Murder on the Orient Express

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AGATHA CHRISTIE

Agatha Christie was born Agatha Miller to an upper-middle class family near the turn of the nineteenth century. Although her father died prematurely in 1901, she had a happy childhood. She was educated alternately at home and in Paris and grew into a devoted and voracious reader. Christie also displayed an early talent for writing, finishing her first novel in 1911, though she was unable to find a publisher for it. At the beginning of World War I, she married an army officer named Archibald Christie, but Archibald's infidelity eventually led to their divorce in 1928. After the war, she published her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, featuring the iconic detective Hercule Poirot, whom she based in part on Belgian soldiers she treated as a nurse in Torquay. In 1930, she traveled to Istanbul where she met her second husband, the archaeologist Max Mallowan. The Middle East would become a setting for and influence on her mid-career novels. After returning to England, Christie wrote continuously for the rest of her life, interrupted only by a stint assisting in the pharmacy of University College Hospital in London during World War II. Christie wrote more than sixty detective novels, many featuring Poirot or Miss Marple, another recurring detective, and became the best-selling novelist of all time. She also wrote several more personal and conventional novels under the pseudonym Mary Westmacott. In recognition of her long and brilliant literary career, she was honored as Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1971. She died in Wallingford, England in 1976.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Agatha Christie drew on her time treating Belgian soldiers during World War I to create the character of the fastidious, eccentric Hercule Poirot, whom she describes as a celebrated veteran of the war. *Murder on the Orient Express* specifically emerged from Christie's fascination with the train route, which she rode first in 1928, and her time in Turkey and the Middle East. She wrote the novel almost entirely in a room at the Pera Palace Hotel in Istanbul. The kidnapping and murder of Daisy Armstrong by the chief antagonist Mr. Ratchett was almost certainly inspired by a similar crime that captured the public imagination in the early 1930s. The young son of the famous aviator and American hero Charles Lindbergh was kidnapped from his home in New Jersey in 1932. A ransom was demanded and paid, but the child was found dead only a few miles from the house. More globally, the solution of the crime in Christie's novel hinges on the status of the United States as a nation of immigrants. Between 1880 and 1920, the United States received 20 million immigrants, mostly from Europe. Additionally, the circumstances of the crime and investigation in the novel may also have been inspired by a 1929 blizzard that trapped the Orient Express fifty miles out of Istanbul.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Detective fiction as a genre was still relatively young when Agatha Christie began writing. The American writer Edgar Allan Poe basically invented the genre in four stories in the mid-eighteenth century, introducing a recurring detective who used observation and logical deduction to solve mysteries. Christie loved Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories (such as *The Hound of the Baskervilles*), which established the detective protagonist as an eccentric and puzzling figure with a less savvy companion who allowed the detective to explain his reasoning. This dynamic is similar to the one between Poirot and Bouc in *Murder on the Orient Express*. Christie also admired *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* by Gaston Leroux. Leroux's novel was one of the first "locked room mysteries," in which the commission of the crime and escape of the culprit seems impossible. The sealed train car on the Orient Express echoes this locked room conceit. Christie's Hercule Poirot has been enduringly popular and influential for almost 100 years. Contemporary authors such as Sophie Hannah have even written new Hercule Poirot novels with the permission of Agatha Christie's estate.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Murder on the Orient Express*
- **When Written:** 1929-1933
- **Where Written:** Istanbul, Turkey
- **When Published:** 1934
- **Literary Period:** Golden Age of detective fiction
- **Genre:** Mystery
- **Setting:** A train car en route from Istanbul to Calais
- **Climax:** The revelation that all twelve passengers murdered Ratchett
- **Antagonist:** Mr. Ratchett, formerly Cassetti
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Mysterious Disappearance. In 1926, Agatha Christie disappeared for eleven days, spurring a media sensation and a manhunt that even involved fellow author Arthur Conan Doyle. She was found alive and well at a hotel and spa in Harrogate. Today, biographers attribute the disappearance to an emotional

crisis following the death of her mother.

Collecting Clues. While working at the University College Hospital pharmacy, Christie collected information on poisons that later appeared in her novels. For example, she learned about thallium from the chief pharmacist there and employed it in her 1961 novel *The Pale Horse*.

PLOT SUMMARY

At a train platform in Aleppo, Syria, a detective named Hercule Poirot boards a train to Istanbul. In the train car are two other passengers: Colonel Arbuthnot, a British officer stationed in India, and Mary Debenham, a young English governess. The two seem acquainted from traveling on the same train, and Poirot observes a polite conversation between them that's peppered with ominous references to a time in the future "When it's all over."

At the hotel in Istanbul, Poirot gets a telegram requesting him in London, so he arranges travel by the Orient Express and in the meantime finds dinner at the hotel restaurant. There, he encounters an old friend: M. Bouc, the director of the *Wagons-Lit* company, which runs the Orient Express. Two Americans, a young man and an older one, are also dining. Poirot remarks on the appearance of the older of the two men; at first glance, he looks harmless, but a closer look reveals a malevolent quality.

Boarding the Orient Express, M. Bouc and Poirot find that all the compartments are taken, which is unusual for this time of year. Poirot is forced to share a second-class cabin with the young American from the hotel restaurant. Later in the dining car, Poirot takes some time to observe the thirteen other passengers in the train car, who are people of "all classes and nationalities." These include Ms. Debenham and Colonel Arbuthnot from the previous leg of the journey, as well as the two Americans from the hotel restaurant, the younger Hector Macqueen and the older Mr. Ratchett. Poirot also notices an elderly Russian lady, Princess Dragomiroff, and a boorish American woman, Mrs. Hubbard. Also assembled are the Hungarian nobles Countess and Count Andrenyi, a Swedish woman named Greta Ohlsson, and the Italian Antonio Foscarelli.

After dinner, Mr. Ratchett recognizes Poirot as a detective and asks him to take on a job finding the source of some threats that he's received, but Poirot refuses him. Having traded rooms with M. Bouc, Poirot retires and falls asleep, but he's awakened some time later by a loud groan from the next cabin, occupied by Mr. Ratchett. The conductor asks at the door, and the occupant responds in French that everything's okay.

Unable to go to sleep, Poirot talks to the conductor, Pierre Michel, who confides that Mrs. Hubbard, the American woman, claims to have seen a shadowy figure in her room. He also mentions that the train is stopped in Yugoslavia due to heavy snow. Before Poirot falls asleep, he hears a thud and looks into the hallway to see a figure in a **scarlet kimono** rushing by.

In the morning, M. Bouc calls for Poirot and informs him that Mr. Ratchett has been killed in the night. A Greek doctor named Dr. Constantine examines the body and finds that Ratchett has been stabbed multiple times. As they are snowed-in and have no hope of police assistance, M. Bouc asks Poirot to take on the case, and Poirot agrees.

Poirot notifies Ratchett's secretary, Mr. Macqueen, and he reveals that Ratchett had received several threatening letters, but generally he knows little about Ratchett's history. Poirot dismisses him and examines the body and crime scene. Ratchett has been stabbed twelve times, but the wounds appear to have been inflicted by two people of varying physical strength. What's more, some stab wounds were delivered after Ratchett was already dead. In Ratchett's room, Poirot finds many clues that appear a bit too convenient, as if this were a "detective's novel": a woman's handkerchief monogrammed with an "H," a stopped pocket watch purporting to give the time of the murder, a pipe-cleaner, and a burnt letter fragment mentioning the name "Daisy Armstrong."

Poirot links the name Daisy Armstrong to a criminal case in America. Daisy Armstrong was the daughter of Colonel Armstrong and Sonia Armstrong, a well-respected and connected American couple. When Daisy was three, she was abducted from her home. The Armstrongs paid a huge ransom to the kidnappers, but afterward Daisy was discovered to be already dead. Overcome with grief, Sonia Armstrong died and Colonel Armstrong committed suicide. Daisy's French nursemaid also killed herself after being falsely targeted for the kidnapping. A gangster named Cassetti was all but convicted of the crime, but he managed to escape justice by bribing high-ranking officials. Poirot concludes that Ratchett is actually Cassetti, having fled to Europe and changed his name.

Poirot then begins interviews with the passengers. Each seems surprised that Mr. Ratchett was actually the criminal Cassetti, and each has an alibi for the time when he was killed. The American Mrs. Hubbard insists that the murderer was in her cabin last night, although she claims the door between her room and Ratchett's was barred the previous night. Mrs. Hubbard produces a button from a conductor's uniform that she found near her window and seems mollified when Poirot accepts it as evidence.

Before interviewing the next person on the list, Princess Dragomiroff, Poirot confronts the conductor Pierre Michel with the button Mrs. Hubbard found. Pierre insists that he didn't lose a button and he calls a conductor from another train car to confirm his alibi. In an interview with Princess Dragomiroff, it's revealed that she did know the Armstrong family and was, in fact, Sonia Armstrong's godmother. She vaguely mentions the actress Linda Arden, who was Sonia's

mother, as well as a younger sister of Sonia's who moved to England.

Poirot discovers a few significant revelations while talking to the passengers. Cyrus Hardman reveals that he's not a typewriter salesman but a private detective hired by Mr. Ratchett to protect him. Further, Ratchett told him to expect a small dark man with a feminine voice. A few passengers claim to have seen this small dark man in a conductor's uniform the previous night, as well as a tall woman in a scarlet kimono.

After interviewing all the passengers, Poirot sums up the evidence, much of it contradictory. Poirot proposes to search each passenger's luggage. Suddenly, Mrs. Hubbard bursts in to say she's discovered a knife in her bag. Poirot identifies the knife as the murder weapon, but provides few other clues.

They begin searching the luggage and find a conductor uniform in Hildegarde Schmidt's luggage, which Poirot predicted, but doesn't mark her as guilty in his eyes. Poirot also has an extended conversation with Ms. Debenham where he confronts her with the conversation he overheard on the train from Syria, but she stubbornly refuses to explain it. Finally, Poirot finds the scarlet kimono in his own luggage, which he understands as a "defiance" from the murderer or murderers.

Poirot makes a list of the evidence and the remaining questions. A pocket watch was found on Ratchett stopped at 1:15, but it's unclear whether the crime was committed then or the murderer wants them to think it was committed then. They have an expensive handkerchief monogrammed with an "H," which no passenger will claim. They also have a pipe-cleaner, which seems to point to Colonel Arbuthnot as the only pipe smoker, but he only shrugged when confronted with it. Poirot noticed a grease spot on Countess Andrenyi's passport near her first name, which suggests an alteration.

Poirot begins to confront passengers with the results of his deductions. The Countess's first name is not Elena but Helena. The Count had altered her passport after the handkerchief with an "H" was found in Ratchett's cabin, but the handkerchief isn't hers, and they profess their innocence. However, Helena does admit that she's actually Helena Goldenberg, Sonia Armstrong's sister, which explains her desperation to escape suspicion for Ratchett's murder. Afterward, Princess Dragomiroff steps forward to claim the handkerchief.

Next, Poirot rounds on Ms. Debenham, who he has identified as Daisy Armstrong's governess, which she admits, while Colonel Arbuthnot leaps to her defense. Then follows a series of admissions from passengers that have not been forthright: Antonio Foscarelli admits that he was the Armstrong's chauffer, Greta Ohlsson admits that she was Daisy's nurse, and Masterman, Mr. Ratchett's valet, admits he was Colonel Armstrong's assistant in World War I. This is enough for Poirot to call all the passengers to assemble in the dining car so he can propose the solution to the crime.

Poirot actually has two solutions. The first is that the small, dark man Hardman mentioned boarded the train at a stop in Belgrade or Vincovci, changed into a conductor uniform, stabbed Ratchett twelve times, and stepped off the train. The passengers accept this tentatively, but M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine are unsatisfied, so Poirot offers another one.

He summarizes the inconsistencies of the case and then concludes that each one of the twelve passengers, including the conductor, Pierre Michel, murdered Ratchett, as each one had a personal connection to Daisy Armstrong or the Armstrong household. This explains why the stab wounds appear to have been made by different people: because they were. In addition, the twelve passengers colluded to throw false or irrelevant evidence in Poirot's path, including the stopped watch, the handkerchief, and the scarlet kimono itself. Poirot thinks that it would take an artist to pull off a scheme like this, and is about to identify Mrs. Hubbard as the actress Linda Arden when she comes forward and admits it. She explains the depths of grief that everyone touched by Ratchett's crime experienced and relates how the twelve of them planned the murder, bringing on Pierre Michel, the father of Daisy's French nursemaid, Hardman, the French nursemaid's lover, and Colonel Arbuthnot, who fought alongside Colonel Armstrong in the war, in addition to those previously identified as connected to the Armstrongs.

Linda Arden asks Poirot what he plans to do, and M. Bouc suggests that Poirot's first solution to the crime was more credible after all. Poirot agrees, shielding the twelve conspirators from suspicion and arrest.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Hercule Poirot – Hercule Poirot, the protagonist of the story, is a celebrated Belgian detective who stumbles on a murder investigation when a man in his train car, Mr. Ratchett, is murdered. Poirot is a short, bald man who's inordinately devoted to personal grooming and fashion, giving the impression of a ridiculous dandy to many of the other passengers. However, Poirot uses that appearance of ridiculousness to overhear and solicit information critical to the case. He speaks multiple European languages, which allows him to alternately challenge suspects or put them at ease. He uses his extraordinary talent for logic and deduction to solve the murder, conducting extended interviews focused on each suspect's emotional state. Poirot's friend, M. Bouc, serves as his foil, as he approaches the case emotionally, gets distracted by convenient evidence, and proves himself wholly incompetent at detective work.

M. Bouc – M. Bouc, who is a friend of Poirot's, is a high-ranking employee of the *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits*, the

company that operates the Orient Express. As the murder of Mr. Ratchett is a considerable liability for the company, Bouc asks Poirot to solve the case. Whatever his talents as a train executive, Bouc is comically unsuited for detective work, as he seizes prematurely on bits of convenient evidence and proceeds according to personal prejudices, including his admitted dislike of Italians. Bouc provides a good foil for the careful, open-minded Poirot so that the latter can explain his thought process about the case to the reader by way of correcting Bouc's misconceptions.

Mr. Ratchett / Cassetti – Mr. Ratchett is an older man in his sixties traveling with Mr. MacQueen, whom Poirot first encounters at a hotel in Istanbul. Ratchett immediately gives off a sinister impression to Poirot, to the extent that when Ratchett appeals to the detective to investigate a possible attempt on his life, Poirot refuses to take on the case. Over the course of the novel, Poirot determines that Mr. Ratchett is actually Cassetti, an American criminal who was nearly convicted of the murder of Daisy Armstrong but escaped punishment using bribery. The twelve passengers on the Orient Express, who were each connected to Daisy or the Armstrong family in some way, collectively murder Ratchett on the train. Ratchett's guilt is never in doubt, and he's an evil enough person that Poirot suggests an alternate explanation for his murder so the twelve passengers can escape punishment for murdering him.

Hector MacQueen – Hector is an American man around the age of thirty who took a job as an assistant to Mr. Ratchett, primarily helping him navigate the various languages of Europe in his travels. This detail becomes important when someone replies in idiomatic French from Ratchett's compartment on the morning of the murder, claiming that everything is fine. Hector's father was the district attorney who unsuccessfully prosecuted Ratchett for the murder of Daisy Armstrong.

Mary Debenham – Mary Debenham is a British governess in her twenties who attends the first leg of the journey from Aleppo to Istanbul along with Poirot and Colonel Arbuthnot. Ms. Debenham is austere and stoic, even in the face of a brutal murder. Poirot describes her as very "Anglo-Saxon." Her strange and somewhat suspicious conversation with Colonel Arbuthnot on the way to Istanbul, which Poirot overhears, is the first suggestion that they have more than a passing acquaintance. It's later revealed that Ms. Debenham was Daisy Armstrong's governess.

Colonel Arbuthnot – Colonel Arbuthnot is an older British soldier, a veteran of British colonial projects in India. He's a stolid, "Anglo-Saxon" type, whom Poirot describes as being "honourable, [and] slightly stupid." He provides an alibi for the young American Mr. MacQueen and defends Ms. Debenham when suspicion falls on her. He even invites suspicion to protect his fellow conspirators by placing a signature pipe-cleaner in Ratchett's compartment. He was a friend of Daisy's father, Colonel Armstrong.

Mrs. Hubbard – Mrs. Hubbard is an older American woman who presumably travels to support charitable and educational causes abroad. Her endless gossip and nosiness, as well as her cultural chauvinism, marks her as distinctively American to some of the other passengers. Poirot later identifies her as the famous actress Linda Arden, Daisy Armstrong's grandmother. Hubbard is revealed as a linchpin of the conspiracy to kill Ratchett. The passengers enter his compartment through hers, and her mock-hysteria on discovering new pieces of evidence is responsible for misleading Poirot and taking heat off the other conspirators.

Pierre Michel – Pierre is a veteran French conductor for the *Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits*, working on the Paris-Calais car of the Orient Express. The investigators see Pierre as a dependable, honorable man, but not as one "remarkable for brains." Thus, he appears to be incapable of deception, much less murder. However, suspicion falls on Pierre when a button from a *Wagons-Lit* uniform is found in Ratchett's compartment. He's connected to the Armstrong case through his daughter, a nursemaid for Daisy Armstrong, who later committed suicide after the police scrutinized her for Daisy's kidnapping.

Cyrus Hardman – Cyrus Hardman is an American on the Orient Express who introduces himself as a travelling salesman of typewriter ribbons. On recognizing Poirot as a famous detective, he "comes clean" and admits he's a private investigator for an American detective agency. Hardman serves as a sort of American mirror of Poirot, as a detective with bright and flashy clothes and good-natured camaraderie. Poirot later identifies him as the lover of Daisy Armstrong's French nursemaid.

Princess Natalia Dragomiroff – Princess Dragomiroff is wealthy, elderly Russian woman who now resides in France. The other passengers remark on her ugliness, but also her strength of will and self-possession. An expensive handkerchief is planted in Ratchett's compartment in order to strategically draw suspicion to her, as her frailty makes her an unlikely murderer. Princess Dragomiroff was the godmother of Sonia Armstrong, Daisy's mother.

Antonio Foscarelli – Often referred to as simply "the Italian," Antonio is an Italian-born businessman with dealings in America. Antonio is especially garrulous, and Poirot has to remind him to stay on topic in their interviews surrounding Ratchett's murder. Foscarelli is an early suspect when M. Bouc singles him out because, as he says, "Italians use the knife," and Ratchett was clearly stabbed by a knife (twelve times, at that). Antonio was the chauffer for the Armstrong household at the time of Daisy's kidnapping.

Hildegarde Schmidt – Hildegarde is a German lady's maid working for Princess Dragomiroff. In his interview with her, Poirot speaks German to put her at ease and baits her by

complimenting her cooking, which is beyond the responsibilities of her current position as a lady's maid. It is later revealed that she was the chef for the Armstrong household at the time of Daisy's kidnapping.

Countess Andrenyi – Countess Andrenyi, a young woman of around twenty, is a Hungarian noble married to Count Andrenyi. It's revealed at the end of the novel that her real name is Helena Goldenberg, and that she's Sonia Armstrong's sister. Countess Adrenyi is the only one connected to the Armstrong family who doesn't stab Mr. Ratchett, perhaps because her connection to Daisy's case is too direct. Instead, her husband goes in her place. Countess Andrenyi is also the likely owner of the **scarlet kimono**.

Count Andrenyi – A Hungarian man of around thirty, the Count met and married Helena Goldenberg, known afterward as Countess Andrenyi, while doing diplomatic work in Washington, D.C. Aware of his wife's direct connection to the Armstrong family, he's especially protective of her and squares off against Poirot to try to keep him from questioning her. Count Andrenyi stabs Ratchett in his wife's stead.

Dr. Constantine – Dr. Constantine is a Greek doctor traveling on the Orient Express, whose services are required to determine the nature of Mr. Ratchett's death. He observes that many different people may have inflicted Mr. Ratchett with his twelve stab wounds. He attends many of the suspect interviews with detective Hercule Poirot.

Daisy Armstrong – Daisy Armstrong was the three-year-old daughter of Colonel Armstrong and Sonia Armstrong. Before the opening of the novel, Daisy had been kidnapped, ransomed, and killed by a gangster named Cassetti. Although the crime spurred national mourning and anger in America, Cassetti subsequently bribed his way out of his trouble, fled the country, and changed his name to Ratchett. Daisy's sweetness, youth, and innocence makes the killing of Ratchett seem an act of justice rather than murder.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Greta Ohlsson – Greta is a Swedish woman on the Orient Express who's sentimental and a bit delicate. Mrs. Hubbard takes her under her wing because the murder of Ratchett seems to especially disturb Greta. Greta later admits that she used to be Daisy Armstrong's nurse.

