain* (published in 1975). Following the latter, Poirot was the only fictional character to receive an obituary on the front page of *The New York Times*.[6][7]

By 1930, Agatha Christie found Poirot "insufferable", and by 1960 she felt that he was a "detestable, bombastic, tiresome, ego-centric little creep". Yet the public loved him and Christie refused to kill him off, claiming that it was her duty to produce what the public liked.[8]

Appearance and proclivities

Captain Arthur Hastings' first description of Poirot:

> He was hardly more than five feet four inches but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military. Even if everything on his face was covered, the tips of moustache and the pink-tipped nose would be visible.
>
> The neatness of his attire was almost incredible; I believe a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound. Yet this quaint dandified little man who, I was sorry to see, now limped badly, had been in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police.[4]

Agatha Christie's initial description of Poirot in *The Murder on the Orient Express*:

> By the step leading up into the sleeping-car stood a young French lieutenant, resplendent in uniform, conversing with a small man [Hercule Poirot] muffled up to the ears of whom nothing was visible but a pink-tipped nose and the two points of an upward-curled moustache.[9]

In the later books, his limp is not mentioned, suggesting it may have been a temporary wartime injury. Poirot has green eyes that are repeatedly described as shining "like a cat's" when he is struck by a clever idea,[10] and dark hair, which he dyes later in life.[11] However, in many of his screen incarnations, he is bald or balding.

Frequent mention is made of his patent leather shoes, damage to which is frequently a source of misery for him, but comical for the reader.[12] Poirot's appearance, regarded as fastidious during his early career, later falls hopelessly out of fashion.[13] He employs pince-nez reading glasses.

Among Poirot's most significant personal attributes is the sensitivity of his stomach:

> The plane dropped slightly. "*Mon estomac*," thought Hercule Poirot, and closed his eyes determinedly.[14]

He suffers from sea sickness,[15] and in *Death in the Clouds* he states that his air sickness prevents him from being more alert at the time of the murder. Later in his life, we are told:

> Always a man who had taken his stomach seriously, he was reaping his reward in old age. Eating was not only a physical pleasure, it was also an intellectual research.[14]

Poirot is extremely punctual and carries a turnip pocket watch almost to the end of his career.[16] He is also pernickety about his personal finances, preferring to keep a bank balance of 444 pounds, 4 shillings, and 4 pence.[17]

As mentioned in *Curtain* and *The Clocks*, he is fond of classical music, particularly Mozart and Bach.

Methods

In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Poirot operates as a fairly conventional, clue-based and logical detective; reflected in his vocabulary by two common phrases: his use of "the little grey cells" and "order and method". Hastings is irritated by the fact that Poirot sometimes conceals important details of his plans, as in *The Big Four*.[18] In this novel, Hastings is kept in the dark throughout the climax. This aspect of Poirot is less evident in the later novels, partly because there is rarely a narrator to mislead.

In *Murder on the Links,* still largely dependent on clues himself, Poirot mocks a rival "bloodhound" detective who focuses on the traditional trail of clues established in detective fiction (e.g., Sherlock Holmes depending on footprints, fingerprints, and cigar ash). From this point on, Poirot establishes his psychological bona fides. Rather than painstakingly examining crime scenes, he enquires into the nature of the victim or the psychology of the murderer. He predicates his actions in the later novels on his underlying assumption that particular crimes are committed by particular types of people.

Poirot focuses on getting people to talk. In the early novels, he casts himself in the role of "Papa Poirot", a benign confessor, especially to young women. In later works, Christie made a point of having Poirot supply false or misleading information about himself or his background to assist him in obtaining information.[19]

In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Poirot speaks of a non-existent mentally disabled nephew[20] to uncover information about homes for the mentally unfit. In *Dumb Witness*, Poirot invents an elderly invalid mother as a pretence to investigate local nurses. In *The Big Four*, Poirot pretends to have (and poses as) a younger brother named Achille: however, this brother was mentioned again in *The Labours of Hercules*. Poirot claimed to have a brother for a short time.[18]

> To this day Harold is not quite sure what made him suddenly pour out the whole story to a little man to whom he had only spoken a few minutes before.[21]

Poirot is also willing to appear more foreign or vain in an effort to make people underestimate him. He admits as much:

> It is true that I can speak the exact, the idiomatic English. But, my friend, to speak the broken English is an enormous asset. It leads people to despise you. They say – a foreigner – he can't even speak English properly. [...] Also I boast! An Englishman he says often, "A fellow who thinks as much of himself as that cannot be worth much." [...] And so, you see, I put people off their guard.[22]

In later novels, Christie often uses the word *mountebank* when characters describe Poirot, showing that he has successfully passed himself off as a charlatan or fraud.