Edward Henry Masterman – Masterman is Mr. Ratchett's valet, or personal assistant. He's an unemotional British man who likes to read and complains of a toothache on the night of Ratchett's murder. Masterman was the personal servant of Colonel Armstrong, Daisy's father, in World War I.

THEMES

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JUSTICE

Crime in popular imagination, including mystery novels, generally centers on individual motivations and perpetrators: one person commits a crime out of greed, jealousy, anger, or a pure streak of evil, while another seeks to unravel the clues in order to "bring the criminal to justice"—to identify and capture the criminal so he or she can be judged and punished for his or her crimes. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, Agatha Christie complicates the story by starting it after traditional justice has already failed: the original criminal was acquitted on a technicality (and also bribed high-ranking officials). The crime that the detective Hercule Poirot investigates in the novel is actually an attempt to redress the failure of justice—the crime is an act of vigilantism. Such a "crime" offers Christie both a twist on the typical mystery novel, but also a way for Christie to investigate whether any act committed outside the traditional justice system can actually serve as justice.

Christie lays the groundwork for the novel's investigation of justice by making clear that the victim of the murder, Ratchett, is himself guilty of an earlier monstrous crime. Ratchett's guilt is established both through Poirot's observations of his personality and descriptions of the scale and severity of his crime. Indeed, the novel suggests his evil character and guilt almost immediately. He's described as a "bland philanthropist" but when his "gaze stopped on Poirot for a moment [...] just for that second there was a strange malevolence." The novel suggests he is in disguise, which in turn suggests his hidden guilt. Through its opening sections, the novel then reveals the terrible crime that Ratchett is accused of committing: Ratchett's gang kidnapped Daisy Armstrong, a three-year-old girl, and then savagely murdered her while continuing to extort money from the family. Not only is Ratchett accused of this crime, he is definitively guilty of it. This is clear when Poirot himself, the novel's singular source of truth and expertise, recalls that Ratchett was only "acquitted on some technical inaccuracy."

In short, the novel establishes that the Ratchett *deserves* to be brought to justice that he has so far evaded. In contrast, the murder of Ratchett, committed by the other passengers of the Orient Express, shows that the certainty of guilt is just one precondition for justice. The passengers on the train also lay claim to justice by modeling their killing, at least roughly, on the

ordinary proceedings of the justice system. They take pains to ensure that the people who sit in judgement over Ratchett are similar in both number, identity, and affect to the members of a jury. While revealing the results of the investigation, Poirot remarks, "A jury is composed of twelve people—there were twelve passengers—Ratchett was stabbed twelve times." Later, Linda Arden, formerly Mrs. Hubbard, reveals that "Colonel Arbuthnot was very keen on having twelve of us." In other words, that there were twelve passengers who came together was no coincidence or accident. It was part of a concerted effort by to give the murder of Ratchett the appearance of justice. In addition, like a typical jury, the members of the conspiracy come from every conceivable background. The Russian Princess Dragomiroff held the knife along with Antonio the Italian chauffer and Hildegarde the German cook. The diversity of the murderers in terms of both national identity and class provides the sort of cross-section of America that Ratchett might have seen in those who would have judged him during a jury trial. Also, early on Poirot detects also that the crime was not one passion: "It is a crime that shows traces of a cool, resourceful, deliberate brain…" In fact, it was deliberately planned and staged over a long period of time. This satisfies another requirement of justice: that it be delivered with cool rationality, without emotion.

The ordinary course of justice works by socializing the responsibility for the punishment of the guilty—by spreading it out across multiple people. A jury composed of multiple people ensures that no one person shoulders too heavy a burden for sitting in judgement over another. When each member of the conspiracy personally stabs Ratchett, guilt is diffused in a similar way. This "spreading out" of the crime takes the act out of the realm of the personal to that of the collective, as punishment would function in a jury trial. Indeed, Linda Arden explicitly points to the idea that the twelve passengers are only an instrument of society when society's aims had been frustrated: "Society had condemned him—we were only carrying out the sentence." Even the weapon is chosen so every one of the conspirators, even the frail Princess Dragomiroff, can have their portion of both justice and guilt. The dagger, as Poirot says, "was a weapon that could be used by everyone—strong or weak." Finally, the crime is structured so that no one perpetrator can be sure of delivering the killing blow. Because Ratchett is already drugged, "They themselves would never know which blow actually killed him." This elevates the act to an impersonal judgement by society. Ratchett is killed by everyone, but by no one person individually.

Ultimately, after he solves the crime of Ratchett's murder, Poirot decides not to apprehend them: he officially settles on an alternate story of a murderer who got away. Poirot's actions make clear that even though Poirot is a detective, his allegiance is to the spirit of the law rather than to the letter. More broadly, his refusal to incriminate the passengers acknowledges that justice has the same principles of established guilt and collective judgment whether it's pursued inside or outside the courtroom.

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

The Orient Express was a transcontinental railroad that knit together the countries of Europe from Istanbul, Turkey in the east to London, England in the west. As such, the passengers in Agatha Christie's novel are drawn from various countries across Europe. In addition, all of the characters have spent time in the "melting pot" of America, where Ratchett's original crime of murdering Daisy Armstrong took place (a crime that affected each of the passengers in some way). When Mr. Ratchett is murdered, some of the investigators initially see national origin—in the sense of stereotypical traits supposedly belonging to certain nationalities—as a likely explanation for the crime. However, as the true nature of the murder becomes clear—that it was an elaborate conspiracy among many people to take revenge on an amoral gangster—the novel reveals a critique of such narrow nationalist thinking. By attributing guilt to *every* passenger, from a sentimental Swedish nurse to a worldly Russian count, Christie ends up telling an unexpectedly utopian story about people of many different nations working together. Further, by locating the source of their connection in the United States, she suggests that America is a place that forges common purpose, for good or ill, particularly among people who might otherwise be divided by ethnicity, class, and language. This, in turn, dismantles the idea that national origin is destiny in a way true to American ideals, if not practice.

Christie begins to attack the primacy of national identity by presenting theories about the case based on national origin, only to expose them as limited or irrelevant. She puts this reasoning by ethnic stereotype in the mouth of M. Bouc, an executive of the train company that operates the Orient Express, which is significant particularly because he's an obviously awful detective whose main function is to be comically wrong about the case. For instance, M. Bouc very prematurely incriminates the Italian Antonio based on nothing more than a coincidence and a stereotype: "I say, my friend, that it is the big Italian. He comes from America—from Chicago—and remember an Italian's weapon is the knife." He finds the simplicity of the stereotype compelling and is happy to accuse a type of person who, by his own admission, he does not like. Detective Hercule Poirot's dismissal of these theories indicates that the crime involves a deeper motivation than national origin. What's more relevant in this case, Poirot understands, is a shared purpose and experience that cuts across national origins.

M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine's errors in focusing on national identity are compounded because, as the reader later learns

when Poirot figures out what happened, all the passengers have been putting on performances in order to frustrate the investigation. No one does this with more gusto than Mrs. Hubbard, who's actually the famed actress Linda Arden. Mrs. Hubbard plays the role of the boorish, nosy American so well, and the investigators are so comfortable with the stereotype, that she deflects suspicion for the majority of the story. All of these performances, which themselves rely on stereotypes based on national origin, show how the belief in the truth of such stereotypes can blind people, including criminal investigators, to the truth of individual identity.

It is no accident that the man who solves the crime, Hercule Poirot, exists outside of this network of national identities and prejudices. Poirot is from Belgium, a European country distinguished by its neutrality in many of Europe's conflicts. And, beyond that, his outlook determinedly international. When asked about his identity by the Countess Andrenyi, Poirot retorts "I belong to the world, Madame," unwilling to be defined even by his native Belgium. This outlook allows him to stay out of the national tensions of the other passengers, such as MacQueen's slights of "Britishers," but it also, crucially for a detective, allows him to more effectively pursue his investigation. For instance, Poirot slides in and out of English, French, and German both to test suspects or to put them at ease.

That both the intricate effectiveness of the murder and Poirot's ability to solve it are based on an ability to connect across national origins is implied when, just before Poirot lays out the facts of the case to the assembled passengers, he declares, "I will speak in English since I think all of you know a little of that language." English, of course, is the "melting pot" language of America, and in that way serves as the medium for cross-national connection that both Poirot and the passengers share.

DETECTIVE METHODS AND INNER LIVES

Hercule Poirot is a recurring character in Agatha Christie's mysteries, appearing in thirty-three novels and more than fifty short stories over the course of her career. Recurring detectives are a tradition in mystery stories, one which includes Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin and, of course, Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. These detectives are often eccentric or solitary, but despite that, they often appear dashing or imposing, even if only for their considerable intelligence. Within the first pages of Christie's novel, it's clear that Hercule Poirot is not that sort of detective, as he's described as "a small man muffled up to the ears of whom nothing was visible but a pink-tipped nose and the two points of an upward-curled moustache." Yet, as becomes clear, Poirot's disarming, even ridiculous personal appearance lends itself perfectly to his particular method of investigation, which involves extended personal engagement with suspects and witnesses rather than connecting many minute details of appearance or setting. Poirot does follow what are traditionally called "clues," or material evidence, but he, and the novel, suggest that more effective crime-solving requires diving into the psychology and experiences of the subjects of the investigation.

Hercule Poirot is a short, rotund man with a waxed mustache and elegant clothes, which is what few would expect in a detective. He's able to hear, observe, and extract details of the passengers' private lives partially because he appears unthreatening or unserious. His eccentricities, rather than alienating suspects and witnesses as Sherlock Holmes would, end up drawing information out of them. On first observing Poirot, "In spite of her preoccupations Mary Debenham smiled. A ridiculous-looking little man. The sort of little man one could never take seriously." His appearance even soothes her anxiety over the murder she's contemplating. A little later, Mary Debenham "seemed suddenly to come to herself, to realise that she was talking to a stranger and foreigner, with whom, until this morning, she had exchanged only half a dozen sentences." Fellow detective Mr. Hardman even issues Poirot a backhanded compliment: "but no one would believe it to look at you. I take off my hat to you. I do indeed." The fact that "no one would believe it" is a cornerstone of Poirot's effectiveness as a detective.

The setting of the novel also highlights Poirot's personal touch. After conducting all his interviews, Poirot remarks, "We are cut off from all the normal routes of procedure. Are these people whose evidence we have taken speaking the truth, or lying?" The novel's primary setting—a stranded train in Yugoslavia—precludes the kind of deep research and cross-referencing of crime-scene information that mysteries often call for. Poirot's method instead seeks and finds "clues" by pushing small emotional levers in his suspects and observing them keenly for any changes in behavior. For instance, when interviewing the Countess Andrenyi, Poirot surprises her by saying, "'I work mainly in London. You speak English?' he added in that language." She responds, "'I speak a leetle, yes.' Her accent was charming." The novel reveals later that the Countess is, in fact, American, and it's not clear whether Poirot finds the accent "charming" for its authenticity or its clumsiness. But he acquires information by requiring that she deny her reflex to speak perfectly in her native language, and instead speak in a Russian misunderstanding of it.

Similarly, he's attentive to and willing to exploit pain or nostalgia in suspects. Speaking with Mr. Hardman, Poirot rhapsodizes about European women in what seems like a non-sequitur: "The French or the Belgian girl, coquettish, charming—I think there is no one to touch her." But Hardman's wistful glance out the window is how Poirot confirms that he was the lover of the young French nursemaid employed by the Armstrongs.

Poirot's subtle nudges might be less dramatic than a reader

would expect in detective fiction. However, the style of a Sherlock Holmes, in which minute details are connected and arcane expertise comes into play, may not be effective in a situation where the details of the crime scene are irrelevant, as they've been intentionally planted. Instead, Christie privileges smaller details: moments where Poirot induces a suspect to act against or in accordance with their instincts. In the process, she creates a distinctive niche for her detective and holds up the inner lives of victims and perpetrators as the most compelling aspects of murder.

DECEPTION AND GENRE EXPECTATIONS

When writing a mystery, one of the author's main responsibilities is to confound any reader's attempts to solve it. When Agatha Christie published *Murder on the Orient Express* in 1938, detective fiction had a rich tradition dating at least back to Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" published in 1841. Devoted readers were familiar with the conventions of the genre and knew the strategies authors used to throw them off the trail. This makes mystery an especially self-referential genre, where both readers and authors are conscious of what's come before. It also makes mystery novels self-referential in another way: the same cat-and-mouse relationship between writer and reader is mirrored in the relationship between criminal and detective. By covering their tracks, criminals in mysteries provide alternate theories of the crime to mislead their pursuers. This is explicitly true in *Murder on the Orient Express* because much of the plot is a performance for the benefit of Hercule Poirot, in which the passengers try unsuccessfully to stump him. Through this dynamic, Christie makes sly references to the genre of the detective story as the passengers use classic techniques to thwart Poirot. Clues and motives that a lesser novel might have put at the heart of the mystery are a distraction or just one piece of the overall picture. By using the conventions of the mystery genre in a knowing way, Christie pushes the boundaries and stays one step ahead in order to tease and delight savvy mystery readers.

In this meta-reading of the novel, Hercule Poirot stands in for the smart reader that Christie hopes to keep ahead of. The passengers know that Poirot isn't merely a detective but one of international renown. They overload the detective with obvious, overdetermined clues that confuse any attempt to build a narrative of the murder. Christie knows that her reader will see past these classic and conventional clues, but their sheer number throw enough chaff that readers are constantly eliminating clues rather than building a positive picture of the crime. For example, Poirot finds the stopped watch in Ratchett's pocket immediately suspect. In his final summation, he notes, "Anyone might see through the watch business—it is a common enough device in detective stories." The passengers' objective here is the same as Christie's. She introduces a cliché from more conventional detective stories to throw off the reader, while also slyly making clear that she's playing a deeper game. The **scarlet kimono** is an equally classic technique: the red herring. A red herring, named for the smoked fish that would throw hounds off the scent of their prey, is a detail that seems crucial but is meant to mislead. When Poirot finds the kimono in his own luggage, it's a sign that each party is aware of their relationship. The author and criminal's role is to mislead, while the detective and reader's role is to deduce. Finally, Christie reveals deception only to hide a deeper one that's relevant to the crime. Mr. Hardman, on recognizing Poirot, admits "Guess I'd better come clean," preparing the reader for a heart-stopping revelation. But the information is simply that Hardman is a fellow detective. Having revealed one lie, Hardman tricks the reader into believing that his whole truth is revealed.

Christie also subverts genre expectations by assigning collective guilt to all twelve passengers. Dr. Constantine identifies twelve stab wounds on Ratchett, some made by a man and others made by a woman, but even with that evidence, he can only imagine at the most two culprits. Traditional mysteries depend so often on single culprits to the extent that a team of twelve perpetrators short-circuits the logic of the mystery story. Rather than evading suspicion, the twelve conspirators *balance* it, so that it falls on those most equipped to absorb it. Neither the reader nor Poirot expects that the perpetrators would actually selflessly incriminate themselves to draw attention from other members of the conspiracy who they don't even seem to know. The pipe-cleaner, conductor's button, and handkerchief all point directly to Colonel Arbuthnot, Pierre Michel, and Princess Dragomiroff respectively, but we later learn that they were planted specifically to direct attention to those with strong alibis. Further, the conspiracy forms a web of alibis, pairing off members to ensure that each has someone to vouch for them. Any reader would expect suspects to lie in a mystery novel, but the reader wouldn't expect *all* of them to. By colluding on the only source of truth for the pivotal night's events, the passengers keep any would-be detective from seizing on any ironclad conclusion.

Poirot also participates in the deception in ways that break the mold of the traditional detective by tailoring his personality to the suspect, testing their facility with certain languages, or anticipating aspects of their personality in ways that surprise them. But his final act of deception when diagramming the crime is an especially self-referential moment that is meant as much for the reader as his audience on the Orient Express. The detective, a creature of truth, is willing to conceal it for the sake of justice. Poirot's first theory is that a stranger boarded the train, disguised himself as a conductor, and killed Ratchett, ditching the knife and leaving afterward. Dr. Constantine's reaction is meant to mimic what is also likely the reader's: "No,

no, and again no! That is an explanation that will not hold water." This theory, introducing a previously unknown character, violates the rules of the genre in ways that break the contract between writer and reader. However, the second deception is that Poirot isn't making a mistake when he suggests this theory. Rather, he purposely introduces it, knowing it's wrong, in order to later suggest it as a cover so the conspirators could escape punishment for the murder. After it's accepted, Poirot cryptically says, "having placed my solution before you, I have the honour to retire from the case." It's a final twist of mystery convention that the famed detective would substitute a dull, convenient falsehood for a fascinating truth, and that he would, in the end, refuse to solve the crime.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

SCARLET KIMONO

In *Murder on the Orient Express*, the scarlet kimono symbolizes the malicious struggle between the mysterious criminal and the detective, Hercule Poirot. When Ratchett is stabbed in his train compartment in the early hours of the morning, Poirot peers into the hallway to see a woman rushing by in a scarlet silk kimono. Over the course of the subsequent investigation, the scarlet kimono remains a persistent mystery. Poirot asks each female witness whether she owns one, and each one denies it. When Poirot finally discovers the kimono in his luggage he says, "It is like that. A defiance. Very well, I take it up." Placing the kimono in Poirot's luggage is an acknowledgement that both parties know the dangerous game they're playing. The scarlet kimono also serves as a red herring, which is a detail or fact that seems crucial to the mystery but is later revealed to be unimportant, to distract readers and keep them in suspense. Agatha Christie's red herring is distinguished by its boldness and transparency—after all, the kimono itself is bright red.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper edition of *Murder on the Orient Express* published in 2011.

Part 1 Chapter 1 Quotes

"You have saved the honour of the French Army—you have averted much bloodshed! How can I thank you for acceding to my request? To have come so far—" To which the stranger (by name M. Hercule Poirot) had made a fitting reply including the phrase—"But indeed, do I not remember that once you saved my life?" And then the General had made another fitting reply to that, disclaiming any merit for that past service; and with more mention of France, of Belgium, of glory, of honour and of such kindred things they had embraced each other heartily and the conversation had ended.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Detective Poirot is introduced indirectly through the recollection of a French Army lieutenant reflecting on Poirot's service in a scandalous or dangerous matter for the French Army. The French General's praise is effusive, suggesting that Poirot is a man of immense talents, but it also points to Poirot's commitments to higher ideals like justice, "glory," and "honour." These qualities are not givens for detectives; in fact, other famous detective characters such as Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes value their work primarily as intellectual exercises rather than as a route to justice per se.

Additionally, the passage burnishes Poirot's international credentials. He's a Belgian who nonetheless has "come so far" to assist in a matter for another country's army. It's clear already that Poirot views national distinction not as a divisive factor but a way to bring glory to both parties through mutual effort.

She had never seen anyone quite so heavily muffled up. It must be very cold outside. That was why they heated the train so terribly. She tried to force the window down lower, but it would not go. The Wagon Lit conductor had come up to the two men. The train was about to depart, he said. Monsieur had better mount. The little man removed his hat. What an egg-shaped head he had! In spite of her preoccupations Mary Debenham smiled. A ridiculous-looking little man. The sort of little man one could never take seriously.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot, Mary Debenham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6-7

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mary Debenham peers out the window of the train and sees Hercule Poirot, who is waiting to board. A picture of the detective Poirot continues to emerge based on the private observations of others, rather than objective description, and the picture that forms is of a "ridiculous-looking little man." It's difficult to square the high praise of the French general for Poirot with his public image. Short in stature with an "egg-shaped head," Poirot doesn't exactly command respect and awe with his presence. Instead, if not for the prior knowledge that Poirot is an important, worldly individual, he would appear a comic figure.

But Poirot's absurd appearance and the sense that he's a "little man one could never take seriously" plays into his role as a detective. Poirot calls attention to himself as a unassuming, unthreatening figure of fun, nearly a parody of a fussy European. As a result, Mary Debenham almost immediately drops her guard: "In spite of her preoccupations Mary Debenham smiled." As a detective, it might be more valuable to be laughed at than feared.

> The Colonel sat down. "Boy," he called in peremptory fashion. He gave an order for eggs and coffee. His eyes rested for a moment on Hercule Poirot they passed on indifferently. Poirot, reading the English mind correctly, knew that he had said to himself, "Only some damned foreigner."