Poirot's investigating techniques assist him solving cases; "For in the long run, either through a lie, or through truth, people were bound to give themselves away..."[23] At the end, Poirot usually reveals his description of the sequence of events and his deductions to a room of suspects, often leading to the culprit's apprehension.

Life

"I suppose you know pretty well everything there is to know about Poirot's family by this time".[24]

A brief passage in *The Big Four* provides original information about Poirot's birth or at least childhood in or near the town of Spa, Belgium or in the village of Ellezelles (province of Hainaut, Belgium – a few memorials dedicated to Hercule Poirot can be seen in the centre of this village): "But we did not go into Spa itself. We left the main road and wound into the leafy fastnesses of the hills, till we reached a little hamlet and an isolated white villa high on the hillside."[25] Christie strongly implies that this "quiet retreat in the Ardennes"[26] near Spa is the location of the Poirot family home. Christie is purposefully vague, as Poirot is thought to be an elderly man even in the early novels. And in *An Autobiography,* she admitted that she already imagined him to be an old man in 1920. At the time, however, she had no idea she would write works featuring him for decades to come. In the Ellezelles birth memorial 'attesting' Poirot's birth, his father and mother were named Jules-Louis Poirot and Godelieve Poirot.

Christie wrote that Poirot is a Roman Catholic by birth,[27] but not much is described about his later religious convictions, except sporadic references to his "going to church".[28] Christie provides little information regarding Poirot's childhood, only mentioning in *Three Act Tragedy* that he comes from a large family with little wealth, and has at least one younger sister.

Policeman

> Gustave[...] was not a policeman. I have dealt with policemen all my life and I *know*. He could pass as a detective to an outsider but not to a man who was a policeman himself.
>
> — Hercule Poirot Christie 1947c

Hercule Poirot was active in the Brussels police force by 1893.[29] Very little mention is made about this part of his life, but in "The Nemean Lion" (1939) Poirot refers to a Belgian case of his in which "a wealthy soap manufacturer[...] poisoned his wife in order to be free to marry his secretary". As Poirot was often misleading about his past to gain information, the truthfulness of that statement is unknown.

Inspector Japp offers some insight into Poirot's career with the Belgian police when introducing him to a colleague:

> You've heard me speak of Mr Poirot? It was in 1904 he and I worked together – the Abercrombie forgery case – you remember he was run down in Brussels. Ah, those were the days Moosier. Then, do you remember "Baron" Altara? There was a pretty rogue for you! He eluded the clutches of half the police in Europe. But we nailed him in Antwerp – thanks to Mr. Poirot here.[30]

In the short story "The Chocolate Box" (1923), Poirot reveals to Captain Arthur Hastings an account of what he considers to be his only failure. Poirot admits that he has failed to solve a crime "innumerable" times:

> I have been called in too late. Very often another, working towards the same goal, has arrived there first. Twice I have been struck down with illness just as I was on the point of success.

Nevertheless, he regards the 1893 case in "The Chocolate Box",[31] as his only actual failure of detection. Again, Poirot is not reliable as a narrator of his personal history and there is no evidence that Christie sketched it out in any depth. During his police career Poirot shot a man who was firing from a roof into the public below.[32] In *Lord Edgware Dies*, Poirot reveals that he learned to read writing upside down during his police career. Around that time he met Xavier Bouc, director of the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits. Poirot also became a uniformed director, working on trains.

In *The Double Clue,* Poirot mentions that he was Chief of Police of Brussels, until "the Great War" (World War I) forced him to leave for England.

Private detective

> I had called in at my friend Poirot's rooms to find him sadly overworked. So much had he become the rage that every rich woman who had mislaid a bracelet or lost a pet kitten rushed to secure the services of the great Hercule Poirot.[33]

During World War I, Poirot left Belgium for England as a refugee (although he returned a few times). On 16 July 1916 he again met his lifelong friend, Captain Arthur Hastings, and solved the first of his cases to be published, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. It is clear that Hastings and Poirot are already friends when they meet in Chapter 2 of the novel, as Hastings tells Cynthia that he has not seen him for "some years". Particulars such as the date of 1916 for the case and that Hastings had met Poirot in Belgium, are given in *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, Chapter 1. After that case, Poirot apparently came to the attention of the British secret service and undertook cases for the British government, including foiling the attempted abduction of the Prime Minister.[34] Readers were told that the British authorities had learned of Poirot's keen investigative ability from certain Belgian royals.

After the war Poirot became a private detective and began undertaking civilian cases. He moved into what became both his home and work address, Flat 203 at 56B Whitehaven Mansions. Hastings first visits the flat when he returns to England in June 1935 from Argentina in *The A.B.C. Murders*, Chapter 1. The TV programmes place this in Florin Court, Charterhouse Square, in the wrong part of London. According to Hastings, it was chosen by Poirot "entirely on account of its strict geometrical appearance and proportion" and described as the "newest type of service flat". (The Florin Court building was actually built in 1936, decades after Poirot fictionally moved in.) His first case in this period was "The Affair at the Victory Ball", which allowed Poirot to enter high society and begin his career as a private detective.

Florin Court became the fictional residence of Agatha Christie's Poirot, known as "Whitehaven Mansions"

Between the world wars, Poirot travelled all over Europe, Africa, Asia, and half of South America investigating crimes and solving murders. Most of his cases occurred during this time and he was at the height of his powers at this point in his life. In *The Murder on the Links*, the Belgian pits his grey cells against a French murderer. In the Middle East, he solved the cases *Death on the Nile* and *Murder in Mesopotamia* with ease and even survived *An Appointment with Death*. As he passed through Eastern Europe on his return trip, he solved *The Murder on the Orient Express*. However he did not travel to North America, the West Indies, the Caribbean or Oceania, probably to avoid sea sickness.

> It is this villainous sea that troubles me! The *mal de mer* – it is horrible suffering![35]

It was during this time he met the Countess Vera Rossakoff, a glamorous jewel thief. The history of the Countess is, like Poirot's, steeped in mystery. She claims to have been a member of the Russian aristocracy before the Russian Rebellion and suffered greatly as a result, but how much of that story is true is an open

question. Even Poirot acknowledges that Rossakoff offered wildly varying accounts of her early life. Poirot later became smitten with the woman and allowed her to escape justice.[36]

> It is the misfortune of small, precise men always to hanker after large and flamboyant women. Poirot had never been able to rid himself of the fatal fascination that the Countess held for him.[37]

Although letting the Countess escape was morally questionable, it was not uncommon. In *The Nemean Lion*, Poirot sided with the criminal, Miss Amy Carnaby, allowing her to evade prosecution by blackmailing his client Sir Joseph Hoggins, who, Poirot discovered, had plans to commit murder. Poirot even sent Miss Carnaby two hundred pounds as a final payoff prior to the conclusion of her dog kidnapping campaign. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Poirot allowed the murderer to escape justice through suicide and then withheld the truth to spare the feelings of the murderer's relatives. In *The Augean Stables*, he helped the government to cover up vast corruption. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, Poirot allowed the murderers to go free after discovering that twelve different people participated in Ratchett's murder. There was no question of his guilt, but he had been acquitted in America over a technicality. Considering it poetic justice that twelve jurors had acquitted Ratchett and twelve people had stabbed him, Poirot produced an alternate sequence of events to explain the death.

After his cases in the Middle East, Poirot returned to Britain. Apart from some of the so-called "Labours of Hercules" (see next section) he very rarely went abroad during his later career. He moved into Styles Court towards the end of his life.

While Poirot was usually paid handsomely by clients, he was also known to take on cases that piqued his curiosity, although they did not pay well.

Poirot shows a love of steam trains, which Christie contrasts with Hastings' love of autos: this is shown in *The Plymouth Express*, *The Mystery of the Blue Train*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, and *The ABC Murders* (in the TV series, steam trains are seen in nearly all of the episodes).

Retirement

> That's the way of it. Just a case or two, just one case more – the Prima Donna's farewell performance won't be in it with yours, Poirot.[38]

Confusion surrounds Poirot's retirement. Most of the cases covered by Poirot's private detective agency take place before his retirement to grow marrows, at which time he solves *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. It has been said that the twelve cases related in *The Labours of Hercules* (1947) must refer to a different retirement, but the fact that Poirot specifically says that he intends to grow marrows indicates that these stories also take place before *Roger Ackroyd*, and presumably Poirot closed his agency once he had completed them. There is specific mention in "The Capture of Cerberus" of the twenty-year gap between Poirot's previous meeting with Countess Rossakoff and this one. If the *Labours* precede the events in *Roger Ackroyd*, then the Ackroyd case must have taken place around twenty years *later* than it was published, and so must any of the cases that refer to it. One alternative would be that having failed to grow marrows once,

Poirot is determined to have another go, but this is specifically denied by Poirot himself.[39] Also, in "The Erymanthian Boar", a character is said to have been turned out of Austria by the Nazis, implying that the events of *The Labours of Hercules* took place after 1937. Another alternative would be to suggest that the Preface to the *Labours* takes place at one date but that the labours are completed over a matter of twenty years. None of the explanations is especially attractive.