Related Characters: Colonel Arbuthnot (speaker), Mary Debenham, Hercule Poirot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

On the train to Istanbul, even though Poirot isn't actively working on a case, he decides to observe the two other passengers: Mary Debenham, a young English governess, and Colonel Arbuthnot, an English soldier returning from India. Arbuthnot immediately distinguishes himself as someone accustomed to command, as he orders in a "peremptory fashion." However, Poirot also attributes to him an "English mind" with its customary dismissal of foreigners. Although Belgium is separated from England only by a few hundred miles of water, Poirot certainly qualifies as a "damned foreigner" in Arbuthnot's eyes. His waxed moustache, elegant clothing, and fluent French mark him as such. But Arbuthnot's reaction to Poirot isn't focused hostility; it's indifference. The fact that Poirot's "only" a foreigner means it's not necessary to monitor one's own speech or habits in front of him. Arbuthnot might assume Poirot doesn't speak English. Of course, Poirot does, and this is a way Poirot deploys his foreignness to learn more than he might otherwise.

Part 1 Chapter 2 Quotes

> He was a man perhaps of between sixty and seventy. From a little distance he had the bland aspect of a philanthropist. His slightly bald head, his domed forehead, the smiling mouth that displayed a very white set of false teeth—all seemed to speak of a benevolent personality. Only the eyes belied this assumption. They were small, deep-set and crafty. Not only that. As the man, making some remark to his young companion, glanced across the room, his gaze stopped on Poirot for a moment and just for that second there was a strange malevolence, an unnatural tensity in the glance.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot, Mr. Ratchett / Cassetti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17-18

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as Poirot sits in the restaurant of the Tokatlian Hotel, he observes an older American man. At first, he appears to be an ordinary, genial old man, and that's indeed the conclusion a casual observer might reach, but Poirot's keen observations reveal that image to be a front. The eyes, "small, deep-set and crafty" speak to a paranoid or mercenary outlook. Further, the "strange malevolence" in the stranger's gaze belies the constructed persona of the "bland philanthropist." The "very white set of false teeth" also speak to a sort of façade that's been built over a hostile and malevolent personality.

In previous scenes on the train to Istanbul, Poirot established confidence in his observational skills by breaking down the "cool efficiency" of Mary Debenham and the stiff-necked, xenophobic personality of Colonel Arbuthnot. So when Poirot detects something close to authentic evil in a chance encounter with a stranger, his account has credence. The apparent presence of evil and its "unnatural tensity" begins to set up the novel's concern with justice and the punishment of the wicked.

Part 1 Chapter 3 Quotes

"And yet—it lends itself to romance, my friend. All around us are people, of all classes, of all nationalities, of all ages. For three days these people, these strangers to one another, are brought together."

Related Characters: M. Bouc (speaker), Hercule Poirot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

M. Bouc, an executive of the Wagons Lit train company, is perhaps self-congratulatory here as he describes the romance of travel and how it brings together strangers of various backgrounds who might otherwise never meet. The Orient Express is an international space where a Russian Princess can dine across from an American salesman of typewriter ribbons. M. Bouc's rhapsodic treatment of that possibility echoes the novel's larger approval of internationalism, gesturing towards America and its "melting pot" ideal. The Orient Express literally connects nations, but it also metaphorically connects them for this short passage of "three days" when words in English, French, and German are freely traded and the importance of class is diminished.

"It is—they must—how do you say?—serve the water of the country," explained the sheep-faced lady.

"Well, it seems queer to me." She looked distastefully at the heap of small change on the table in front of her. "Look at all this peculiar stuff he's given me. Dinars or something. Just a lot of rubbish, it looks like!"

Related Characters: Mrs. Hubbard, Greta Ohlsson (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29-30

Explanation and Analysis

Greta Ohlsson, a Swedish nurse, is trying to explain to Mrs. Hubbard why the customs of the European countries might not exactly match her preferences. Mrs. Hubbard is defiant, speaking in derogatory terms of Turkish currency as "peculiar stuff" and "just a lot of rubbish." As an upper-class, elderly American traveling in Europe, Mrs. Hubbard embodies many of the worst qualities of the stereotype. She's naïve and contemptuous of foreign customs. Previously, she had extolled the importance of teaching "work ethic" to people in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. In a way, she's a foil to the general spirit of internationalism on the Orient Express. Where M. Bouc found "romance" in travel, Mrs. Hubbard finds only confusion and disappointment.

Of course, much later it will be revealed that Mrs. Hubbard is actually the actress Linda Arden. It's appropriate for a novel committed to dissecting and resisting stereotypes that the character who hews closest to the American stereotype is almost entirely fabricated—her behavior is merely an acting exercise.

"Name your figure, then," he said. Poirot shook his head. "You do not understand, Monsieur. I have been very fortunate in my profession. I have made enough money to satisfy both my needs and my caprices. I take now only such cases as-interest me."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot, Mr. Ratchett / Cassetti (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

After the first evening's dining service, Mr. Ratchett joins Poirot to offer him a job safeguarding a threat on his life. Previously, Poirot had been struck by Ratchett's "malevolent gaze" and described him as a "savage animal" on the basis of a close observation. So when approached for a job, Poirot demurs. Some of Poirot essential honorable character had been established by his service to the French army, but this episode reinforces that Poirot's allegiance is to justice and "interest," rather than money.

Further, Ratchett's difficulty in comprehending Poirot's refusal shows his overwhelming greed and small-minded concern with money. He grows increasingly desperate, begging Poirot to "Name your figure," without understanding that Poirot may have different reasons for refusing. In fact, the punctuation of "such cases as-interest me" is telling. Poirot's hesitation speaks to him finding a more tactful way to express his displeasure with Ratchett. His reason for refusing isn't that Ratchett's case is boring but that Ratchett is fundamentally a bad person.

Part 1 Chapter 5 Quotes

He was just dropping off when something again woke him. This time it was as though something heavy had fallen with a thud against the door. He sprang up, opened it and looked out. Nothing. But to his right, some distance down the corridor, a woman wrapped in a scarlet kimono was retreating from him. At the other end, sitting on his little seat, the conductor was entering up figures on large sheets of paper. Everything was deathly quiet.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Poirot awakens for the second time to a loud noise from the adjacent cabin, occupied by Mr. Ratchett. The reader has been conditioned to expect a murder, and so small details assume outsize importance. However, what Poirot witnesses isn't a small detail; indeed, few could be more prominent. The scarlet kimono is an exotic garment that draws an extraordinary amount of attention to itself as potential clue.

The "red herring" trope is a familiar one in mystery novels, in which an attention-grabbing clue appears to be crucial to the case but is later revealed to be irrelevant. The scarlet kimono, then, presents itself as an especially powerful and obvious red herring, one which would necessarily influence the investigation to follow. But this early in the novel, it's impossible to determine its relevance. Its inclusion seems almost a challenge from the author, raising the question of if an author would mislead the reader with a red herring that's actually red, or is this a double-bluff and the kimono is genuinely relevant.

Part 1 Chapter 7 Quotes

"Perfectly," said Poirot. "The matter begins to clear itself up wonderfully! The murderer was a man of great strength—he was feeble—it was a woman—it was a right-handed person—it was a left- handed person. Ah! c'est rigolo, tout ça!"

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), Dr. Constantine

Related Themes:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Poirot has conferred with Dr. Constantine to examine the extent and variety of Mr. Ratchett twelve wounds, all of which have been inflicted by a knife. Some are "feeble" and others cut nearly to the bone. Some were delivered by a left-handed person and other by a right-handed person. Poirot's litany of contradictory details about the suspect's profile establishes the central dilemma. It's all ridiculous, he concludes in French.

Previously, Poirot had floated the idea of multiple murderers, but here he returns to an individual suspect, in part because the force of individual motive is so powerful in making sense of a crime. When a crime is committed, an individual culprit is where the mind generally rests. It's difficult enough to find one murderer. How much more difficult, then, is it to determine the motives of multiple murderers, whether they acted together or separately, and whether their motives aligned or diverged. This question of individual versus group agency is one of the significant innovations of *Murder on the Orient Express* as a mystery novel.

"A woman's handkerchief," said the doctor. "Our friend the chef de train was right. There is a woman concerned in this."

"And most conveniently she leaves her handkerchief behind!" said Poirot. "Exactly as it happens in the books and on the films—and to make things even easier for us, it is marked with an initial."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot, Dr. Constantine (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Poirot begins to grapple with the unusual preponderance of evidence surrounding Ratchett's murder. MacQueen had already provided him with convenient threatening letters written in a clunky gangster dialect, and now Poirot discovers a woman's handkerchief "exactly as it happens in the books and on the films." His reference to murder

mystery cliché analogizes the work of an author and the work of a murderer. After all, when a murderer covers up a crime or plants evidence she is telling a story about the murder that leads away from her. In this passage, Agatha Christie has Poirot invoke these books and films as if to warn the reader that it won't be that simple. Other novels may traffic in these easy clues, but this novel won't let a monogrammed handkerchief lead to the first woman with an "H" in her name.

"It is the psychology I seek, not the fingerprint or the cigarette ash. But in this case I would welcome a little scientific assistance. This compartment is full of clues, but can I be sure that those clues are really what they seem to be?"

"I do not quite understand you, M. Poirot."

"Well, to give you an example—we find a woman's handkerchief. Did a woman drop it? Or did a man, committing the crime, say to himself: 'I will make this look like a woman's crime.

Related Characters: Dr. Constantine , Hercule Poirot (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the early stages of the investigation, Poirot has been strangely dismissive of physical evidence. In this passage, he lays out an explanation for this as well as a justification for his theory of detective work. Poirot seeks "psychology" not "the fingerprint or the cigarette ash," meaning he seeks to understand the experiences and motives that might lead someone to want someone else dead. A murder can occur without a telltale spot of cigarette ash, but it won't occur without these deep psychological forces.

Still further, physical evidence can lie in more insidious ways than people do. Every crime scene is potentially constructed, arranged in such a way by the perpetrator that it frustrates or misleads the investigation. In Poirot's example, a man could have planted the handkerchief to implicate a woman just as easily as a woman could have dropped it accidentally. This vindicates what readers have already seen of Poirot's method: a focus on people rather than objects.

Part 1 Chapter 8 Quotes

"I will come to the moment when, after the parents had paid over the enormous sum of two hundred thousand dollars, the child's dead body was discovered; it had been dead for at least a fortnight. Public indignation rose to fever point. And there was worse to follow. Mrs. Armstrong was expecting another baby. Following the shock of the discovery, she gave birth prematurely to a dead child, and herself died. Her broken-hearted husband shot himself."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), M. Bouc, Daisy Armstrong, Mr. Ratchett / Cassetti

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

After discovering a half-burnt letter referring to Daisy Armstrong in Ratchett's cabin, Poirot recalls the Armstrong case, in which a three-year-old girl was kidnapped and murdered. The story is a parade of horrors, destroying an entire family and, as Poirot would go on to say, a French nursemaid who was briefly suspected of the crime. Poirot will later identify the late Ratchett as Cassetti, the man who orchestrated this vile murder and then escaped justice.

However, this description of the case does important preparatory work in establishing that a horrifying failure of justice occurred, and that Ratchett's murder, although accomplished in an improper way, may be justified. The use of an innocent young girl as a pawn in an extortion scheme is evil enough, but her murder despite the ransom being paid shows a raw and willful cruelty that scrambles any moral or procedural objections to how such a monster should be punished.

Part 2 Chapter 5 Quotes

"Without a doubt, that is the solution of the mystery. Doubtless he and this Ratchett were in this kidnapping business together. Cassetti is an Italian name. In some way Ratchett did on him what they call the double-cross. The Italian tracks him down, sends him warning letters first, and finally revenges himself upon him in a brutal way. It is all quite simple." Poirot shook his head doubtfully.

Related Characters: M. Bouc (speaker), Hercule Poirot, Antonio Foscarelli

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

After the testimony of Greta Ohlsson, M. Bouc tries to persuade Poirot to interview the Italian man, Antonio Foscarelli, next. M. Bouc's monologue is almost a parody of the way a layman with little talent for deduction but significant prejudices would break down the case. He draws a direct line between Antonio and Cassetti that he justifies only by their having Italian names, but many people have Italian names: in Italy, America, and across the world.

Further, Christie seems to diminish M. Bouc's conclusion that he, but not Poirot, is entirely convinced of his own argument. He begins "without a doubt…" and then proceeds, "Doubtless he and this Ratchett were in this kidnapping business together." Whereas Poirot, ever carefully, shakes his head "doubtfully." Poirot, at this early stage in the investigation, attempts to resist both simplicity and certainty, an impulse that makes him a great detective.

Part 2 Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ "I am not a Jugo-Slavian detective, Madame. I am an international detective." "You belong to the League of Nations?"

"I belong to the world, Madame," said Poirot dramatically.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), Countess Andrenyi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

After Poirot asks Countess Andrenyi the color of her dressing gown, she grows understandably curious of his legitimacy and credentials. When she asks if he's Yugoslavian, he responds that he's an "international detective." Curiously, his commitment to internationalism is so strong that he doesn't even mention his Belgian nationality. This offers several advantages to Poirot as a detective. It allows him to evade any prejudices that others might form of him based on nationality, and it enables him to remain impartial in issues of nationality, as his allegiance is to neither Belgium nor Europe but "the world."

This fierce spirit of independence is reinforced by the Countess' confused question about the "League of Nations," an international governing body between the wars. Her confusion betrays a desperation for the Countess to assign nationality to this stranger as a way of making sense of him and divining his motives. However, Poirot refuses association even with this international body, choosing to align his work with higher ideals: truth, justice, and service to the world.

Part 2 Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ "In fact, Colonel Arbuthnot, you prefer law and order to private vengeance?" "Well, you can't go about having blood feuds and stabbing each other like Corsicans or the Mafia," said the Colonel. "Say what you like, trial by jury is a sound system."

Related Characters: Colonel Arbuthnot (speaker), Mr. Ratchett / Cassetti, Hercule Poirot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

As a regular part of his interviews with the passengers, Poirot has revealed that the murdered Mr. Ratchett was actually Cassetti, the man responsible for the kidnapping and murder of Daisy Armstrong. Like the other passengers, Colonel Arbuthnot believes the "swine deserved what he got," but he qualifies that approval with a wish that it could have been done with a "trial by jury," which he calls a "sound system."

Ironically, that's exactly what Cassetti got and precisely what failed to produce the necessary justice. Arbuthnot's ambivalence navigates a course between "trial by jury" and "blood feuds," as a jury can fail to reach justice and blood feuds commit to private violence in a way society can't tolerate. Much later, it will be revealed that Arbuthnot insisted that there be twelve people organized to kill Ratchett as it echoed the twelve sitting in judgment on a jury. Arbuthnot tried to give private vengeance, though shared by twelve people, the veneer of impersonal justice.

Part 2 Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Mr. Hardman sighed, removed the chewing gum, and dived into a pocket. At the same time his whole personality seemed to undergo a change. He became less of a stage character and more of a real person. The resonant nasal tones of his voice became modified. "That passport's a bit of bluff," he said. "That's who I really am." Poirot scrutinised the card flipped across to him.

Related Characters: Cyrus Hardman (speaker), Hercule

Poirot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Hardman introduces himself as an American typewriter ribbon salesman, but after hearing and recognizing Poirot's name, he decides to "come clean." As Mr. Hardman relaxes into his "true" identity, it reinforces Poirot's focus on getting to the "psychology" of the case. Hardman shows that people are duplicitous, often for reasons entirely separate from avoiding guilt, and they can be shown to be such only through sustained personal engagement.

Hardman had played a type, as Christie writes, "a stage character," more clearly than others on the train. He's a big, loud, brash American, of whom M. Bouc had said "He chews the gum, which I believe is not done in good circles." Here, that habit is shown to be an act. Christie deftly raises the stakes for the passenger interviews, seeming to ask, "what other passengers are putting on an act," and "can we trust that this is Hardman's real character?" In the process, it amplifies the doubt and deception that are at the core of an effective mystery.

Part 2 Chapter 11 Quotes

"You are, I think, a little bit contemptuous of the way I prosecute my inquiries," he said with a twinkle. "Not so, you think, would an English inquiry be conducted. There everything would be cut and dried—it would be all kept to the facts—a wellordered business. But I, Mademoiselle, have my little originalities. I look first at my witness, I sum up his or her character, and I frame my questions accordingly."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), Mary Debenham

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

As Poirot begins his interview with Mary Debenham, he's frustrated with her noncommittal and adversarial posture. In response, he lets Mary behind the curtain in a way by sharing the secrets of his interrogation strategy. He defends his "little originalities," in a way making clear to her that his eccentricities, such as his strange lines of questioning or his personal grooming habits, are strategic as much as they are personal. At this point, readers have seen Poirot "twinkle" when he senses a crucial inconsistency or weakness in a witness. Here, he senses that honesty about his process will unbalance an uncooperative witness.

Poirot's defense of his process is also a defense of the larger mystery. Whereas an "English inquiry" (like that of Sherlock Holmes) might proceed more linearly with an accumulation of facts and evidence, Murder on the Orient Express leaps forward with key revelations and then falls back as confusing or contradictory testimony muddles the progress of the investigation. The fact that the revelation of the murderer or murderers isn't "well-ordered" is exactly what makes it compelling, giving it a psychological realism that more conventional mysteries may lack.

Part 2 Chapter 15 Quotes

He got it down and snapped back the lock. Then he sat back on his heels and stared. Neatly folded on the top of the case was a thin scarlet silk kimono embroidered with dragons. "So," he murmured. "It is like that. A defiance. Very well, I take it up."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout his investigation, Poirot has tracked the woman in the scarlet kimono whom he saw in the hallway on the morning of Ratchett's murder. The scarlet kimono has warped the investigation around it as Poirot agonizes over its significance and questions each female passenger about it. Now, he finds it in his own luggage in a way that suggests the murderer or murderers are well aware of his focus on it and throw it in his face to taunt him. Poirot hears their message, taking it as "A defiance." The planting of the kimono validates Poirot's carefulness with physical evidence, maintaining always that there might be an intelligent actor constructing a scene for his benefit. Here, he comes face to face with that actor, and what's more, that actor wants Poirot to know that he or she is tracking his investigation. "Red herrings" can be deployed not just by authors hoping to throw off readers, but characters in the story itself who hope to mislead detectives.

Part 3 Chapter 5 Quotes

"It has this advantage," said Poirot. "If you confront anyone who has lied with the truth, he will usually admit it—often out of sheer surprise. It is only necessary to guess right to produce your effect. That is the only way to conduct this case. I select each passenger in turn, consider his or her evidence, and say to myself, 'If so and so is lying, on what point is he lying, and what is the reason for the lie?' And I answer, 'If he is lying—if, you mark—it could only be for such a reason and on such a point.'"

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), M. Bouc

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 250-251

Explanation and Analysis

Poirot has just confronted Countess Andrenyi with the alteration of her passport and Princess Dragomiroff with her ownership of the monogrammed handkerchief. While M. Bouc laments the "duplicity" of the passengers, Poirot claims that lying can actually be advantageous for the investigation. The fact that deception can be broken "out of sheer surprise" is pivotal to the way Poirot interrogates suspects. He's given them the handkerchief, pretending they've dropped it. He's offered cigarettes to test whether they're pipe smokers. And he's switched languages, as he did with the Countess, to test whether their background is false.

Poirot's method is slightly cynical in that it presupposes for the sake of the investigation that suspects are lying. However, it also predicts that people will revert unconsciously to the truth if given the opportunity. In Poirot's conception, people reveal themselves by instinctual behavior. The truth is automatic, while deception is an act of will.

Part 3 Chapter 9 Quotes

Then everyone jumped as Dr. Constantine suddenly hit the table a blow with his fist. "But no," he said. "No, no, and again no! That is an explanation that will not hold water. It is deficient in a dozen minor points. The crime was not committed so—M. Poirot must know that perfectly well."

Related Characters: Dr. Constantine (speaker), Hercule Poirot

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 273

Explanation and Analysis

Poirot has just delivered his first solution to the assembled passengers, engaging in a time-honored mystery novel tradition in which the detective breaks down the solution to the case from start to finish in front of a crowd of awed onlookers. However, Poirot's solution is obviously inadequate, placing blame on a stranger whom he can't even identify.