In terms of a rudimentary chronology, Poirot speaks of retiring to grow marrows in Chapter 18 of *The Big Four*[40] (1927) which places that novel out of published order before *Roger Ackroyd*. He declines to solve a case for the Home Secretary because he is retired in Chapter One of *Peril at End House* (1932). He is certainly retired at the time of *Three Act Tragedy* (1935) but he does not enjoy his retirement and repeatedly takes cases thereafter when his curiosity is engaged. He continues to employ his secretary, Miss Lemon, at the time of the cases retold in *Hickory Dickory Dock* and *Dead Man's Folly*, which take place in the mid-1950s. It is therefore better to assume that Christie provided no authoritative chronology for Poirot's retirement, but assumed that he could either be an active detective, a consulting detective, or a retired detective as the needs of the immediate case required.

One consistent element about Poirot's retirement is that his fame declines during it, so that in the later novels he is often disappointed when characters (especially younger characters) recognise neither him nor his name:

> "I should, perhaps, Madame, tell you a little more about myself. I am *Hercule Poirot*."
>
> The revelation left Mrs Summerhayes unmoved.
>
> "What a lovely name," she said kindly. "Greek, isn't it?"[41]

Post World War II

> He, I knew, was not likely to be far from his headquarters. The time when cases had drawn him from one end of England to the other was past.
>
> —Hastings[42]

Poirot is less active during the cases that take place at the end of his career. Beginning with *Three Act Tragedy* (1934), Christie had perfected during the inter-war years a subgenre of Poirot novel in which the detective himself spent much of the first third of the novel on the periphery of events. In novels such as *Taken at the Flood*, *After the Funeral*, and *Hickory Dickory Dock*, he is even less in evidence, frequently passing the duties of main interviewing detective to a subsidiary character. In *Cat Among the Pigeons*, Poirot's entrance is so late as to be almost an afterthought. Whether this was a reflection of his age or of Christie's distaste for him, is impossible to assess. *Crooked House* (1949) and *Ordeal by Innocence* (1957), which could easily have been Poirot novels, represent a logical endpoint of the general diminution of his presence in such works.

Towards the end of his career, it becomes clear that Poirot's retirement is no longer a convenient fiction. He assumes a genuinely inactive lifestyle during which he concerns himself with studying famous unsolved cases of the past and reading detective novels. He even writes a book about mystery fiction in which he

deals sternly with Edgar Allan Poe and Wilkie Collins.[43] In the absence of a more appropriate puzzle, he solves such inconsequential domestic riddles as the presence of three pieces of orange peel in his umbrella stand.[44]

Poirot (and, it is reasonable to suppose, his creator)[a] becomes increasingly bemused by the vulgarism of the up-and-coming generation's young people. In *Hickory Dickory Dock*, he investigates the strange goings on in a student hostel, while in *Third Girl* (1966) he is forced into contact with the smart set of Chelsea youths. In the growing drug and pop culture of the sixties, he proves himself once again, but has become heavily reliant on other investigators (especially the private investigator, Mr. Goby) who provide him with the clues that he can no longer gather for himself.

> *You're too old.* Nobody told me you were so old. I really don't want to be rude but – there it is. *You're too old.* I'm really very sorry.
>
> — Norma Restarick to Poirot in *Third Girl*, Chapter 1[43]

Notably, during this time his physical characteristics also change dramatically, and by the time Arthur Hastings meets Poirot again in *Curtain*, he looks very different from his previous appearances, having become thin with age and with obviously dyed hair.

a. In *The Pale Horse*, Chapter 1, the novel's narrator, Mark Easterbrook, disapprovingly describes a typical "Chelsea girl"[45] in much the same terms that Poirot uses in Chapter 1 of *Third Girl*, suggesting that the condemnation of fashion is authorial.[46]

Death

Poirot passes away in October 1949[47] from complications of a heart condition at the end of *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*. He had moved his amyl nitrite pills out of his own reach, possibly because of guilt. He thereby became the murderer in *Curtain*, although it was for the benefit of others. Poirot himself noted that he wanted to kill his victim shortly before his own death so that he could avoid succumbing to the arrogance of the murderer, concerned that he might come to view himself as entitled to kill those whom he deemed necessary to eliminate.

The "murderer" that he was hunting had never actually killed anyone, but he had manipulated others to kill for him, subtly and psychologically manipulating the moments where others desire to commit murder so that they carry out the crime when they might otherwise dismiss their thoughts as nothing more than a momentary passion. Poirot thus was forced to kill the man himself, as otherwise he would have continued his actions and never been officially convicted, as he did not legally do anything wrong. It is revealed at the end of *Curtain* that he fakes his need for a wheelchair to fool people into believing that he is suffering from arthritis, to give the impression that he is more infirm than he is. His last recorded words are "*Cher ami!*", spoken to Hastings as the Captain left his room. (The TV adaptation adds that as Poirot is dying alone, he whispers out his final prayer to God in these words: "Forgive me... forgive...")[48] Poirot was buried at Styles, and his funeral was arranged by his best friend Hastings and Hastings' daughter Judith. Hastings reasoned, "Here was the spot where he had lived when he first came to this country. He was to lie here at the last."

Poirot's actual death and funeral occurred in *Curtain*, years after his retirement from active investigation, but it was not the first time that Hastings attended the funeral of his best friend. In *The Big Four* (1927), Poirot feigned his death and subsequent funeral to launch a surprise attack on the Big Four.

Recurring characters

Arthur Hastings

Hastings, a former British Army officer, first meets Poirot during Poirot's years as a police officer in Belgium and almost immediately after they both arrive in England. He becomes Poirot's lifelong friend and appears in many cases. Poirot regards Hastings as a poor private detective, not particularly intelligent, yet helpful in his way of being fooled by the criminal or seeing things the way the average man would see them and for his tendency to unknowingly "stumble" onto the truth.[49] Hastings marries and has four children – two sons and two daughters. As a loyal, albeit somewhat naïve companion, Hastings is to Poirot what Watson is to Sherlock Holmes.

Hastings is capable of great bravery and courage, facing death unflinchingly when confronted by *The Big Four* and displaying unwavering loyalty towards Poirot. However, when forced to choose between Poirot and his wife in that novel, he initially chooses to betray Poirot to protect his wife. Later, though, he tells Poirot to draw back and escape the trap.

The two are an airtight team until Hastings meets and marries Dulcie Duveen, a beautiful music hall performer half his age, after investigating the *Murder on the Links*. They later emigrate to Argentina, leaving Poirot behind as a "very unhappy old man". Poirot and Hastings reunite for the final time in *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, having been earlier reunited in *The Big Four*, *Peril at End House*, *The ABC Murders*, *Lord Edgware Dies* and *Dumb Witness* when Hastings arrives in England for business.

Ariadne Oliver

Detective novelist Ariadne Oliver is Agatha Christie's humorous self-caricature. Like Christie, she is not overly fond of the detective whom she is most famous for creating–in Ariadne's case, Finnish sleuth Sven Hjerson. We never learn anything about her husband, but we do know that she hates alcohol and public appearances and has a great fondness for apples until she is put off them by the events of *Hallowe'en Party*. She also has a habit of constantly changing her hairstyle, and in every appearance by her much is made of her clothes and hats. Her maid Maria prevents the public adoration from becoming too much of a burden on her employer, but does nothing to prevent her from becoming too much of a burden on others.

She has authored over 56 novels and greatly dislikes people modifying her characters. She is the only one in Poirot's universe to have noted that "It's not natural for five or six people to be on the spot when B is murdered and all have a motive for killing B." She first met Poirot in the story *Cards on the Table* and has been bothering him ever since.

Miss Felicity Lemon

Poirot's secretary, Miss Felicity Lemon, has few human weaknesses. The only mistakes she makes within the series are a typing error during the events of *Hickory Dickory Dock* and the mis-mailing of an electricity bill, although she was worried about strange events surrounding her sister at the time. Poirot described her

as being "Unbelievably ugly and incredibly efficient. Anything that she mentioned as worth consideration usually was worth consideration." She is an expert on nearly everything and plans to create the perfect filing system. She also worked for the government statistician-turned-philanthropist Parker Pyne. Whether this was during one of Poirot's numerous retirements or before she entered his employ is unknown. In *The Agatha Christie Hour*, she was portrayed by British actress Angela Easterling, while in *Agatha Christie's Poirot* she was portrayed by Pauline Moran. A marked difference from the text exists in Moran's portrayal, where she is an attractive, fashionable, and emotional woman showing an occasional soft corner for Poirot. She also appears far more often in the TV series, making an appearance in most episodes and often being a bigger part of the plot. On a number of occasions, she joins Poirot in his inquiries or seeks out answers alone at his request.