Dr. Constantine's forceful rejection of this "solution" mirrors the reader's own dissatisfaction. As well as being "deficient in a dozen minor points" it's deficient in a major, narrative point: it's not a culmination of the psychological truths Poirot has discovered during the investigation. After extensive interviews in which the personalities of the passengers are laid bare, a solution that doesn't grapple with those details is unacceptable. Instead, Poirot's solution commits a cardinal narrative sin by assigning blame to a *deus ex machnia*, a convenient solution arising by whim of the author rather than as a natural consequence of the story.

"I agreed with him, but when this particular point came into my mind, I tried to imagine whether such an assembly was ever likely to be collected under any other conditions. And the answer I made to myself was—only in America. In America there might be a household composed of just such varied nationalities—an Italian chauffeur, an English governess, a Swedish nurse, a German lady's-maid, and so on."

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 274

Explanation and Analysis

The passengers on the Orient Express are understood to be people of wildly different nationality, character, and social status, such that it's inconceivable that they would otherwise associate with each other, much less work together towards a common goal. However, the idea that these "strangers" knew each other before the train ride begins to emerge when unlikely people begin giving alibis for each other. Colonel Arbuthnot is vouched for not by Mary Debenham, whom he appeared to have met on a previous train, but by someone he barely knows, an American many years his junior. Why would such different

people care enough for each other to vouch for each other?

America is the country that creates that potential for an Italian chauffer, an English governess, a Russian princess, and a Hungarian count, among others, to meet and be forged by tragedy. Poirot, the man most committed to internationalism, provides a utopian vision of America, where people of different classes and countries can share experiences and be bound by them.

"I remembered that MacQueen had called attention, not once but twice (and the second time in a very blatant manner), to the fact that Ratchett could speak no French. I came to the conclusion that the whole business at twenty-three minutes to one was a comedy played for my benefit! Anyone might see through the watch business—it is a common enough device in detective stories.

Related Characters: Hercule Poirot (speaker), Mr. Ratchett / Cassetti, Hector MacQueen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 277

Explanation and Analysis

Multiple times, Poirot has referenced "detective stories," often in a derogatory way. His sense that clues, especially the stopped pocket watch, resemble clichés from that genre is borne out by the revelation that every passenger has been performing in a carefully choreographed "comedy" to mislead Poirot. Clearly, their impromptu play has been influenced by tropes from detective stories, which is why Poirot observed that some pieces of evidence were much too easy and convenient to acquire: the pipe-cleaner, the handkerchief, and the information about Ratchett's language abilities.

The structure of the novel allows Christie to tell two detective stories: a poor and clumsy one about a stranger who boards a train to kill someone and an emotionally compelling and intricate one about twelve unlikely people collaborating to exact justice. She's able to toy with and deconstruct these obvious clues and tropes as part of the first story, commenting on the state of the mystery genre in the process.

"I would have stabbed that man twelve times willingly. It wasn't only that he was responsible for my daughter's death and her child's and that of the other child who might have been alive and happy now. It was more than that: there had been other children kidnapped before Daisy, and there might be others in the future. Society had condemned him—we were only carrying out the sentence."

Related Characters: Mrs. Hubbard (speaker), Mr. Ratchett / Cassetti, Daisy Armstrong, Hercule Poirot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

After Mrs. Hubbard reveals herself as the actress Linda Arden, the grandmother of Daisy Armstrong, she makes a final plea to Poirot to justify Ratchett's murder. The difficulty in killing Ratchett is making it seem like justice rather than the "blood feuds" that Colonel Arbuthnot alludes to. If Linda Arden had "stabbed that man twelve times willingly," it would have been private vengeance rather than society's deferred punishment.

It's the participation of others touched by the Armstrong crime that elevates the murder to a justified execution. As Linda Arden moves from an "I" to a "we," she makes the act impersonal, as if the conspirators were acting as an extension of "society." The fact that she refers to a "sentence" when the case never arrived at one shows she lives in a post-judgment world, where Ratchett's guilt is assured and all that's missing is twelve people willing to fulfill that judgment. Through the "evil chance," in a favorite phrase of Poirot's, a man had inflicted suffering and survived to inflict more. Now, that error has been corrected.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1 CHAPTER 1

It's five o'clock in the morning, and a French lieutenant (Lieutenant Dubosc) stands on a train platform in Aleppo, Syria, waiting outside the Taurus Express. He's accompanied by a "small lean man" (later revealed to be Hercule Poirot) who is heavily bundled against the freezing cold. Even though "seeing off a distinguished stranger" on such a cold morning is an unsavory task, Lieutenant Dubosc conducts himself "mannerly," as "graceful phrases fall from his lips in polished French." Although he doesn't know the details, he knows that the stranger had been assisting the General with a particularly delicate situation.

The novel opens by withholding the identity of the "distinguished stranger" who readers soon learn is the detective Hercule Poirot. But already, the details of the situation reinforce his talent and importance, creating a power asymmetry between the nervous functionary and the "distinguished stranger" he's trying to see off. In addition, an international setting is quickly established. The "small lean man" is currently in Syria on his way somewhere else, and he's speaking French with a member of the French army. Clearly, this is a well-traveled and worldly man.

The General had been in an increasingly bad mood up until this "Belgian stranger" (Hercule Poirot) arrived from England. After a week of "curious tensity," one officer committed suicide, and another resigned. Immediately, Lieutenant Dubosc's colleagues relaxed, and the General "suddenly looked ten years younger." The lieutenant recalls overhearing a conversation between Poirot and the General, in which the General praised him for "sav[ing] the honour of the French Army" and saving many lives. Poirot brushed off the lavish praise, claiming the General once saved his life, so the men are even.

In an aside, the author establishes Poirot's nationality (Belgian) and a previous location (England) that furthers his internationalist credentials. It's not clear yet exactly what kind of assistance Poirot offers, but the General's intense gratitude and insistence that he's saved lives suggests that it's considerable. A hint about Poirot's past is also dropped in the allusion to the French General saving his life, which might in turn suggest a previous life as a soldier.

Back in the present, Lieutenant Dubosc makes painful attempts at small talk with Poirot. Aloud, he reflects that Poirot will be in Stamboul by tomorrow evening—an observation he's already made a few times. The lieutenant says the La Sainte Sophie is "very fine," even though he's never been there. Glancing discreetly at his watch, he notes that he only has to make small talk for five more minutes, but he panics thinking that Poirot has noticed him looking at his watch.

The French lieutenant begins to flail in his attempt at small talk, and he doesn't receive a lot of assistance from Poirot. The power dynamic between the eminent Poirot and the French lieutenant is reinforced by the former's silence and the latter's talkativeness.

Lieutenant Dubosc says he hopes Poirot doesn't get snowed in during his journey—a common occurrence this time of year. After an awkward pause, the lieutenant repeats that Poirot will be in Stamboul tomorrow evening, and Poirot quickly replies that he's heard La Sainte Sophie is "very fine."

Here, an element of foreshadowing is buried in the lieutenant's casual remark about snow in the mountains. Everything about the lieutenant's presentation in the novel conditions the reader that he is inessential, and that his careless small talk can be ignored, but there's a countervailing expectation embedded in the mystery genre that warns readers to observe even minor figures carefully.

Meanwhile, inside the Taurus Express, Mary Debenham peers out the window at two men below—a French officer and a "ridiculous-looking little man" with an "egg-shaped head." Despite her troubles, Mary smiles, thinking of how no one could possibly take that funny little man "seriously."

Hercule Poirot is presented as he appears to a stranger, and the initial impression is not impressive. His "egg-shaped head" and short stature seem at odds with the effusive praise that the French general delivered to him, suggesting that Poirot's importance doesn't lie in a commanding presence.

After exchanging formal goodbyes with Lieutenant Dubosc, Poirot boards the train, murmuring the word "finally" under his breath in French. The conductor explains that there are only two other passengers on the train: both are English, but one is a Colonel from India, while another is a young woman from Baghdad.

Poirot, a Belgian national, has just completed a task for the French army in Syria, after which he boards a train for Turkey alongside two English citizens based in Baghdad and India, respectively. It's clear from the start that the story, and the mystery to follow, will have an international character.

Later, Poirot notices the female passenger, Mary Debenham, in the dining car. She's about twenty-eight and has a "cool efficiency" about her, which makes her seem well-traveled. Poirot admires her features but deems her "a little too efficient" to be pretty. Colonel Arbuthnot enters and eats with Mary Debenham, though they speak very little. Neither notice Poirot eavesdropping because, as Poirot speculates, he's "only some damned foreigner" in their eyes. At lunch, the Colonel and Miss Debenham dine together again, and through their conversation they learn that they have mutual friends.

In this initial interaction between Mary Debenham and Colonel Arbuthnot, Poirot illustrates his inclination towards and talent for personal observation. Their economy of words and Ms. Debenham's "cool efficiency" mark them as particularly English. And in eavesdropping on their conversation, Poirot benefits from not being English and instead a "damned foreigner." Colonel Arbuthnot assumes that either Poirot doesn't know English or is too foreign to have any interest in their affairs. In this way, Poirot is able to hear more than a proper Englishman might in his position.

Later, the Colonel says that he wishes Miss Debenham "were out of all this," but she hushes him. With a quick glance at Poirot, the Colonel continues, expressing his sympathy for Miss Debenham in her work as a governess, dealing with "tyrannical mothers" and "tiresome brats." Mary Debenham assures him that the parents are more afraid of her than she is of them. Poirot thinks to himself that he's watching "an odd little comedy" unfold.

Perhaps lulled by Poirot's foreign status, the Colonel says more than he should, which Ms. Debenham's quick interruption indicates. And the Colonel's meaningful glance at Poirot suggests that his references to "tyrannical mothers" and "tiresome brats" are meant to cover his faux pas. All of this contributes to a sense that the relationship between the Colonel and Miss Debenham is much deeper than it appears.

At the next stop, Poirot steps out to enjoy some fresh air and overhears another conversation between the Colonel and Miss Debenham. She cuts him off and references a time "When it's all over." They seem like they have been fighting, and Poirot notes that Miss Debenham no longer sounds "cool, [and] efficient."

The sense that the Colonel and Miss Debenham aren't strangers is reinforced by this snippet of overheard conversation. What sort of interaction could strangers have that would occasion this much emotion and familiarity? Poirot's observation that Miss Debenham has lost her composure is a sign that this composure may have been a front and that Poirot's initial grasp of her character was premature.

The next day, the train is slightly delayed due to a fire under the dining car, which puts Miss Debenham into a panic. In French, she expresses her worry that she'll miss her connection to the Orient Express in Istanbul. Despite the setback, they arrive in Istanbul only five minutes late. After crossing the Bosporus Strait, Poirot makes his way to a local hotel.

Miss Debenham loses more of her composure at the suggestion that the train to Istanbul may be delayed and that she may miss her connection to the Orient Express. Her level of pique at being delayed, far greater than a simple traveler's frustration, suggests that there's something on the Orient Express that's especially important to her.

PART 1 CHAPTER 2

At the hotel, Poirot receives a telegram requesting his return to London after there's a development in the "Kassner case." Poirot had planned to stay the night, but he cancels his room and books travel on the Orient Express to London.

Poirot's reputation and skill have been developed by degrees as his immediate services are requested in far-flung locations, creating the image of an international detective. But Poirot's presence on the Orient Express is something of a foregone conclusion, and any mystery reader fluent in the genre will have expected some wrinkle that would put him on the train with Miss Debenham.

In the hotel restaurant, Poirot finds an old friend named Monsieur Bouc, a fellow Belgian and the director of a train company. M. Bouc knew Poirot when he was a "star of the Belgian police force." Bouc praises Poirot's current success while the latter tries to "look modest." The two dine together, and Poirot tells M. Bouc about his travel back to London on the Orient Express. During the meal, Poirot focuses on keeping his moustache out of his soup.

Poirot's reputation is burnished again by the revelation that he was the star of the Belgian police force, but this reputation continually clashes with the more comic aspects of Poirot's character. His failure at modesty clearly indicates some measure of vanity and pride in his work. He's not, as some other classic detectives are, immune to worldly success and recognition. Further, it's difficult to reconcile this world-spanning detective with the image of a short, bald man completely absorbed in keeping his moustache out of his soup.

Poirot observes two American men in the restaurant, one older and one younger. The older man's smile and bald head at first suggest the character of a "bland philanthropist," but Poirot is thrown off by his eyes, which are "small" and "crafty." When his gaze fixes on Poirot, the detective feels a "strange malevolence." The old man tells the younger, whom he calls Hector, to pay the bill in a "queer, soft, dangerous" voice. The younger man assents, calling the older man Mr. Ratchett.

These two Americans are even further from home than the English passengers Poirot accompanies to Istanbul, and the book's first vision of America is not generally positive. While a stranger might write Mr. Ratchett off as a genial older man, Poirot pierces to his inner, malevolent personality. The "soft, dangerous" voice suggests a barely suppressed violence.

The two Americans depart, and Poirot asks M. Bouc's opinion of them. M. Bouc agrees with Poirot's negative opinion of Mr. Ratchett, and Poirot describes Ratchett as a "wild animal" and a "savage." They note the contrast between his respectable appearance and inner malevolence, which leads Poirot to philosophize about "the body" as a respectable cage through which a wild animal looks out.

As Poirot's credentials and keen observations have already been established, his read of Mr. Ratchett's character, even based on scant evidence, has the ring of truth. Further, as a way of establishing Ratchett's core evil, Poirot presents a distinction between the inner and outer self. The outer self is misleading, and even misleads Poirot initially in Ratchett's case, but the inner self, though hidden, is a more honest representation of an individual's character. This is the self that the detective targets.

M. Bouc escorts Poirot to the Orient Express, which he is also traveling on. When they reach the train, they find that it's entirely full, which is unheard of for this time of year, and even the compartment M. Bouc keeps in reserve is taken. But Poirot is able to take the place of a man named M. Harris, who hasn't yet arrived, in a second-class berth. Poirot quips that M. Harris' name is a good omen because "I read my Dickens. M. Harris he will not arrive."

Poirot's reference to Dickens points to the novel Martin Chuzzlewit, *in which Mrs. Harris is an imaginary person who exists entirely in the mind of one of the characters. This not only speaks to Poirot's knowledge of English literature, but it pushes against the fourth wall of the novel by explicitly invoking literary conventions. This move implies that the novel itself has its own set of genre expectations, and so alerts the reader to a sort of cat-and-mouse game played between mystery author and mystery reader.*

Poirot enters cabin number seven to find not M. Harris, but Hector MacQueen, the young American from the hotel restaurant. Hector confronts Poirot in stilted French with the possibility that he's made a mistake, but the conductor confirms that Poirot is supposed to lodge here. Poirot speculates that Hector had paid the conductor to keep the two-person room for his own use. Despite the misunderstanding, Poirot has an "agreeable" conversation with MacQueen and then the Orient Express departs.

MacQueen's French is quite bad, which might be a hindrance in international travel at this time. His initial annoyance that his attempt to preserve the cabin for his own use draws attention to the question of what use he might have put it to. This also suggests that M. Harris might truly not exist, as Poirot suspected, and was simply a contrivance to keep anyone else from booking the room.

PART 1 CHAPTER 3

On the next day, Poirot joins his friend M. Bouc in the train's dining car. M. Bouc rhapsodizes about the passengers on the train, members "of all classes, of all nationalities, of all ages." He notes that if he had the pen of "Balzac," he would be able to describe the scene.

M. Bouc pointedly expresses that the passengers on the Express are diverse in background. International travel necessarily involves international travelers, so this crowd must be especially diverse for the director of a train company to even comment on them. M. Bouc also invokes Honore de Balzac, a French novelist known for deep, psychologically rich characters. Here, Agatha Christie is possibly drawing on literary associations to focus or mislead reader expectations.

Poirot observes each of the thirteen passengers in turn. He first notices a "big, swarthy Italian man," a "spare, neat" English servant, and "a big American in a loud suit." The Italian man picks his teeth as he holds forth, gesticulating wildly and speaking in an accent, while the Englishman coughs and lets his attention drift.

The passengers at this table resolve easily enough into national stereotypes: an Italian man who's effusive and talkative, a proper and fastidious Englishman, and a large American wearing bold or inelegant clothing. The Englishman even coughs in seeming embarrassment at the Italian man's lack of manners.

Seated by herself, an especially ugly older lady dictates "autocratically" to a servant her requirements for the journey. The older woman is bedecked in expensive jewelry, and her gaze lands on Poirot but does not rest on him with the "nonchalance of the uninterested aristocrat." M. Bouc clarifies that the lady is the Russian Princess Dragomiroff, an ugly but "cosmopolitan" woman who "makes herself felt."

Another type is introduced here, a nominally Russian but cosmopolitan aristocrat, fabulously wealthy and accustomed to giving orders. Like Colonel Arbuthnot before her, Princess Dragomiroff doesn't find Poirot especially worthy of attention, in this case for reasons of class rather than nationality. Although, Poirot dresses elegantly, his appearance is bourgeois, or upper-middle class, rather than aristocratic.

Ms. Debenham, the British governess whom Poirot met briefly in Syria, is also in the dining car, sitting with an elderly, evidently American woman and another woman with a "mild, amiable face rather like a sheep." The American woman talks at length on the prospect of applying "Western ideals" to people in the East.

The American woman is exemplifying a kind of Western chauvinism that's not unique to Americans, but which Americans participate in especially vigorously. Her condescending comments speak to a stereotypically American ignorance of world affairs and the particularities of other cultures. This, like some other stereotypes Poirot observes, is instantly recognizable—and, maybe for that reason, a bit too easy.

Colonel Arbuthnot is behind the three women, very pointedly apart from Ms. Debenham, which Poirot believes is an attempt to hide whatever relationship he may have with her for the sake of her reputation as a governess. His "gaze was fixed upon the back of Mary Debenham's head." Poirot then shifts attention to a middle-aged woman across the room, who's probably the German lady's maid he'd been informed of earlier.

Poirot detects in the Colonel's fixed gaze an intensity that suggests a romantic relationship. The fact that they sit apart seems to cement this for him, an example of English propriety and the necessity of a governess to maintain virtue and a kind of chastity. It's clear that Poirot is the type who is always discerning motives and extracting conclusions from details as small as two people sitting apart on a train.

Poirot moves on to observe an attractive young couple talking "animatedly." The man is tall, handsome, dressed in the English style but evidently not English and around thirty years of age. The woman is only twenty, dressed elegantly with pale skin, dark hair, and a "foreign-looking" face. Poirot describes her as "jolie" and "chic." M. Bouc places them as a husband and wife associated with the Hungarian Embassy.

The man's English style of dress and Hungarian nationality exemplifies more of the cultural blending and borrowing common to the passengers on the Express. Here, "foreign-looking" is a compliment rather than a slight, a sign of exotic beauty and cosmopolitanism.

Finally, Poirot glances at the two Americans from the hotel, Hector MacQueen and Mr. Ratchett, and he once again notices the "false benevolence" in Ratchett's appearance. M. Bouc returns to his compartment while Poirot listens to the American woman complain about Turkish currency, which she calls "rubbish."

Poirot again focuses on the dishonesty of Ratchett's self-presentation, which contributes to his evil character. In comparison, the American woman's offenses stem from ignorance or naivete. But her refusal to acknowledge another culture as legitimate plays into the stereotype of a boorish American and undercuts the cosmopolitan character of the Orient Express.

As the dining car clears, Ratchett approaches Poirot and sits down. He correctly identifies Poirot and seems to recognize him by reputation. Ratchett goes on to offer Poirot a "job," promising the detective "big money" if he accepts. In an elliptical way, Ratchett notes that he has received threats on his life, and he wants Poirot to ensure his safety. When Ratchett says that he has an enemy, Poirot challenges him, noting that men of his circumstances rarely have just one.

Ratchett's clumsy appeal to Poirot's greed with the offer of money reveals his fundamentally venal character. Though he recognizes Poirot as a famous detective, he seems to know little of the way Poirot operates, which, as readers have seen in his interactions with the French general, is generally out of a concern for justice or a basic fascination with a case.

Poirot refuses Ratchett's offer, but the man continues to press him, offering a large sum. The detective states that money won't tempt him as "I take now only such cases as – interest me." Ratchett forces him to say straight out why Poirot refuses to work with him, to which Poirot responds, "I do not like your face" and exits the car.

Poirot's admission that he does not like Ratchett's "face" might seem a superficial reason to refuse, but what he's truly saying is that he has used observation of Ratchett's outward qualities to intuit his inner character and he has found that character abhorrent. He's also showing his commitment to justice above greed and elaborating a sort of personal code. Poirot is not a mercenary.