Chief Inspector James Harold Japp

Japp is a Scotland Yard Inspector and appears in many of the stories trying to solve cases that Poirot is working on. Japp is outgoing, loud and sometimes inconsiderate by nature and his relationship with the refined Belgian is one of the stranger aspects of Poirot's world. He first met Poirot in Belgium in 1904, during the Abercrombie Forgery. Later that year they joined forces again to hunt down a criminal known as Baron Altara. They also meet in England where Poirot often helps Japp and lets him take credit in return for special favours. These favours usually entail Poirot being supplied with other interesting cases.[50] In *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, Japp was portrayed by Philip Jackson. In the film, *Thirteen at Dinner* (1985), adapted from *Lord Edgware Dies*, the role of Japp was taken by the actor David Suchet, who would later star as Poirot in the ITV adaptations.

Major novels

The Poirot books take readers through the whole of his life in England, from the first book (*The Mysterious Affair at Styles*), where he is a refugee staying at Styles, to the last Poirot book (*Curtain*), where he visits Styles before his death. In between, Poirot solves cases outside England as well, including his most famous case, *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934).

Hercule Poirot became famous in 1926 with the publication of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, whose surprising solution proved controversial. The novel is still among the most famous of all detective novels: Edmund Wilson alludes to it in the title of his well-known attack on detective fiction, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" Aside from *Roger Ackroyd*, the most critically acclaimed Poirot novels appeared from 1932 to 1942, including *Murder on the Orient Express*, *The ABC Murders* (1935), *Cards on the Table* (1936), and *Death on the Nile* (1937), a tale of multiple homicide upon a Nile steamer. *Death on the Nile* was judged by detective novelist John Dickson Carr to be among the ten greatest mystery novels of all time.

The 1942 novel *Five Little Pigs* (a.k.a. *Murder in Retrospect*), in which Poirot investigates a murder committed sixteen years before by analysing various accounts of the tragedy, is a *Rashomon*-like performance. In his analysis of this book, critic and mystery novelist Robert Barnard referred to it as "the best Christie of all".[51]

Portrayals

Stage

The first actor to portray Hercule Poirot was Charles Laughton. He appeared on the West End in 1928 in the play *Alibi* which had been adapted by Michael Morton from the novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

Film

Austin Trevor

Austin Trevor debuted the role of Poirot on screen in the 1931 British film *Alibi*. The film was based on the stage play. Trevor reprised the role of Poirot twice, in *Black Coffee* and *Lord Edgware Dies*. Trevor said once that he was probably cast as Poirot simply because he could do a French accent.[52] Leslie S. Hiscott directed the first two films, with Henry Edwards taking over for the third.

Tony Randall

Tony Randall portrayed Poirot in *The Alphabet Murders*, a 1965 film also known as *The ABC Murders*. This was more a satire of Poirot than a straightforward adaptation, and was greatly changed from the original. Much of the story, set in modernistic times, was played for comedy, with Poirot investigating the murders while evading the attempts by Hastings (Robert Morley) and the police to get him out of England and back to Belgium.

Albert Finney

Albert Finney played Poirot in 1974 in the cinematic version of *Murder on the Orient Express*. As of 2015 Finney is the only actor to receive an Academy Award nomination for playing Poirot, though he did not win.

Albert Finney playing Poirot in the 1974 film, *Murder on the Orient Express*

Peter Ustinov

Peter Ustinov played Poirot six times, starting with *Death on the Nile* (1978). He reprised the role in *Evil Under the Sun* (1982) and *Appointment with Death* (1988).

Christie's daughter Rosalind Hicks observed Ustinov during a rehearsal and said, "*That's* not Poirot! He isn't at all like that!" Ustinov overheard and remarked "He is *now!*"[53]

He appeared again as Poirot in three made-for-television movies: *Thirteen at Dinner* (1985), *Dead Man's Folly* (1986), and *Murder in Three Acts* (1986). Earlier adaptations were set during the time in which the novels were written, but these TV movies were set in the contemporary era. The first of these was based on *Lord Edgware Dies* and was made by Warner Bros. It also starred Faye Dunaway, with David Suchet as Inspector Japp, just before Suchet began to play Poirot. David Suchet considers his performance as Japp to be "possibly the worst performance of [his] career".[54]