PART 1 CHAPTER 4

The Orient Express pulls into Belgrade, at which point Poirot exchanges cabins with M. Bouc, who moves into the adjacent train car occupied only by a Greek doctor. As night approaches, Poirot notices "barriers break down" and the passengers become more comfortable with each other. Colonel Arbuthnot talks at length with Hector Macqueen about politics while Mrs. Hubbard takes the somewhat helpless Swedish woman under her wing, offering aspirin for a headache. Mrs. Hubbard feels some sympathy for the Swedish woman because she's delicate and doesn't speak English well.

Travel on the Orient Express has the effect of breaking down barriers between people of diverse backgrounds, and prejudices that would be ironclad in daily life are starting to fall away. Exemplifying this, the older British soldier Arbuthnot is talking politics with the younger American Macqueen. The Swedish woman's illness also draws out the do-gooder American Mrs. Hubbard, who, in a culturally blinkered fashion, attributes some of her difficulties to poor English.

Poirot passes Ratchett in his cabin, who gives him a hostile look and shuts the door. Mrs. Hubbard gossips with Poirot about Mr. Ratchett, noting that she "wouldn't be surprised if that man turned out to be a murderer." She's concerned because her compartment is right next to Ratchett's. Poirot then retires to bed in his own cabin, which borders Ratchett's on the other side.

It's telling that anyone who interacts with Ratchett even briefly comes away thinking the man is pure evil. Mrs. Hubbard goes as far as to say that he might be a murderer, a sort of wink at the reader who is expecting a "murder" on the Orient Express. This could be taken as Christie's attempt to direct or misdirect the reader.

Poirot falls asleep, but he's startled awake hours later when he hears a loud groan and notices that the train is stopped. Peering into the hallway, he sees the conductor (Pierre Michel) check in on Ratchett and a voice responds in French that everything is okay.

Christie doesn't normally reproduce the text of French words, but she does here when "a voice" answers the conductor. This indicates that the language is of special importance here.


PART 1 CHAPTER 5

Poirot can't fall back to sleep afterward. He reaches for the bell to ring for the conductor, but as he does he hears a nearby bell ring a few times before the conductor answers it. He hears Mrs. Hubbard talk to the conductor, describing the conversation as 90% Mrs. Hubbard speaking.

Christie plays with reader expectations in this chapter, which is titled "The Crime." The purposeful ringing of the bell and the conductor's delay suggests that this crime may have been committed or discovered, but it's almost with relief that Poirot realizes it's Mrs. Hubbard ringing. Both Poirot and the reader have been conditioned to think Mrs. Hubbard is impertinent and naïve, so Poirot dismisses it easily.

When he arrives, the conductor explains to Poirot that Mrs. Hubbard believes she saw a man in her cabin and no objections on the conductor's part would convince her otherwise. Poirot also finds out from the conductor that the train is stalled between stations in Yugoslavia.

Just as the French lieutenant suggested in the first scene of the novel, the train has been blocked by snow, creating a portentous stage for "the crime" yet to be discovered. Christie, by seeding the event in a casual remark by a minor character, rewards savvy readers or prompts an "aha" moment.

Poirot is just about to fall asleep when he hears a thud next door. Looking into the hallway, he sees a woman wearing **a scarlet kimono** walking by.

The titling of this chapter primes the attention for small details that may be crucial in the investigation to follow. The scarlet kimono, an unconventional choice for a dressing gown, is an especially significant clue that may play a large role.

The next morning, there's a big commotion because the train is stopped indefinitely in a blizzard. The Swedish woman is crying, Mrs. Hubbard complains about the "foreigners" in charge of the train and refers to their present location as one of those "Balkan things," and Colonel Arbuthnot asks Poirot about the delay, confusing him for his fellow Belgian M. Bouc.

As the full scale of the delay unfolds, the passengers fall into their seductively easy stereotypes. Mrs. Hubbard talks dismissively about the country they're in, the Swedish woman, known to be sentimental, is overcome with emotion, and Colonel Arbuthnot is so contemptuous of foreigners that he can't make the distinction between Poirot and his fellow Belgian M. Bouc.

Poirot has a short conversation with Mary Debenham about the delay. Unlike the other passengers, she seems remarkably stoic, seeking, as she says, to save herself "useless emotion." Poirot praises her for her strong will, but she replies cryptically that she knows someone "far, far stronger." She stops short, realizing that she's speaking to a stranger, and laughs off her strange comment.

Mary Debenham in one sense is falling into the stoic English governess role that she's displayed, but Poirot has already seen through that façade somewhat. Her current indifference to the delay contrasts with her previous nervousness about the delay on the train to Istanbul. She also reveals too personal a detail to Poirot, perhaps prompted by Poirot's unthreatening and ridiculous appearance.

M. Bouc calls for Poirot and tells him that Mr. Ratchett was stabbed to death last night. He also elaborates about the delay, noting that it will be days before they can move again. M. Bouc introduces the Greek doctor from the adjacent train car, Dr. Constantine, who estimates the murder took place between twelve and two that morning.

The revelation that the murder occurred sometime late the previous night and early that morning throws the details Poirot witnessed into sharp relief.

Further details of the murder follow. Ratchett was discovered by the conductor at 11 that morning, but his door was locked and bolted. A window was open onto the snow, but it seems impossible for anyone to have entered or exited through it because of the snow. Ratchett was stabbed about twelve to fifteen times, with apparent savagery.

In the lineage of the murder mystery there's a trope called the "locked room," where a murder has been committed in a place that no one could have accessed or left. Ratchett's cabin seems one such locked room, although the fact that the window was opened suggests that someone might have tried to make it seem otherwise.

M. Bouc implores Poirot to take the case while praising at length his powers of deduction and investigation. He asks Poirot to use the "**little grey cells of the mind**," using Poirot's own phrase, to solve the case. Poirot is touched by the appeal and "emotionally" agrees, conceding that he had been dreading the hours of boredom ahead of him.

Here, Christie places herself in the lineage of detective fiction, presenting a mystery as an intellectual exercise and an antidote to boredom, a frame echoed by Sherlock Holmes in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories. But she also distinguishes Poirot as a man not immune to vanity, as he is touched by M. Bouc's breathless praise. Poirot, while participating in the love of rational deduction for its own sake, humanizes himself with a small personal weakness.

In conversation with the conductor, Pierre Michel, and M. Bouc, Poirot determines that the train car was locked after dinner and no one could have exited the murder scene since the train was stopped in the snow. The only conclusion, as M. Bouc states, is that the murderer is still on the train.

There's another locked room, this time in the form of the train car. This is a classic parlor room mystery set up, but where some writers would choose a house party at a secluded location, Christie chooses a snowed-in train. The dynamics of each setting are similar: the culprit must be among the assembled passengers and outside help from the police is out of the question. It's from this baseline that Poirot begins his investigation.

PART 1 CHAPTER 6

Poirot begins by notifying Mr. MacQueen of Ratchett's death. MacQueen begins in "laborious" French, but soon lapses into English, which Poirot is conversant in. Poirot introduces himself as a detective, but he seems displeased when MacQueen has only a vague recognition of his name as a "woman's dressmaker."

Poirot's facility with English is especially useful on a train with two Americans and two British passengers, and it creates the sense that he's a well-traveled man of the world. At the same time, Poirot is played for comic effect. He clearly attaches some weight to his name and reputation, and MacQueen's dismissive reaction punctures his vanity.

MacQueen doesn't seem especially surprised at Ratchett's death, saying, "so they got him after all." He explains his history with Ratchett, relating the story of how he joined Ratchett as a personal secretary, since Ratchett was "hampered by knowing no languages."

MacQueen gives as a primary reason for his employment with Ratchett the fact that the latter needed help with languages. But when greeting Poirot, MacQueen's French was "laborious" and he soon gave up on it in favor of English, which Ratchett speaks fluently. Something doesn't add up.

MacQueen supplies Poirot with several threatening letters sent to Ratchett and written in an over-the-top style: "We're going to GET you—see?" The most recent was just days ago. Poirot identifies the letters as being written by multiple people, although he doesn't seem impressed by them otherwise. After some probing, MacQueen reveals he knows little of Ratchett's life and history, but he can't pretend to have any affection for him.

In some mysteries, determining whether the victim had any reason to be killed is part of the investigation, but here, in the form of threatening letters, there's a ready-made explanation. The diction of the letters, especially "see?" as a capstone to a threat, models a popular vision of 1930s gangsters closely—perhaps too closely.

Mr. MacQueen is dismissed, and although Poirot is reluctant to remove anyone from suspicion prematurely, as M. Bouc suggests, the sober and genial MacQueen doesn't seem capable of the crime. M. Bouc suggests that the brutality of the murder makes it likely the product of a "Latin" temperament or a woman.

Poirot illustrates a bit of his method when he rejects M. Bouc's attempt to nail down MacQueen as innocent of the crime. He has a careful, measured approach, but it's also attuned to personality, and MacQueen's doesn't fit the profile. M. Bouc's further suggestion of a Latin or a woman's temperament shows, in its absurdity, the difference between Poirot's meticulousness and M. Bouc's wild speculation.

PART 1 CHAPTER 7

Poirot is taken to view Ratchett's body in his cabin. Inside, the window is open, which Poirot thinks was intended to suggest the murderer left that way, but the snow makes it impossible. Poirot assumes that he will find no fingerprints because "criminals do not make mistakes of that kind nowadays."

Poirot's comment about mistakes criminals no longer make describes a sort of arms race carried on between detectives and criminals, where the latter learn how to foil the methods of the former, making detectives craftier or more inventive. This mirrors in its own way, the difficulty of the mystery novelist, whose crimes must be increasingly unpredictable or sensational as readers grow familiar with the tricks of the trade. If the solution to the case was the immediate discovery of fingerprints, it would make for a boring mystery novel.

Dr. Constantine concludes that Ratchett was stabbed twelve times, but some blows are glancing while others are deep, some delivered by the left and some by the right hand—and, crucially, some were delivered after Ratchett was already dead. This suggests multiple murderers who may even have been unaware of each other.

Previously, Poirot had followed up on Ratchett's comment that he had an enemy with the suggestion that he may have multiple enemies. The nature of the murder wounds seems to suggest that Poirot may have been right. But this provides an additional challenge: the need to prove multiple people guilty.

Poirot begins to search the cabin. He finds a loaded gun under Ratchett's pillow, and a mixture of a sleeping draught nearby.

These clues explain an inconsistency, namely that Ratchett didn't scream as he was being murdered. He was under the influence of a sleeping drug. But it raises another contradiction: why did he have a gun at the ready to defend himself only to make sure he wouldn't be able to wake up to do it?

In a search of the cabin, Poirot finds a few items of evidence. The first is a woman's handkerchief inscribed with an "H," which was conveniently left behind, as Poirot says, "Exactly as it happens in the books and on the films." Additionally, there's a pipe-cleaner, deemed a "masculine clue," and a pocket watch stopped precisely at 12:45, which Dr. Constantine assumes is the time of the murder, though Poirot is skeptical.

The investigation is only hours old, and already it has a wealth of evidence. Poirot's skepticism about all this, especially the stopped watch, reflects a concern that these clues may be engineered to point the investigation away from the real murderer. His references to "books" and "films" is a particularly meta gesture to the constructed nature of both crimes and stories. Both anticipate a reader or a detective who will attempt to make sense of the details left behind. Poirot seems unimpressed that these heavy-handed clues are essentially clichés.

Poirot also finds a scrap of burnt paper. He assembles a contraption to reveal the words imprinted on the scrap. As he does so, he explains to the doctor that "I am not one to rely upon the expert procedure. It is the psychology I seek…" but in this case he would welcome "scientific assistance." He acknowledges that several of the clues found so far may be faked, but he believes this one isn't. The scrap of paper reveals the words "little Daisy Armstrong" which reminds Poirot of a case in America.

Poirot finds the beginnings of a clue that he has to work for, which makes him more certain of its genuineness. A clue intended to be found doesn't require a complex chemical reaction to reveal. This is a comparatively rare example, for Poirot, of detective work based on physical evidence. While this reveal would be the crux of the case for another detective, for Poirot it's only the beginning. Normally, he seeks "psychology," the inner workings of the suspects, to lay the case bare.

Dr. Constantine raises the question of entrances and exits. The door to the hallway was bolted and the door to the adjacent cabin, Mrs. Hubbard's, was bolted on the other side. Poirot notes that this is like an escape artist's trick. Work has been done to make certain avenues of escape seem impossible.

Questions of entrances and exits reemerge here as a perennial concern of murder mysteries. Also, Poirot's metaphor of the magician makes clear that the crime and its aftermath is a performance done for an audience. It's for that reason that Poirot has a healthy skepticism of certain clues that Constantine and M. Bouc find definitive.

PART 1 CHAPTER 8

Dining with M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine, Poirot announces that he's discovered Mr. Ratchett's real name: Cassetti, the man responsible for the murder of Daisy Armstrong. Two respected and wealthy Americans, Colonel Armstrong and his wife Sonia, had a daughter named Daisy. When Daisy was three-years-old she was kidnapped and held for ransom.

The shady and malevolent impression that Ratchett made begins to be confirmed as Poirot identifies his true identity. Even Mrs. Hubbard's wild claim that Ratchett was a murderer gains more credence.

Although her parents paid the ransom, Daisy was found dead a little while afterwards. The discovery broke the young couple. Mrs. Armstrong had been expecting another baby, but she experienced a miscarriage and died. Her husband, destroyed by grief, committed suicide.

The grisly details of the Armstrong case, in which grief is piled upon grief, plumbs the depth of injustice that the family suffered. This crime, the murder of a child, breaks some of the logic of motive that drives mysteries. It approaches pure evil.

Poirot also mentions a French or Swiss nursemaid to Daisy Armstrong. After the kidnapping, the police questioned her so harshly that she too committed suicide. After her death, she was completely cleared of any suspicion.

Poirot describes a curious effect of the Armstrong crime: that it dooms everyone involved, even a nursemaid employed by the Armstrongs. The murder destroyed not just the family, but the household as well.

The authorities located the leader of the gang who kidnapped Daisy, a man named Cassetti. His guilt was certain. As Poirot remarks, "Cassetti was the man." But he escaped justice on a technical inaccuracy. Poirot concludes that the murdered Mr. Ratchett was actually this Cassetti from America, having fled to Europe and changed his name. Given the scale of his crimes, neither Poirot nor M. Bouc can "regret" that he's dead.

This chapter establishes the certainty of Cassetti's, later Ratchett's, guilt. In a mystery, the lead detective is the primary source of truth, and Poirot is known to be careful and talented. He's not certain of much, but he's certain that Cassetti was guilty, and that his escape was a damning failure of justice. Tellingly, both Poirot and M. Bouc think his death is no great tragedy, but they're now in the position of investigating a victim whose murder may have been justified.

PART 2 CHAPTER 1

Poirot begins calling the passengers for interviews to give their accounts of the previous night and early morning.

This chapter begins to lay out the form the investigation will take: a series of interviews in which Poirot will attempt to compare stories, but also to get to the "psychological" truth of the case. Tellingly, this part of the novel is titled The Evidence, *seeming to suggest that there's an entire realm of it beyond physical evidence.*

First up is Pierre Michel, the conductor, who seems a bit shaken and flighty. Poirot asks him to describe the events of last night, including ones that Poirot himself witnessed. Pierre relates that only Mr. MacQueen was in Ratchett's cabin that night. After hearing the groan that woke Poirot, Pierre rapped on the door of Ratchett's room to check on him, and Ratchett called out in French to reassure him.

Matching the events of the night to what Poirot already knows, the response from Ratchett in "French" leaps out as suspicious. MacQueen has already noted that he was brought on by Ratchett to assist with languages, as Ratchett only knows English.

Pierre Michel confirms that Mr. MacQueen talked in his cabin with Colonel Arbuthnot late into the night. After making up MacQueen's cabin, Pierre Michel talked with another conductor in the adjacent train car until he was summoned by Mrs. Hubbard. He attended to her and then to Poirot, and then sat in his place awake for the rest of the night. He also remembers a woman in a **scarlet kimono** walking down the hallway.

Pierre confirms MacQueen's story: that he was talking late with Colonel Arbuthnot. He also confirms the existence of a woman in a scarlet kimono. The nature of the garment itself, as a boldly colored and exotic dressing gown, calls special attention to itself.

Pierre Michel almost omits a detail about Poirot poking his head out close to 2 a.m., with Poirot adding "Good my friend…I wondered whether you would remember that." Pierre claims that there is no way someone either boarded the train at the previous stop or has hidden undiscovered somewhere on the train.

Pierre's testimony lends credence to the theory that the Paris-bound sleeping car is a "locked room" and that Ratchett's murderer is currently on the train. Poirot also reveals some of his detective style here. He gently tests Pierre Michel on what he would have seen if his account is truthful—for example, Poirot looking out into the hallway.

Pierre Michel seeks validation from both Poirot and M. Bouc that he hasn't been negligent in any way. They reassure and then dismiss him.

Throughout his testimony, Pierre has been anxious that he'd made a mistake in handling the events of the night and early morning. Poirot had leaned on that slightly in his questioning, praising his recall to put him more at ease.

PART 2 CHAPTER 2

Poirot informs Hector MacQueen that his late boss was actually the criminal Cassetti. MacQueen reacts with surprise and anger, exclaiming "The damned skunk!" MacQueen reveals a personal connection the Armstrong case: his father was the district attorney who unsuccessfully prosecuted Cassetti. He even says that he'd have been willing to kill Ratchett himself, had he known, but he admits, "Seems I'm kind of incriminating myself."

MacQueen's response to the information that Ratchett was Cassetti diminishes suspicion in several ways. For one, his surprise seems authentic. Secondly, he openly admits that he's personally connected to the Armstrong case. Finally, he even lets slip that he might have been willing to kill Ratchett. A guilty man might have tried to hide or downplay any of these facts.

MacQueen recounts his movements and activities on the previous night. He talked for a little bit with Mary Debenham, and then discussed world politics extensively with Colonel Arbuthnot until two in the morning. He generally finds "Britishers" uptight, but he liked the Colonel. MacQueen had left the train at Vincovci, but can't remember if he barred the door to the platform on the way back in.

MacQueen corroborates the accounts of other witnesses. In the process, he reveals a prejudice against the British, but notes that Colonel Arbuthnot overcame it in his eyes, echoing the breaking down of barriers between the passengers that Poirot had previously observed. Poirot also tries to nail down whether an unknown suspect might have boarded the train, but MacQueen is unsure.

PART 2 CHAPTER 3

Poirot calls Mr. Ratchett's personal valet, Edward Masterman, a sober-minded and proper British man with an "inexpressive face." He answers questions about his age and background in clipped phrases with little elaboration. Masterman reports that he had last seen Ratchett at nine the previous night and that Ratchett had been upset over a letter he was reading. Ratchett routinely took a sleeping draught which Masterman would administer, as he did the previous night.

Masterman is an example of a "Britisher" that MacQueen might not like, as he's rather dour and taciturn, somewhat unlike Colonel Arbuthnot. He's well-matched with his profession in this way, as he's generally incurious and unemotional, which might allow him to keep his master's confidence. His name, "Masterman," is an obvious sign that he's fully identified with his job.

Masterman implies that he didn't care much for Ratchett, although he's too mannered to say so until Poirot reveals that Ratchett was responsible for Daisy Armstrong's kidnapping. At this point, "The valet's tone held positive warmth and feeling for the first time." The night before, after seeing to Ratchett, he returned to his cabin which he shared with an Italian man. The Italian, according to Masterman, spoke "a kind of English," as he had spent time in Chicago.

Masterman displays the discretion characteristic of British servants. Even with his master dead, he's unwilling to speak ill of him. But the fact that "positive warmth" comes into his voice at the mention of the Armstrong case illustrates that he's not all icy deference. It also captures the hideousness of the Armstrong case that it could reach even someone so unemotional as Masterman. Despite that warmth, Masterman can't resist a dig at the Italian roommate, with the notion that he spoke "a kind of English" displaying a stereotypically British snobbishness.

Masterman can't shed much light on yesterday's events, as he was reading in his room with a toothache for much of the night. His Italian roommate also never left the cabin that night. Before dismissing him, Poirot asks him whether there was bad blood between MacQueen and Ratchett, which he denies by saying "Mr. MacQueen was a very pleasant gentleman." Finally, Poirot asks whether he's a pipe-smoker, but Masterman responds that he only smokes "gaspers," or cigarettes.

The difference between the way Masterman speaks of Ratchett and MacQueen is fairly stark, showing the depth of Ratchett's odious personality. Poirot, in these early interviews, is pushing at the passengers' alibis for the time between twelve and two o'clock, confirming that the Italian man never left his room and that MacQueen went into Ratchett's room before ten.

PART 2 CHAPTER 4

The next interview is with Mrs. Hubbard, the older American woman, who immediately demands to see the person "in authority." Mrs. Hubbard claims that the murderer was in her room last night. She woke to the presence of a shadowy figure and pretended to be asleep, worrying about "these nasty trains…and all the outrages I've read of." Soon, she gathered the courage to ring the conductor's bell. After Pierre Michel turned on the lights, they found no one there, which "seemed to Mrs. Hubbard to be a dramatic climax rather than an anticlimax."

Mrs. Hubbard has already established a reputation for herself as impertinent and gossipy, so her story about a shadowy figure in her room comes off as the product of an overactive imagination. Additionally, her complaints characterize her as a privileged and naïve American. Her arrogant demands for someone "in authority" and her reference to "the outrages I've read of" describe a worldview animated by fear of other cultures and social milieus.

After Pierre Michel checked her cabin and found nothing, Mrs. Hubbard reports that she was frustrated that he kept trying to "soothe" her rather than taking her seriously. She asked him to check the door into Ratchett's room, which wasn't bolted. Telling her story, Mrs. Hubbard quickly grows impatient with the investigators' skepticism. But she offers a piece of evidence, a button from a train conductor's uniform which she found near her bed, and is gratified when Poirot accepts it, saying "that, madame, I call evidence."

Mrs. Hubbard appears understandably upset that she isn't being taken seriously. The investigators have, maybe prematurely, categorized her as prone to exaggeration, a conclusion that clearly draws from her nationality, background, and gender. But here, as before with Pierre Michel, Poirot attempts to keep her engaged by affirming her, especially when she produces the button.

Poirot asks her whether the door to Ratchett's room was bolted when she went to sleep, and Mrs. Hubbard says that she had asked the Swedish woman to confirm that it was locked. She couldn't see the lock herself because she had hung a bag over the lock.

Poirot had spoken briefly to Mrs. Hubbard the previous night, when she volunteered that she was particularly scared of Ratchett and would not be surprised if he were a "murderer." Given that, it seems strange that she wouldn't check the bolt for herself.

Mrs. Hubbard had spoken to the Swedish woman, who was upset because she had mistakenly entered Ratchett's room. Ratchett made a cruel sexual joke about her being "too old."

This anecdote illustrates that Ratchett's cruelty was not just criminal but casual, expressed even where there's no advantage for Ratchett. This, in turn, backs up Poirot's initial perception of him as an "animal" and a "malevolent' force.

Poirot then tells Mrs. Hubbard about Ratchett's connection to the Armstrong case, and while she's familiar with it, calling Cassetti a "monster," she doesn't have a personal connection. He follows up on **the scarlet kimono**, but she denies owning one. Mrs. Hubbard rises to leave and Poirot suggests she forgot her handkerchief, holding the one with an "H" found in Ratchett's cabin, but she says that it isn't hers. She uses less expensive, more practical handkerchiefs.

Again, the gravity of the Armstrong case is such that each passenger has an instinctive revulsion to the idea that the perpetrator was a passenger on the train. Poirot asks about the scarlet kimono in a straightforward way, but he offers the handkerchief to Mrs. Hubbard as if assuming it's hers, trying to prompt an automatic response. This illustrates how Poirot alternately reassures and surprises witnesses in order to coax information that they might otherwise hide.

PART 2 CHAPTER 5

Poirot moves on to the Swedish woman who had talked to Mrs. Hubbard, a woman named Greta Ohlsson. She's a trained nurse traveling to stay with family in Lausanne, Switzerland. She confirms Mrs. Hubbard's story, including her encounter with Ratchett, from which Poirot moves on "tactfully."

Greta has been shown to be a somewhat meek, fragile woman who's already been exposed to Ratchett's cruelty, so Poirot's approach is markedly less skeptical and intensive than it was with Pierre Michel or Mrs. Hubbard.

Afterward, Greta Ohlsson returned to her cabin, which she shared with Ms. Debenham. She slept in her cabin for the rest of the night, claiming that Ms. Debenham never left because her departure would have awakened her. Greta also reports that neither she nor Ms. Debenham owns a **scarlet silk kimono.**

The presence of the scarlet kimono remains mysterious even after three of the women on the train report, directly or indirectly, that they don't own one.

Poirot asks Greta Ohlsson whether she's been to America, which she denies. She praises Americans for their financial investments in schools and hospitals. When informed that Ratchett was the man who killed Daisy Armstrong, Greta becomes emotional and leaves with her "eyes suffused with tears."

Although some on the train have a negative opinion of Americans and probably Mrs. Hubbard specifically, Greta finds their charitable efforts admirable. This probably also explains her affinity for Mrs. Hubbard, who's involved in these causes, even if her opinions about it are clumsy. Greta plays a bit to type when she's overcome with emotion about the Armstrong case, as she's been categorized as "sentimental," but her reaction further emphasizes the odiousness of the Armstrong case.

After Greta Ohlsson's departure, M. Bouc lobbies Poirot to call the Italian man who roomed with Masterman. M. Bouc is fixated on the Italian because, as he says, "an Italian's weapon is the knife."

M. Bouc's prejudices are clear, and he seems convinced of a man's guilt because of his sense that people of his nationality kill with "the knife." His conclusion is presented as patently ridiculous as way to cast doubt on reasoning from these thin cultural prejudices.

M. Bouc is untroubled by the clear alibi that Masterman offered for the Italian, but Poirot is described as "twinkling" as he reminds M. Bouc of the inconvenient fact. M. Bouc is certain that these inconvenient details will be explained away, but Poirot insists that it's "hardly so simple as that."

Poirot resists M. Bouc's premature conclusion, and the "twinkling" in his eye is something of a detective's tell that he thinks the case goes much deeper than a coincidence of nationality. In a way, his insistence that the case is "hardly so simple" echoes the reader's own desire for a more complex, more surprising mystery.

PART 2 CHAPTER 6

Before moving on to the next witness, Poirot and M. Bouc ask Pierre Michel about the button that Mrs. Hubbard found. Pierre flies into a panic when the implication becomes clear to him, but insists that he has not lost a button, and finds conductors from the adjacent train cars to vouch for him. Pierre Michel insists that he saw no one else in the hall on his way to Mrs. Hubbard's. This prompts speculation about whether a suspect could have slipped out of Mrs. Hubbard's room between her ringing of the bell and Pierre Michel's arrival.

Pierre Michel has already been disturbed by any implication that he's failed in his duty to safeguard the passengers on the train, but when faced with evidence that implicates him directly in the murder, he loses all composure. Although the other conductors vouch for him, clearly a lot is riding on his testimony that he was the only one in the hallway when he answered Mrs. Hubbard's bell.

Poirot again dismisses Pierre Michel and calls for the Russian Princess Dragomiroff. The investigators offer to meet her in her cabin, but she appears in the dining car nonetheless. Her presence is imposing, as "she had eyes like jewels, dark and imperious, revealing latent energy and an intellectual force that could be felt at once."

Princess Dragomiroff is an elderly woman, but she shows her strength of will when she reports to the dining car rather than allowing the investigators to come to her. The description of her eyes as "jewels" illustrates intelligence but also a haughtiness or aristocratic birthright that might make her a challenging witness.

Although Russian by origin, Princess Dragomiroff now resides in Paris and is on her way home after staying at the Austrian embassy. For much of the previous night, she claims that she was in her cabin with her German maid, Hildegarde Schmidt, who massaged her to relieve her arthritis.

Princess Dragomiroff's essential cosmopolitanism is typical of aristocrats at the time. She's clearly well-traveled in Europe, owing to her Russian birth, French residence, contacts at the Austrian embassy, and German lady's maid.

It emerges that Princess Dragomiroff personally knew the Armstrongs through Sonia's mother Linda Arden. As a result, she finds it entirely just that Ratchett, the man who ruined them, is dead. She alludes to a much younger sister of Sonia Armstrong who married an Englishman and resides in England. Poirot also asks about the color of her dressing gown, which is "black-satin."

Here, as with Mr. MacQueen, a witness somewhat incriminates herself through a personal connection to the Armstrong case. However, being a frail, elderly woman and an aristocrat, the Princess is not what one would call a prime suspect for the murder. Nevertheless, Poirot asks about her dressing gown. It's a question that might cause some offense, owing to the Princess's age and status, but it shows the extent to which Poirot has fixated on the scarlet kimono that he feels the need to ask anyway.

Then, the Princess leaves, but not before repeating Hercule Poirot's name and declaring, "It is Destiny," a remark that puzzles Poirot.

Her curious remarks about Hercule Poirot at the end of her interview betray some knowledge of his reputation. And the reference to "destiny" cryptically addresses how an internationally renowned detective should happen to be present when a murder is committed on a snowed-in train. It's a sly wink at narrative conveniences that brought Poirot to the Orient Express.

PART 2 CHAPTER 7

The Hungarian nobles Count and Countess Andrenyi are next, but only the Count appears. The Count is described as an attractive young man dressed in "English tweeds" who "might have been taken for an Englishman." Poirot reveals to him that Ratchett was the murderer of Daisy Armstrong, but his response is muted. The Count has, however, been to America, which he proclaims an "extraordinary country."

Count Andrenyi shares Princess Dragomiroff's cosmopolitanism, as a Hungarian man dressed in the English fashion who's traveled extensively in America. There's an implication that they may have more in common than that, as the Count was stationed at the Hungarian embassy, where Princess Dragomiroff was staying.

The Count says both he and his wife were in their rooms for much of the night, although his wife retired earlier and took a customary sleeping draught. Poirot asks him to write out his name and address. He claims that it's unnecessary for his wife to join them, at which point "a little gleam came into Poirot's eye." Poirot insists on her presence anyway. He receives her passport, which reads Elena Maria Andrenyi, maiden name Goldenberg, and has a spot of grease on it. Both the Count and Countess have "diplomatic status.'

Poirot's "tell" reappears here, as a "gleam" comes into his eye when he faces resistance from the Count. Clearly, the Count is trying to protect his wife, which Poirot finds significant enough to insist on her presence, even though their diplomatic status makes it risky to compel them.

The Countess appears as asked and confirms her husband's account that she had been asleep. Poirot asks her to sign her name after answering a few questions about her marriage to the Count. He interjects, "by the way, does your husband smoke?" to which the Countess responds that he smokes cigarettes and cigars, but not a pipe.

Here again, Poirot hopes to catch a witness off guard. He asks her to complete a task while answering questions, possibly hoping that she will inadvertently reveal something. And he asks about her husband's smoking habits in an off-hand way, without revealing that the answer is essential to the case.

The Countess becomes suspicious when Poirot asks about her dressing gown but reveals that hers is a "corn-coloured chiffon." She asks whether he's a Yugoslavian detective, to which Poirot replies, "I am an international detective" and "I belong to the world." He then pivots to English to ask if she speaks that language, and she responds that she speaks "a little" in a heavy accent.

Poirot's response, "I belong to the world," is emblematic of his entire demeanor and approach to detective work. Conversant in many languages and traveled in many places, Poirot doesn't even mention his own Belgian nationality. It's this internationalism that allows him to quickly switch to English in order to surprise the Countess. He clearly thinks she's hiding something, but the Countess's accented English isn't out of the ordinary for a woman of her background.

PART 2 CHAPTER 8

Colonel Arbuthnot is the next witness to be called. Poirot finds his French lacking, so he switches to English to speak to him. Gathering basic details, Poirot finds him uncooperative, so he becomes, "more foreign than he need have been" to draw him out. Poirot leans on his connection to Mary Debenham, which the Colonel finds "highly irregular."

Poirot's command of English comes into play here, as the French of the American and British passengers is generally poor. Arbuthnot is withdrawn and hostile from the first, so Poirot leans into antagonizing him by becoming more "foreign." Arbuthnot has been open about his distaste for foreigners. Poirot is something of a chameleon who can play up or down his foreign qualities when it suits the investigation.

Poirot tells a white lie that the murder was most likely committed by a woman, and so he must especially scrutinize the women on the train. He notes that it's challenging to deal with the English, as "they are very reserved." Poirot further implies that the Colonel feels "warmly" in the matter of Mary Debenham, to which the Colonel reacts with hostility.

Although Poirot doesn't put much stock in stereotypes, he deploys a stereotype about the English to great effect, trying to anger Arbuthnot into a revelation about the case. His innuendo about him and Mary Debenham pursues the same objective: to make Arbuthnot emotional and therefore less careful.

Colonel Arbuthnot goes on to establish his movements the previous night, spending most of it in conversation with MacQueen. Then Poirot asks him to cast his mind back, setting the scene by saying "you smoke—perhaps a cigarette—perhaps a pipe" and Arbuthnot volunteers that he smokes a pipe. At one point the Colonel smells a "fruity" scent which he takes to be a woman passing in the hallway.

Poirot again smuggles an important question into a larger, unrelated question. The suggestion of smoking appears just to provide a memory aid for Arbuthnot, but it's crucial to link him to the pipe-cleaners found in Ratchett's cabin. Arbuthnot takes the bait, answering that he prefers a pipe, which in turn makes him a credible suspect. Additionally, the fruity scent points indirectly to the woman in the scarlet kimono.

Poirot then asks him about Colonel Armstrong, and Arbuthnot names a few unrelated men named Armstrong but remembers Colonel Armstrong after Poirot nudges him towards the correct man. When informed that Ratchett was the man who kidnapped Daisy, Colonel Arbuthnot approves of his death, but he would have preferred that it happen lawfully, as "you can't go about having blood feuds and stabbing each other like Corsicans or the Mafia." He adds, "a trial by jury is a sound system."

Colonel Arbuthnot, like many of the passengers, is not sorry that Ratchett was murdered. But he's the first of the passengers to express concrete disapproval of the way Ratchett was punished. His reference to "Corsicans" and the "Mafia" is a not so subtle way to throw suspicion on the Italian passenger. But it's also a way to express a very English aversion to vigilante justice.

Poirot asks for a recollection of any other suspicious events on the previous night, no matter how small. Colonel Arbuthnot notes that he noticed the door in cabin sixteen was slightly open so that the "fellow" inside could see out without fully revealing himself. Poirot accepts that evidence but replies "doubtfully."

Colonel Arbuthnot speaks of the fellow in cabin 16 peering out into the hall without realizing that the fellow was Poirot himself. He had previously mistaken Poirot for another Belgian, his friend M. Bouc. It's clear from this that Arbuthnot has some severe cultural blinders.

Colonel Arbuthnot leaves but not before vouching again for Mary Debenham, calling her a "pukka sahib." After his departure, Poirot sums up the interview, finding it hard to believe that an "honourable, slightly stupid Englishman" would stab Ratchett twelve times. He insists that "one must respect the psychology."

Poirot restates his focus on "psychology" as the key to detective work and notes that this psychology points away from Arbuthnot, an "honourable, slightly stupid Englishman." Here, the psychology of the crime conflicts with the physical evidence, as the presence of a pipe-cleaner in Ratchett's room points directly to Arbuthnot.

PART 2 CHAPTER 9

The investigators move on to the last of the first-class passengers, the American Mr. Hardman. Mr. Hardman confirms that he's a traveling typewriter ribbon salesman, but on learning Hercule Poirot's identity, he says he better "come clean." He says his true occupation is a private investigator for a respected American detective agency.

Agatha Christie feints towards a more serious revelation when Hardman says he should come clean. When he states that he's heard of Poirot and his work, it's an admission that Poirot would find out his secret eventually. But the secret is, after all, an anticlimax. Hardman didn't commit the crime or even have any special information about it; he's simply a fellow detective.

Hardman reveals that he received the same offer of a job from Ratchett that Poirot did, but Hardman accepted. Ratchett even gave him a physical description of his potential murderer: a small, dark man with a feminine voice. Poirot shoots back, "You know who he really was, of course?" and goes on to describe Ratchett's situation and the Armstrong case.

Hardman volunteers information that should be much more powerful than it is: a physical description of the man Ratchett thought was out to kill him. But the description is vague to the point of meaningless and can't even definitively establish the gender of the suspect. Poirot tries to surprise Hardman by assuming "you knew who he really was" while leaving it ambiguous whether he's referring to Ratchett or the suspect.

Continuing with his story, Hardman describes how he kept watch all night, describing Pierre Michel's movements just as Pierre told Poirot. He notes that no one else could have boarded or left the train without him noticing.

Hardman corroborates the account of Pierre Michel and insists that no one could have boarded the train without him noticing. This places suspicion back on the current passengers in the Paris – Calais train car.

Hardman volunteers that he knew MacQueen by sight, having had dealings with his father, the district attorney. As Hardman goes, Poirot offers him both a cigarette and pipe, and Hardman takes the cigarette. Alone again, the investigators repeat the major new piece of information, that a small, dark man with a feminine voice was after Ratchett. Poirot observes that no one on the train fits that description.

Poirot again tries to get Hardman to act on instinct by offering a cigarette. In this situation, someone might act before remembering they had to disguise their habits. This is a suggestion that Poirot's focus on "psychology" includes instinctive behavior. Nevertheless, Hardman takes the cigarette and Poirot is left with the vague description of the "small, dark man." The fact that no one on the train fits that description points to an as-yet-undiscovered suspect, but the testimony of both Pierre Michel and Hardman suggests that no one boarded or left the train.

PART 2 CHAPTER 10

Poirot observes that his friend M. Bouc will be delighted to call the Italian passenger, Antonio Foscarelli, because M. Bouc sees him as a prime suspect. Interviewing Antonio, Poirot has to make an effort to keep him on topic, as he is prone to digression. Antonio is "not a man who had to have information dragged from him" and he volunteers that he has spent many years in America as a salesman.

Whereas extracting information from Arbuthnot was painful, Poirot has the opposite problem with Antonio, as he offers up irrelevant information. Antonio's talkativeness plays into a stereotype of Italians. M. Bouc, of course, has already decided on Antonio's guilt based on his nationality.

Antonio largely confirms the story of his roommate, Masterman the valet, but in the process scorns Masterman, calling him a "miserable John Bull." As Masterman testified, Antonio had been in his cabin all night, and Antonio claims that Masterman never expressed any displeasure with his boss, Mr. Ratchett, as he "did not speak" at all. Afterward, he signs a document for Poirot and leaves.

Antonio participates in a stereotype of his own by referring to Masterman as a miserable John Bull, a symbol of Britain and the British empire similar to Uncle Sam in the United States. Nevertheless, he provides an alibi for Masterman, confirming that he was in bed alternately reading and suffering from a toothache.

Even though there's no evidence against Antonio, M. Bouc continues to suspect him, exclaiming "Italians use the knife! And they are great liars. I do not like Italians." He appeals to the "psychology" of the case, but Poirot sees the psychology of the crime differently as the product of a "cool, resourceful brain."

M. Bouc's prejudices against Italians appear absurd, especially because he has a habit of pouncing on dubious information as a solution to the case. His final admission that "I do not like Italians" gives the game away that his conclusions were based entirely on prejudice. In responding to M. Bouc's prejudices, Poirot poses that the criminal may be "cool" and "resourceful," which is surprising given what's known of the apparent savagery of the murder: twelve blows delivered by a knife, a weapon which requires that the user face down the victim.

PART 2 CHAPTER 11

Mary Debenham is next, and Poirot finds her uncooperative, giving noncommittal responses to each question and claiming ignorance. Unlike some other passengers, she merely shrugs when she hears the nature of Ratchett's murder and notes that "people die every day." Poirot responds that "you are very Anglo-Saxon."

Poirot's is frustrated with Mary Debenham for many of the same reasons as he was with Arbuthnot. They both display an "Anglo-Saxon" sensibility that mostly manifests as a refusal to show any emotion or curiosity whatsoever. In response, Poirot attempts to get a rise out of Mary through reference to her nationality.

Poirot says what Mary is thinking: that she's contemptuous of the way he conducts the investigation and that she would prefer an "English inquiry," "cut and dried" with everything in its proper place. He says this with a "twinkle" in his eye. Poirot states that he reserves the right to his "little originalities" and notes that he tailors his method to the witness. He claims that, for her, he asks probing questions about her thoughts and feelings.