Peter Ustinov as Poirot in a 1982 adaptation of the novel *Evil Under the Sun*

Other

- Anatoly Ravikovich, *Zagadka Endkhauza* (*End House Mystery*) (1989; based on "Peril at End House")

Television

David Suchet

David Suchet starred as Poirot in the ITV series *Agatha Christie's Poirot* from 1989 until June 2013, when he announced that he was bidding farewell to the role. "No one could've guessed then that the series would span a quarter-century or that the classically trained Suchet would complete the entire catalogue of whodunits featuring the eccentric Belgian investigator, including 33 novels and dozens of short stories."[55] His final appearance was in an adaptation of *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case*, aired on 13 November 2013. During the time that it was filmed, Suchet expressed his sadness at his final farewell to the Poirot character whom he had loved:

> Poirot's death was the end of a long journey for me. I had only ever wanted to play Dame Agatha's true Poirot [...] He was as real to me as he had been to her: a great detective, a remarkable man, if, perhaps, just now and then, a little irritating. I think back to Poirot's last words in the scene before he dies. That second 'Cher ami' was for someone other than Hastings. It was for my dear, dear friend Poirot. I was saying goodbye to him as well — and I felt it with all my heart.[48]

The writers of the "Binge!" article of *Entertainment Weekly* Issue #1343-44 (26 December 2014 – 3 January 2015) picked Suchet as "Best Poirot" in the "Hercule Poirot & Miss Marple" timeline.[56]

Other

- Heini Göbel, (1955; an adaptation of *Murder on the Orient Express* for the West German television series *Die Galerie der großen Detektive*)
- José Ferrer, *Hercule Poirot* (1961; Unaired TV Pilot, MGM; adaptation of "The Disappearance of Mr. Davenheim")
- Martin Gabel, *General Electric Theater* (4/1/1962; adaptation of "The Disappearance of Mr. Davenheim")

- Horst Bollmann, *Black Coffee* 1973
- Ian Holm, *Murder by the Book*, 1986
- Alfred Molina, *Murder on the Orient Express*, 2001
- Konstantin Raikin, *Neudacha Puaro* (*Poirot's Failure*) (2002; based on "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd")

Animated

In 2004, NHK (Japanese public TV network) produced a 39 episode anime series titled *Agatha Christie's Great Detectives Poirot and Marple*, as well as a manga series under the same title released in 2005. The series, adapting several of the best-known Poirot and Marple stories, ran from 4 July 2004 through 15 May 2005, and in repeated reruns on NHK and other networks in Japan. Poirot was voiced by Kōtarō Satomi and Miss Marple was voiced by Kaoru Yachigusa.

Radio

Radio adaptations of the Poirot stories also appeared, most recently twenty seven of them on BBC Radio 4 (and regularly repeated on BBC 7, later BBC Radio 4 Extra), starring John Moffatt; Maurice Denham and Peter Sallis have also played Poirot on BBC Radio 4, Mr. Denham in *The Mystery of the Blue Train* and Mr. Sallis in *Hercule Poirot's Christmas*.

In 1939, Orson Welles and the Mercury Players dramatised *Roger Ackroyd* on CBS's *Campbell Playhouse*.[57]

A 1945 radio series of at least 13 original half-hour episodes (none of which apparently adapt any Christie stories) transferred Poirot from London to New York and starred character actor Harold Huber,[58] perhaps better known for his appearances as a police officer in various Charlie Chan films. On 22 February 1945, "speaking from London, Agatha Christie introduced the initial broadcast of the Poirot series via shortwave".[57]

An adaptation of *Murder in the Mews* was broadcast on the BBC Light Programme in March 1955 starring Richard Williams as Poirot; this program was thought lost, but was recently discovered in the BBC archives in 2015.[59]

BBC Radio 4 Poirot radio dramas

Recorded and released (John Moffatt stars as Poirot unless otherwise indicated):[60]

- Hercule Poirot's Christmas (1986 w/Peter Sallis as Poirot)
- The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1987)
- Murder on the Links (1990)
- Murder on the Orient Express (1992 - 5 episodes)
- Sad Cypress (1992 - 5 episodes)
- Hallowe'en Party (1993)
- Five Little Pigs (1994)
- Death on the Nile (1997 - 5 episodes)
- Evil Under the Sun (1999 - 5 episodes)
- Peril at End House (2000 - 5 episodes)