Poirot's monologue here is notable as a justification for his entire method of inquiry and indeed Christie's larger approach to the detective novel. There may even be an allusion to Sherlock Holmes in his reference to "English inquiry." In any case, Poirot's investigation is disorganized in much the way people are, and his focus on psychology rather than physical evidence means that few things can be "cut and dried." Further, Poirot has shown that the "twinkle" in his eye is a sign that he's hit on a productive avenue of inquiry, and the way he presses Mary Debenham suggests that she may be hiding something.

Ms. Debenham recites her recent history as a governess in Baghdad. Poirot mentions that he assumed she would be married soon, which Ms. Debenham calls "impertinent." He also asks her whether she owns **a scarlet kimono** and she responds, "No that is not mine." Poirot follows it "like a cat pouncing on a mouse" and Ms. Debenham reveals she did see someone in a scarlet kimono when she woke this morning at five but didn't recognize the person.

Just as Poirot antagonized Arbuthnot by suggesting that he felt "warmly" towards Mary Debenham, he provokes Mary by suggesting that she might be married soon, a reference to her relationship with Arbuthnot. This approach, as well as Poirot's close attention to the language of the suspects in his interviews, bears fruit when Mary reveals a hidden detail: she also saw the woman in the scarlet kimono. Notably, she saw the woman at five in the morning when Poirot had seen her closer to two.

Before she leaves, Ms. Debenham says that her roommate, the Swedish woman Greta Ohlsson, is worried that she's a suspect for the murder as she was the last to see Ratchett alive. Poirot confirms Greta's alibi and tells Ms. Debenham that Greta is not a prime suspect.

Even faced with an unlikely suspect, a gentle older Swedish woman, Poirot is reluctant to rule her out as a suspect until her alibi is confirmed. Even then, reassuring Greta may be a strategy on Poirot's part, and there's a sense that he still views every passenger as a potential suspect.

PART 2 CHAPTER 12

Poirot is confused by the interview with Ms. Debenham. He tells M. Bouc that he believes this was a premeditated crime, rather than a crime of passion, and he was trying to shake Ms. Debenham's self-possession. Given that she and Colonel Arbuthnot have a prior relationship, he expected them to provide alibis for each other, but instead their alibis are confirmed by strangers.

Poirot interrogated Mary Debenham in a heavy-handed way because he believes she has the "cool, resourceful brain" necessary to pull of the murder, which he now believes was premeditated. He also raises an unconventional aspect of the crime: strangers offering alibis for each other. Particularly in Arbuthnot and Ms. Debenham's case, the two have kept scrupulously apart since their time together on the train to Istanbul.

Poirot has only one witness left to call: Hildegarde Schmidt, who is Princess Dragomiroff's lady's maid. Poirot was adversarial with Ms. Debenham, but with Hildegarde "he was at his kindest and most genial, setting the woman at her ease." He also slips into German so that Hildegarde can converse in her native language.

Poirot again calibrates his approach to the witness, finding a kind approach the best way to gather information from Hildegarde Schmidt. His status as an "international detective" pays off as well, as he has enough German to interview her in her native language, setting her further at ease.

Hildegarde maintains that she doesn't know anything. She says she was called to attend to the Princess the previous night. When she notes that she doesn't like to wear a dressing gown in the presence of the Princess, Poirot gently interrupts to compliment her **"scarlet" dressing gown**. She replies that hers is dark blue. According to Hildegarde, after massaging the Princess, she returned to her cabin and slept.

Having put Hildegarde at ease, Poirot hopes to surprise her by acting as if he knows more than he does: namely, the color of her dressing gown. Poirot's efforts to build rapport lead to a situation where he adds details that it would be easy for the suspect to confirm, provided that the details are true.

Poirot asks whether Hildegarde saw a woman in a scarlet dressing gown and her eyes "bulge," but she denies it. However, she did see a conductor coming out of one of the compartments and walking swiftly past her in the other direction, a fact that M. Bouc particularly treats as sensational. The conductor passed her moving towards the dining car, ignoring a ringing bell.

Hildegarde, unbalanced by the suggestion about her dressing gown, reveals that she knows more than she lets on, bulging her eyes as Poirot asks about the scarlet kimono. She also reveals that there was a conductor in one of the compartments, which as M.Bouc's surprise shows, is new information. The fact that there was a conductor moving away from the ringing bell either contradicts Pierre Michel's account or suggests that there was another conductor, or someone dressed as a conductor, in the Paris train car.

M. Bouc sends for the three conductors so that Hildegarde can identify the man she saw. In the meantime, Poirot asks whether the handkerchief found in Ratchett's room is hers. Hildegarde responds "I? Oh, no, Monsieur," which Poirot finds odd, hearing a "nuance of hesitation" in it.

There are three conductors on the train attending to the Bucharest, Athens, and Paris train cars. If none of these resemble the man Hildegarde saw, it may point to a stranger disguised as a conductor. Poirot also follows up on the monogrammed handkerchief, as the "H" initial might point to "Hildegarde." Hildegarde denies ownership saying "I? Oh, no" which Poirot detects as implying that she knows it belongs to someone else.

When the three conductors, including Pierre Michel, arrive, Hildegarde claims that none of them are the man she saw. Asked to describe the man, Hildegarde remembers a small, dark man, who said "pardon me" in a feminine voice.

None of the conductors resemble the conductor that Hildegarde saw. She describes instead, almost to the letter, the man that Hardman had suggested as the assailant that Ratchett was expecting.

PART 2 CHAPTER 13

Poirot, M. Bouc, and Dr. Constantine take stock of the evidence. They're faced with a "small, dark man," a prime suspect, who seems to have vanished, as he can't be hiding on the train. Poirot lays out the facts of the case, but he's less inclined to take clues and information as fact than M. Bouc. The irrefutable fact is that Ratchett was stabbed twelve times early that morning. But Poirot notes that the stopped pocket watch doesn't necessarily give the time of the murder, as it could have easily been faked.

Poirot diagrams the case in his particular careful way, and it's a way that has a healthy suspicion of convenient physical evidence. Poirot is suspicious of the stopped watch because it could be "faked," and indeed, there's no way to determine whether the crime scene was arranged by the murderer to mislead investigators.

The credibility of the witnesses is also a concern. Poirot uses the example of Mr. Hardman who first pointed them towards a small, dark man as a possible assailant. He notes that he can't investigate the "bona fides" of each witness and can go only on "deduction." He describes a process where each piece of information must be cross-referenced between the passengers. In Hardman's case, his story of the small, dark man is corroborated by an "unlikely" source: Hildegarde the German maid.

Poirot cautions that the progress of this case is slightly unusual because it can't involve the sort of rote policework that would reveal a witness as untrustworthy and, in turn, make for a boring mystery. Instead, each witness's testimony must be balanced against that of others, seeking points of corroboration and disagreement, a task uniquely suited to Poirot's "psychological" focus. In the case of the small, dark man, the fact that Hardman and Hildegarde can't have known each other may suggest that each of them are telling the truth.

Poirot continues, focusing on the still unknown identity of the small, dark man in the conductor's uniform. The man's existence is directly or indirectly confirmed by the testimony of four witnesses, MacQueen and Arbuthnot in addition to Hildegarde and Hardman. But supposing he exists, Poirot says, he would have to be either hidden undiscovered on the train, which has been extensively searched, or disguised as one of the known passengers so completely that Ratchett wouldn't recognize him.

Nevertheless, Poirot is skeptical, faced with two seeming impossible possibilities. According to both M. Bouc and Pierre Michel, no one could be currently on the train without their knowledge. On the other hand, as Poirot has noted before, no one on the train fits the description of the "small, dark man" and it's unlikely that someone could be so completely disguised as to transform into one.

The same question attaches to the woman in **the scarlet kimono**. Seemingly, they're confronted with a missing scarlet kimono and a missing conductor's uniform, one lacking the button that Mrs. Hubbard found in her cabin. To that end, Poirot resolves to search each passenger's luggage. He makes a grandiose prediction that the kimono will be found in one of the male passengers' luggage and the conductor's uniform in Hildegarde Schmidt's luggage. As they're wrapping up, Mrs. Hubbard bursts in screaming about a bloody knife in her "sponge-bag" and promptly faints.

Much of the information necessary to solve the crime hasn't been found yet. Although Poirot isn't certain that the small, dark man exists, an extra conductor's uniform definitely does because of the button Mrs. Hubbard found. Further, Poirot himself saw a woman in a scarlet kimono, so that garment must be somewhere on the train.

PART 2 CHAPTER 14

Making his way past the commotion in front of Mrs. Hubbard's cabin, Poirot finds the knife in Mrs. Hubbard's bag. It's a cheap knife in the oriental style which Dr. Constantine says could have been used for any of Ratchett's twelve wounds. Poirot says in mock-weariness, "Two people decided to stab M. Ratchett last night. It is too much of a good thing that both of them should select the same weapon."

The discovery of the murder weapon, which in another novel might be the crux of the mystery, doesn't seem to have a huge impact on the case. Poirot's comment reflects his running theory that the crime was committed by at least two people, but two people using the same weapon seems convenient to the point of absurdity.

Poirot seems dismissive of the murder weapon and instead removes the sponge-bag from the door handle to Ratchett's compartment. He notices the bolt is above the handle. When M. Bouc observes his fiddling with the door, Poirot says cryptically, "The same point does not strike you? No, evidently not."

Mrs. Hubbard had previously told Poirot that she couldn't see whether the door was locked because her bag was blocking the bolt. But the bolt is above the handle, so Mrs. Hubbard was mistaken or lying.

Poirot tries the door to Ratchett's cabin and can't get through, as they had locked the door on the other side. Poirot takes pains to soothe Mrs. Hubbard and discusses the door between Ratchett's cabin and hers. He suggests that Greta, when she checked the bolt, may have thought it locked on Mrs. Hubbard's side when it was only locked on Ratchett's side.

Since the doors to adjoining compartments can be locked on either side, in which case they can't be used, Greta may have thought the door was locked when it was actually open. This implies that someone in Ratchett's cabin may actually have been able to escape through Mrs. Hubbard's cabin and into the hallway.

Mrs. Hubbard describes more of her journey, expressing displeasure with Istanbul as a "tumble-down city." Poirot takes the opportunity to search her bags, with her permission, which takes longer because he has to look through pictures of Mrs. Hubbard's children.

Even distraught, Mrs. Hubbard can't help but condescending to the ancient, beautiful city of Istanbul in her particularly American way. Poirot looks through pictures of her children as a way to keep Mrs. Hubbard calm while he searches his luggage.

PART 2 CHAPTER 15

Poirot carries on with his search of the passengers' luggage while conducting short second interviews with them. Beginning with Hardman, Poirot searches his two bags but finds nothing except some bottles of liquor. Poirot expresses admiration for America but takes a moment to praise European women. Hardman looks out at the snow and "blinked as if the snow hurt his eyes."

Poirot's discussion of the merits of European women is out of character for him and something of a non-sequitur. Clearly, Poirot was attempting to provoke a response from Hardman, which he seems to get when Hardman looks out at the snow. In this case, Poirot knows or suspects something that hasn't been openly discussed, a hallmark of the classic mystery.

Next up is Colonel Arbuthnot. In the search, Poirot finds pipe-cleaners that match exactly the one found in Ratchett's cabin. Arbuthnot seems untroubled by the focus on the pipe-cleaners and notes that he always uses them "If I can get 'em."

The discovery of the pipe-cleaners matching the one found in Ratchett's room all but proves that Arbuthnot was there, as no one else on the train seems to smoke a pipe.

With Princess Dragomiroff, Poirot assures her that, in her case, the search is a formality. The Princess seems to find his lack of suspicion strange, considering her personal connections to the Armstrong family. The Princess states that she loved Sonia Armstrong and projects that Poirot thinks she would not "soil my hands" with Ratchett's murder. She openly claims that she would have liked to have her servants "flog" Ratchett. Poirot responds that her strength is in her will rather than her arms, and the Princess admits, almost regretfully, that it's true she has no strength in "these."

Strangely, the Princess seems disappointed that she's not a suspect in Ratchett's murder. She almost taunts Poirot, emphasizing her love of Sonia Armstrong and hatred of Ratchett, going so far as to say she would have had Ratchett killed. But the Princess, by her own admission, is a frail woman and would hardly have the strength to stab Ratchett twelve times, especially considering some of the wounds are quite deep. But her hatred of Ratchett and love of the Armstrongs seems genuine enough that her "will" is capable of the crime, if not her "arms."

Next, Poirot searches the Count and Countess's luggage, which is tricky due to their diplomatic status. They waive it in this case and Poirot talks as he searches; "Poirot seemed to be trying to mask an embarrassment by making various small pointless remarks…" Poirot finds that one of the labels on the Countess's suitcase is wet and that she has a bottle of "trional," a sleeping drug, in her cabinet.

As Lieutenant Dubosc discovered in his first conversation with Poirot, the detective is not inclined to small talk. But here, he makes "small pointless remarks" perhaps in an attempt to distract the Count and Countess.

He moves on to Greta Ohlsson and Ms. Debenham, performing a quick search of Greta's luggage and sending her to minister to Mrs. Hubbard. Ms. Debenham suspects that he wanted to interview her privately. Poirot confronts her with two inconsistencies. One, the overheard conversation with Colonel Arbuthnot and the reference to "When it's all over." Two, her anxiety at missing her connection to the Orient Express but her calmness when faced with their present delay.

Poirot's aggressive questioning of Mary Debenham has already put her on the defensive, and she suspects rightly that Poirot sending Greta away was a ruse. He presents several pieces of evidence that together show Mary is hiding something fairly significant. In doing so, Poirot all but leads Mary to shut down completely. He's clearly on to something, but he can't pursue it further.

Mary Debenham flatly refuses to talk further, and Poirot departs. Afterward, Poirot delivers a proverb to M. Bouc "Mon ami, if you wish to catch a rabbit you put a ferret into the hole, and if the rabbit is there—he runs."

Here, Poirot explains his strategy to M. Bouc. As the proverb indicates, he's not sure that the "rabbit is there," or that Mary Debenham is guilty. But if she is, this aggressive posture will cause her to react in desperation, prompting a mistake or revelation.

Poirot searches Hildegarde Schmidt's luggage where, true to his prediction, he finds a conductor's uniform with one button missing. Hildegarde panics and insists that the uniform isn't hers, and Poirot reassures her, strangely, by saying he's as convinced of her innocence as he is that she's a "good cook."

Poirot had previously predicted that the conductor's uniform may be found in Hildegarde's luggage if she's guilty, but if she's innocent, it definitely will be. Finding the uniform as he predicted, Poirot seems to think it proves her innocence. His comment about Hildegarde's cooking is another case of the detective knowing more than the reader, as we've seen no evidence of Hildegarde's cooking skills.

The search of the luggage is finished with no further surprises. Poirot notes that the mystery of the **scarlet kimono** remains, a mystery that's difficult because it's been "made difficult." Returning to his own bags, Poirot finds in them the scarlet kimono which he sees as "a defiance."

Poirot appears amused by the discovery of the kimono in his own luggage, but he seems to have anticipated the possibility of finding it there. He calls it, "a defiance," which seems to have been prompted by his intrusive searching of the luggage, indicating that he's getting closer to the truth and that the perpetrator has chosen a bold move to confuse him. The scarlet kimono has been a persistent mystery that has affected Poirot's handling of the case. And now the perpetrator seems well aware of his preoccupation with it, sending a signal by planting the garment.

PART 3 CHAPTER 1

Poirot, M. Bouc, and Dr. Constantine reconvene. M. Bouc again stresses his confusion with the case and the opinion that none of the passengers' testimony has given any definite evidence, or at least he "did not observe it." Poirot responds, "That is because you did not listen."

Here, Poirot chastises M. Bouc for discounting the evidence they've gathered, saying he "did not observe" because he "did not listen." This echoes a classic line of Sherlock Holmes, who had chided Watson in a similar way: "You see, but you do not observe." This places Poirot and M. Bouc in a Holmes/Watson relationship, which bears out as Poirot is consistently in a position of explaining his thinking to M. Bouc. More significantly, Poirot's choice of verb ("listen" rather than Holmes' "see") distinguishes their approach to detective work. Sherlock uses the eye to detect fine elements of physical evidence while Poirot uses the ear to measure witness testimony and find clues to their psychological states.

Poirot offers a significant detail as an example: MacQueen said he was brought on to assist Ratchett with languages, yet the voice that answered from Ratchett's cabin at twenty-three minutes to one spoke in idiomatic French. M. Bouc finds this to be proof that Ratchett was dead at this time, but Poirot cautions that they don't know that definitively.

Poirot's facility with languages makes him especially attentive to nuances, such as whether a French statement might have been spoken by a native speaker. Clearly, Ratchett was not the one answering. Whether Ratchett was alive or not at this time, a fluent French speaker was with him in his cabin.

They return to the matter of the stopped watch. Poirot reasons that if the watch was altered, it must have some significance, and that they should look for someone with a reliable alibi for that time.

Poirot continues with his exceedingly careful approach, speaking, as he did in the case of the conductor's uniform, in terms of conditional statements. If the stopped watch was altered, it would have been done to turn suspicion away from someone who had a solid alibi for that time.

Then, Poirot assembles a list of the identities of the passengers, complete with alibis and distinguishing information. Each is vouched for by at least one other passenger and most have either no motive or no evidence against them. They are of various nationalities. Colonel Arbuthnot has the evidence of the pipe-cleaner in Ratchett's room. Princess Dragomiroff has a strong motive, as she was very close to the Armstrongs.

The list of suspects and their essential information is as much a clarification for the reader of the novel as it is a helpful guide for Poirot. The amount of information involved is considerable, and a reader needs a way to synthesize it at a glance. The list primarily shows a web of alibis offered for each passenger by others, and no suspect seems likelier than another except Princess Dragomiroff, who seems incapable of the physical act of the crime.

PART 3 CHAPTER 2

To supplement the suspect list, Poirot makes a list of unresolved questions. He notes that they haven't assigned ownership of the handkerchief. **The scarlet kimono** is still an open question, as every female passenger has denied ownership of it. The precise time of the murder is also in question.

Poirot's list of questions illustrates the difficulty of a case in which no witness can be believed unconditionally and each piece of physical evidence, except the half-burnt note that mentioned Daisy Armstrong, could have been faked.

M. Bouc narrows it down to Mrs. Hubbard, Mary Debenham (whose middle name is Hermione), and Hildegarde Schmidt. To this, Poirot responds, "Ah! And of those three?" Dr. Constantine notes that it is expensive and so he thinks it belongs to the American Mrs. Hubbard, as Americans "do not care what they pay."

Dr. Constantine, like M. Bouc, reasons on the basis of stereotypes. His notion that Americans "do not care what they pay" doesn't apply to this American, Mrs. Hubbard, as she's made clear that her tastes are practical rather than expensive. In this case, Poirot's response, "Ah! And of those three?" is condescending, indicating that he's willing to let M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine explain their thinking, but that he himself thinks the owner is someone other than those three.

Then there's the matter of the pipe-cleaner. Dr. Constantine cites Poirot saying, "two clues is too much carelessness." He reasons that the handkerchief may be genuine, but the pipe-cleaner is a faked clue. As evidence, he points to Colonel Arbuthnot's impassive reaction when asked about the pipe-cleaner.

Here, the three men face the difficulty of determining which clues are planted, if any, and which are genuine. Constantine is willing to accept one clue may have been left by mistake but speculates that the pipe-cleaner was planted to implicate Colonel Arbuthnot. This points to an already observed feature of the crime scene. A meticulous criminal could ensure that the crime scene offers no clues or many clues. Ratchett's murder is the second scenario, but the effect it has to frustrate an investigation is similar.

Poirot leads them through several other questions. **The scarlet kimono** is unique in that none of them can even propose a solution to who wore it and why.

The scarlet kimono stands apart as a clue that seems overwhelmingly significant but doesn't lead to any further information or speculation.

Dr. Constantine then raises the issue of multiple murderers acting independently. He cites as evidence Ratchett's wounds, as some are deep and other are superficial, and some suggest a left-handed murderer and others a right-handed one. Poirot reveals that he had invited each witness to write their name precisely to determine whether they are right- or left-handed. Only Princess Dragomiroff didn't participate.

Poirot reveals that the recording of name and address that seemed an act of basic policework was actually a way to find information without the suspect knowing it was important. This is another instance of Poirot trying to investigate by compelling automatic behavior.

At one point, M. Bouc "struggles in mental agony." They try out several plausible and implausible theories, after which Poirot asks them to sit back and think, having all the facts arranged before them. He notes, "one or more of those passengers killed Ratchett. Which of them?"