- The ABC Murders (2000)
- Three Act Tragedy (2002 - 5 episodes)
- Death in the Clouds (2003)
- One, Two Buckle My Shoe (2004 - 5 episodes)
- The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding (2004)
- Dumb Witness (2006 - 5 episodes)
- The Mysterious Affair at Styles (5 episodes)
- The Mystery of the Blue Train (w/Maurice Denham as Poirot)
- Lord Edgware Dies (a.k.a. Thirteen at Dinner) (5 episodes)
- Murder in Mesopotamia (5 episodes)
- Cards on the Table
- Appointment With Death
- Taken at the Flood (5 episodes)
- Mrs. McGinty's Dead (5 episodes)
- After the Funeral
- Dead Man's Folly (4 episodes)
- Elephants Can Remember

Parodies and references

In a 1964 episode of the TV series "Burke's Law" entitled "Who Killed Supersleuth?", Ed Begley plays a parody of Poirot named Bascule Doirot.

In *Revenge of the Pink Panther*, Poirot makes a cameo appearance in a mental asylum, portrayed by Andrew Sachs and claiming to be "the greatest detective in all of France, the greatest in all the world".

In Neil Simon's *Murder By Death*, American actor James Coco plays "Milo Perrier", a parody of Poirot. The film also features parodies of Charlie Chan, Sam Spade, Nick and Nora Charles, Hildegarde Withers and Miss Marple.

Dudley Jones played Poirot in the film *The Strange Case of the End of Civilization as We Know It* (1977).

In the movie *Spice World*, Poirot (Hugh Laurie) *accuses* a weapons-packing Emma Bunton of the crime.

Much the same joke had already been done in The Mary Whitehouse Experience, with Poirot played by Steve Punt, failing to accuse Hannibal Lecter of an obvious murder.

In *Sherlock Holmes: The Awakened*, Poirot appears as a young boy on the train transporting Holmes and Watson. Holmes helps the boy in opening a puzzle-box, with Watson giving the boy advice about using his "little grey cells", giving the impression that Poirot first heard about grey cells and their uses from Dr. Watson. Poirot would go on to use the "little grey cells" line countless times throughout Agatha Christie's fiction.

The Belgian brewery Brasserie Ellezelloise makes a highly rated stout called *Hercule*[61] with a moustachioed caricature of Hercule Poirot on the label.

In the final host segment of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*'s episode "The Rebel Set", Tom Servo dresses up as Poirot and impersonates him in an attempt to discover the identity of B-movie actor Merritt Stone.

Jason Alexander played Poirot in episode 8 of *Muppets Tonight* in a spoof called "Murder on the Disoriented Express".

Poirot is parodied twice in sketch show *That Mitchell and Webb Look*, where he is played by David Mitchell; one sketch sees him identifying a killer due to her use of "the evil voice"—a voice that only murderers use—admitting that he otherwise had no evidence, and a later sketch sees him meeting a ship captain who is also played by Mitchell.

Leo Bruce parodied Hercule Poirot with the character Amer Picon in his book *Case for Three Detectives* (1936); the other two characters were parodies of Lord Peter Wimsey and Father Brown.

In C. Northcote Parkinson's charity biography based on the PG Wodehouse character, "Jeeves, A Gentleman's Personal Gentleman", Poirot is one of a number of famous detectives beaten to a mystery's solution by the eponymous valet.

See also

- Tropes in Agatha Christie's novels

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9. Christie 2011.
10. e.g. "For about ten minutes [Poirot] sat in dead silence [...] and all the time his eyes grew steadily greener" Christie 1939, Chapter 5
11. as Hastings discovers in Christie 1991, Chapter 1
12. E.g. "Hercule Poirot looked down at the tips of his patent-leather shoes and sighed." Christie 1947a
13. E.g. "And now here was the man himself. Really a most impossible person – the wrong clothes – button boots! an incredible moustache! Not his – Meredith Blake's kind of fellow at all." Christie 2011, Chapter 7
14. Christie 2010, Chapter 1.
15. "My stomach, it is not happy on the sea"Christie 1980, Chapter 8, iv
16. "he walked up the steps to the front door and pressed the bell, glancing as he did so at the neat wrist-watch which had at last replaced an old favourite – the large turnip-faced watch of early days. Yes, it was exactly nine-thirty. As ever, Hercule Poirot was exact to the minute." Christie 2011b
17. Christie 2013a.
18. Christie 2004b.
19. "It has been said of Hercule Poirot by some of his friends and associates, at moments when he has maddened them most, that he prefers lies to truth and will go out of his way to gain his ends by elaborate false statements, rather than trust to the simple truth." Christie 2011b, Book One, Chapter 9