The possibility of multiple murderers, acting either independently or together, makes the mystery extraordinarily complex. Some mysteries offer the reader a fair chance to solve the murder given the facts of the case; in other words, they don't introduce extraneous or unknowable factors to explain the murder. Here, Christie seems to be inviting the reader to participate in the exercise.

PART 3 CHAPTER 3

The three men think, but neither M. Bouc nor Dr. Constantine think very productively and are distracted by private, unrelated thoughts. Poirot awakens from his reverie muttering "And if so—why, if so, that would explain everything." When his eyes opened, "they were green like a cat's.

M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine reach a dead end almost immediately, but it's implied that Poirot's thoughts bring him the solution to the case. Again, Christie focuses on Poirot's eyes in a moment of epiphany, and the comparison to a cat suggests an almost predatory insight into the identity of the culprit.

Poirot begins to explain the results of his contemplation. He targets a few suggestive details beginning with the grease spot on Countess Andrenyi's passport. He connects this to the handkerchief monogrammed with an "H." Ignoring the letter for a moment, the elegance and expense of the handkerchief point to two women in particular: Princess Dragomiroff and Countess Andrenyi. He notes the convenience of the grease spot near the first letter of her name, "Elena," and reasons that the grease spot was deliberately placed.

Poirot begins to combine small details that may have been overlooked by the reader, but that combined point to a powerful conclusion. It was always too easy for the handkerchief to lead to someone like Mrs. Hubbard, whose name obviously begins with "H."

And in fact, Poirot deduces that the grease spot was placed to obscure an "H" after the handkerchief was found. He concludes that Countess Andrenyi's true first name is Helena. As evidence, he cites the wet label on the Countess's luggage.

When searching the Countess's luggage, Poirot had made small talk, ostensibly to hide the embarrassment of searching a noblewoman's luggage. But it seems this also had the effect of hiding the revelation of the altered luggage tag and pretending that the Count and Countess were not suspects. Poirot, again, is in the business of managing suspects' knowledge and emotion, just as he had in a different way with Ms. Debenham.

Poirot brings up a major constraint on any planned attempt to murder Ratchett: the blizzard. He reasons that the culprit planned to depict the murder as an outside job committed by someone who had boarded and left the train at the next station; the existence of the extra conductor's uniform supports this, and Poirot says that if not for the snow, the uniform would be found in the "toilet." But since the train was stalled, the culprit or culprits would be shown to be still on the train, complicating the plan.

Poirot had previously thought the murder to be premeditated, but here he demonstrates just how meticulously planned the murder was. It's only the interruption of a force of nature that makes the murder a dilemma for the investigators. If not for the snow, it would seem obvious that the murder was committed by a stranger who boarded the train, and the investigation would lead away from any of the current passengers.

Continuing with his theory, Poirot brings up the threatening letters Ratchett received. He notes they sounded as if they were "lifted bodily out of an indifferently written American crime novel." Those letters, Poirot says, were intended for the police rather than Ratchett. The only genuine letter was the half-burnt one that mentioned Daisy Armstrong.

Christie gets in a sly dig at her competitors by attributing the clunky writing of the letters to pulp American crime novels. Now Poirot realizes the reason for that is that they were intended to convince police, who already had compelling evidence in the form of the conductor's uniform, that the murderer wasn't a registered passenger on the train. In a heavily-constructed crime scene, the one authentic clue is one Poirot had to work to decipher.

Returning to the handkerchief, Poirot claims that it was inadvertently dropped by someone whose name began with "H." Dr. Constantine concludes that this means that the Countess dropped the handkerchief and tried to obscure her name. Poirot disagrees, thinking that the handkerchief may have been planted to shift suspicion to someone connected to the Armstrong family, namely, Countess Andrenyi. The doctor responds that an innocent person wouldn't hide their identity in this way, but Poirot thinks otherwise, saying, "I know human nature."

As the thinking on the murder approaches a dizzying level of complexity, Poirot considers not just what a guilty person might do if suspected, but what an innocent person would do. As suspicion falls on her, Countess Helena Andrenyi would panic and alter her passport and luggage. But she would only do this if she were connected to the Armstrong case and likely to have been involved in the murder of someone who destroyed the family.

Poirot recalls further that Linda Arden, Sonia's mother, was a stage name, and that her actual surname was Goldenberg. Linda also had another daughter, one much younger than Sonia. He concludes from this that Countess Elena Andrenyi is actually Helena Goldenberg, Sonia Armstrong's younger sister. As a result, Princess Dragomiroff, who knew the Armstrong family well, must have known Helena was on the train and lied that she had married an Englishman and moved to England.

In the same way, as Poirot observed previously, that each passenger on the train provides an alibi for another, such that it's difficult to determine the truth, when one passenger is shown to be lying it implicates others. Princess Dragomiroff's account of Sonia Armstrong's sister had always been vague, and now Poirot knows that's because she was trying to deflect from that sister's presence on the train.

PART 3 CHAPTER 4

Poirot and M. Bouc go to the dining car to confront the Count and Countess with this new information. Poirot first offers her the monogrammed handkerchief, which the Countess denies ownership of. But Poirot insists that the monogram matches the first letter of her name, Helena Goldenberg. Against Poirot's evidence, the Countess gives in and her voice becomes "for the first time, a definitely American voice."

The Countess's admission makes clear Poirot's logic when he challenged the Countess to speak English in a previous interview. At that time, she made an attempt at the accent of a European learning English as a second language. Now, her true voice removes all doubt that she's American.

The Countess gives an impassioned excuse that Ratchett had destroyed the three people "I loved best and who made up my home—my world!" In that moment, she appears a "true daughter" of the world-famous actress Linda Arden. She explains that she lied because her motive to kill Ratchett was so strong, yet she swears she did not commit the crime.

Poirot is impressed by the emotional force of Helena's admission, which brings back the real monstrosity of Ratchett's crimes and the human suffering it created, which even now persists. As Sonia Armstrong's sister and the person with the most reason to commit the murder, she correctly anticipated that she would be discovered and suspected. However, her denial of the crime seems genuine.

The Count admits his complicity in the deception, saying that the alteration of the passport and luggage was his doing. He offers as an excuse that he wanted to protect his wife from false suspicion and media scandal and that the alteration of the passport was "easily done." Poirot gives him backhanded praise: "You have the makings of a very fine criminal…and an apparently remorseless determination to mislead justice."

More context is provided for the Count's reluctance to have his wife interviewed: in effect, he was right to think she would be suspected and interrogated for the crime. Poirot's disappointment in the Count stems not from his desire to protect his wife, however, but from his successful effort to confuse the course of justice, Poirot's chief concern.

Poirot asks for her help to fill out the details of the Armstrong household. She confirms for him that Daisy had a French nursemaid named Susanne and a nurse named Stengelberg. She also volunteers someone else from Daisy's childhood, an old woman: "a dragon—a sort of governess…a big red-haired woman." Helena remembers her as English, then corrects herself that she was Scottish. She remembers her as Miss Freebody.

Helena has unburdened herself of a terrible and significant secret, yet her responses to Poirot about the Armstrong household aren't entirely confident. She has difficulty remembering Miss Freebody's precise role, "a sort of governess," and revises her nationality once, as well.

PART 3 CHAPTER 5

Alone again, M. Bouc expresses certainty to Poirot that the Countess is guilty, but Poirot reminds him that there was another option for the owner of the handkerchief. Indeed, Princess Dragomiroff enters the dining-car to claim ownership of it.

With each twist of the case, M. Bouc has seized on the new evidence to claim that the solution to the case is beyond doubt. But Poirot has discovered as much as he has by being patient and suspending conclusions. He's proved correct, again, when the Princess claims the handkerchief.

M. Bouc is shocked, objecting that her first name is Natalia, to which the Princess responds that the letter "N" appears as an "H" in the Russian alphabet. Poirot notes that the Princess didn't say that the handkerchief was hers, but the Princess only says, "You did not ask me." She has no idea how her handkerchief ended up in Ratchett's room, but Poirot suspects that she's lying.

The case turns on an international misunderstanding, one Poirot no doubt had grasped earlier. To anyone unversed in the differences between the Roman and Cyrillic alphabets, the Princess would not have been considered an owner of the handkerchief, despite its finery and her wealth.

Princess Dragomiroff admits that she lied to protect the Countess, who she knew was Sonia Armstrong's sister. Poirot tries to admonish her by appealing to her sense of justice, but she replies, "In this case I consider that justice—strict justice—has been done."

The Princess draws a distinction between superficial and "strict" justice, which she believes herself to be on the correct side of. Her notion of justice is that the wicked are punished, as Ratchett has been, and the innocent and suffering are protected, as she attempted with Helena. In a case concerned with the legitimacy of vigilante justice, the Princess seems to support it.

The Princess departs, and Poirot confers with the doctor to determine whether it's physically possible that she inflicted the wounds on Ratchett. Dr. Constantine concedes that it's possible the "feebler ones" were inflicted by the Princess. Frustrated, M. Bouc laments the lies that the passengers have told them, but Poirot is unfazed by them. The detective notes that "If you confront anyone who has lied with the truth, he will usually admit it—often out of sheer surprise."

The Princess has told the most brazen lies to the investigators, but Poirot, even as he criticizes the suspects for their dishonesty, finds in them an investigative tool. Indeed, Poirot's approach has been to guess at the truth and surprise his suspects with it, on the off-chance that they will instinctively confirm it.

PART 3 CHAPTER 6

Poirot turns his attention to Colonel Arbuthnot. He confronts Arbuthnot with the pipe-cleaner, but Arbuthnot is unimpressed and continues to stonewall him. Poirot asks about the ominous conversation with Ms. Debenham in Syria, and he begins to slip into French, asking "Pourqoui?" when Arbuthnot refuses to answer.

Poirot had hit on a winning strategy in his previous interview with Colonel Arbuthnot which he repeats here. Lapsing back into French, Poirot seeks to unbalance Arburhtnot with his foreignness. Poirot senses an opening in Arbuthnot's refusal to speak about his conversation with Mary Debenham, which Mary also refused to speak about.

Finding little cooperation, Poirot ventures that Ms. Debenham was Daisy Armstrong's governess at the time of the kidnapping, after there was "a minute's dead silence." Arbuthnot continues to evade, looking like he's "carved out of wood, rigid and impassive." Poirot calls for Ms. Debenham.

The "minute's dead silence" is a clear sign that Poirot's strategy of guessing at the truth has hit its mark and Arbuthnot isn't inventive enough to create a lie for cover. Instead, he tries to find a way out by remaining impassive and refusing to volunteer any other information.

PART 3 CHAPTER 7

Mary Debenham arrives with her "head thrown back as if in defiance." Her appearance "suggested the figure-head of a ship plunging gallantly into a rough sea." Poirot confronts her with the information that she lived with the Armstrongs at the time of Daisy's murder. Mary flinches before recovering and admitting the lie.

The image of Mary Debenham as the figurehead of a ship captures both her "defiance" and her essential helplessness, driven forward as a ship is driven by the wind. Even knowing that Poirot is getting closer to the truth, the revelation of her lie about her presence at the Armstrongs shakes her.

Mary attributes the lie to a desire to escape scandal so that she could find further employment as a governess. Poirot asks how she could not have recognized Countess Andrenyi when she had lived with her. In response, Mary gives a meandering response mentioning that Helena was not grown up when Mary knew her and that she "noticed her clothes more than her face" as "women do."

Mary regains some composure and tries to fend off Poirot's inquiry by appealing to her reputation as a governess. But her explanation for how she didn't recognize Countess Andrenyi as Helena is less convincing. Mary, a self-possessed, intrepid young woman, even attempts to deprecate herself as vain to escape the truth.

When Poirot continues to press her, she's overwhelmed with emotion and Arbuthnot yells at Poirot to leave her alone. Threatening to "break every bone in your damned body." They both leave, but not before Arbuthnot insists that Mary has nothing to do with "this business."

The dynamic of Arbuthnot as Mary's protector is only heightened as Poirot inches closer to the truth. The man who before had wished for Mary that "you were out of all this" roars in defense of her, roused even to violence.

M. Bouc marvels at the "guess" that brought out Ms. Debenham's former occupation. Poirot had already suspected Ms. Debenham's position when questioning the Countess about Daisy's governess. The Countess described someone the opposite of Ms. Debenham, and when she was forced to make up a name, she chooses Freebody. But Poirot recalls a shop in London called Debenham and Freebody, an association the Countess must have seized on.

M. Bouc is in a Watson role here as he praises the leap of logic that brought Poirot to Mary Debenham's connection to the Armstrongs. Although Agatha Christie generally presents a "fair" mystery where the reader has the information needed to find the next twist, this is a rare case where information has been hidden. The existence of a shop called Debenham and Freebody was known only to Poirot.

PART 3 CHAPTER 8

Poirot calls still other passengers into the dining car. First, Antonio Foscarelli appears, looking side to side like a "trapped animal." He becomes hostile when Poirot begins questioning him but relents after Poirot correctly guesses that he was the Armstrongs' chauffer.

Antonio's description as a "trapped animal" measures the extent to which Poirot has closed in on the hidden backgrounds of the passengers. Antonio enters the room prepared to fight but finds that Poirot has already won.

While denying the murder, Antonio rails against Ratchett calling him "a pig." He alludes to some trouble with the police in connection with the kidnapping, but Poirot concludes he had nothing to do with it. At this, Antonio sinks into grief, remembering the sweetness and innocence of Daisy Armstrong. He exclaims that "All the household worshipped her!"

Antonio's habits of speech have shown him to be coarse and colloquial, exemplified by calling Ratchett "a pig." That makes the contrast starker when he begins to speak of Daisy Armstrong's innocence in divine terms of "worship." Ratchett's crime seems especially infernal considering Daisy Armstrong as remembered by those who loved her.

Antonio sulks off and Poirot summons Greta Ohlsson, who immediately admits that she was Daisy's nurse. Greta also mourns Daisy, calling her an "angel" and insisting to Poirot that "You cannot understand—you cannot know—if you had been there as I was…" Although she doesn't admit to the murder, she rejoices that Ratchett is dead.

Greta is next to admit her employment in the Armstrong household as Daisy's nurse, whom Helena had remembered as a woman named Stengelberg in a nod to her Swedish nationality. She claims that she's also innocent of the murder, but she seems to throw the accusation back on Poirot, claiming that he "cannot understand" since he hadn't shared in the grief of Dasiy's death. This suggests that there may be a justification on a personal level for a crime that society may not deem legitimate or just.

Poirot treats Greta gently, letting her go without further questions. As she leaves, Masterman the valet enters. He admits straight away that he was Colonel Armstrong's assistant in the war and apologizes for his deceit. He comes forward largely to defend Antonio, who he describes as a "gentle creature…not like those nasty murdering Italians one reads about."

Masterman comes forward both to admit his lie and defend Antonio in a way that speaks of genuine affection for the man. In the process, he also punctures a national stereotype, work that Antonio had begun in his sentimental remembrance of Daisy.

M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine marvel at the carousel of emotional confessions and the coincidence of each passenger having a connection to the Armstrong household. Dr. Constantine calls it "more wildly improbable than any roman policier I have ever read."

Poirot had been pushing against a network of lies supported by seemingly all of the passengers, but when it fails, it fails all at once with each coming forward to admit their dishonesty. Again, there's a reference to the improbability of detective novels (roman policier)*, which is also Christie's insistence that she has done her job in holding the reader in suspense.*

Just then, Mr. Hardman enters, but he does so to ask, "Just exactly what's up on this train?" Poirot is described again as "twinkling" as he questions Hardman on his history as an employee of the Armstrongs. Hardman denies any of that. But he praises Poirot saying, "believe me, you're a pretty slick guesser" and then further, "but no one would believe it to look at you."

When Poirot "twinkles," it's clear that he knows something he's not letting on, so Hardman's claim that he's ignorant of the events of the day doesn't ring true. His contention that Poirot is brilliant but that "no one would believe it to look at you" ironically captures Poirot's talent. His unassuming appearance hides his talent in a way that makes him a better detective.

Poirot states that he has known for "some time" who killed Mr. Ratchett and he asks M. Bouc to assemble the passengers in the dining car so that he can propose two solutions.

What's soon to follow is an event mystery readers have been anticipating: a grand reveal of the solution of the crime to the assembled suspects. But Poirot breaks that formula by noting he has two solutions to offer. This may imply that the "truth" of the case is not a straightforward matter at all.

PART 3 CHAPTER 9

Addressing the assembled passengers, Poirot speaks English as he says, "I think all of you know a little of that language." He plans to give two solutions to the crime and then asks M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine to "judge" which is the correct one.

Poirot's choice of English is apropos, as the passengers have all spent time in America, connected by their familiarity with the Armstrong family. And his request that M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine "judge" the proceedings implies that there is an underlying justice to be determine; it's not just a matter of pointing to and naming the murderer.

Poirot sets out the parameters of what they've discovered. Mr. Ratchett was stabbed between midnight and two that morning and that at 12:30, the train was stopped by a snowdrift. He further states that since no one boarded or left the train in that time, the murderer will be found among the assembled passengers. But then he says that "was our theory" and M. Bouc exclaims in surprise.

The facts Poirot describes have been the basis of the entire investigation. Multiple witnesses have confirmed that it would be impossible for a stranger to have boarded the train. In one fell swoop, Poirot undercuts this certainty and sets even a savvy mystery reader adrift.

He then sets out an alternative theory in which an unknown assailant was provided with a conductor's uniform, snuck on the train at Belgrade or Vincovci, With the pass-key, he entered Ratchett's cabin through Mrs. Hubbard's, stabbed him twelve times with the knife, abandoned the uniform in Hildegarde's luggage, and left the train just before it departed again.

Poirot's first solution is notable in that it doesn't grapple with the facts of the case. Poirot himself had dismissed the "outside job" theory as the one the murderer or murderers had attempted to create before being foiled by the fierce snow.

The passengers raise several objections to which Poirot responds somewhat unsatisfactorily. The inconsistent time on the broken pocket watch is explained by Ratchett forgetting to wind the watch. The voice from Ratchett's cabin at 12:37 is explained by a third person who went to check on Ratchett but found him dead and was afraid to be accused of the crime. Some seem satisfied by this, but Dr. Constantine exclaims, "No, no, and again no! That is an explanation that will not hold water."

The reader should share Dr. Constantine's refusal to believe Poirot's solution. Poirot's entire approach to the case has depended on determining the psychology of the assembled passengers. Now he posits a stranger whose psychology or motive can't be known and tries to handwave away any valid objections. Dr. Constantine's outburst reflects the fear that the entire investigation, and the novel that recounts it, will have come to nothing.

In response, Poirot moves on to a second theory. He alludes to M. Bouc's early comment that the train contained people of all classes and nationalities. The only other place where such people would find themselves together is in America. This is how Poirot was able to guess at how each passenger was related to the Armstrong household, either as family or staff.

Having found little audience for his first theory, Poirot moves on to his second. The diverse classes and nationalities that M. Bouc had observed are possible in two places: an international train and America. America seems to be the logical place that such different people would have developed relationships.

Poirot supports a closer relationship between the passengers by reference to Ms. Debenham and Colonel Arbuthnot, who know each other too well to have just met on the journey. He also concludes that the pocket-watch evidence was faked and MacQueen had clearly established that Ratchett did not speak French so that Poirot would hear the interaction in the hallway and think Ratchett was dead at 12:37. Instead, he believes Ratchett was killed closer to 2:00. It was "a comedy played for my benefit."

Poirot's explicit reference to theater, "a comedy," mirrors the constructed, choreographed nature of the crime and investigation. MacQueen had performed a carelessness about Ratchett's lack of language skills precisely to lead Poirot to a false conclusion.

As for the identity of the murderer, Poirot establishes first that Ratchett's guilt is unassailable. He then "visualised a self-appointed jury of twelve people" and the case comes together in his mind. Guilt was balanced between all twelve people so that suspicion would not fall too heavily on any in particular. Each piece of testimony or evidence was designed to frustrate rather than clarify the investigation.

Poirot had previously grappled with the curious occurrence that solid alibis for each passenger were provided by others who appeared to be strangers. The conclusion, finally, is that each passenger participated in the murder and the subsequent coverup, managing Poirot's suspicions so that no individual could be deemed guilty. Poirot's phrase "a self-appointed jury" lends legitimacy to the effort, considering Ratchett's monstrousness. In this case, a "self-appointed" jury may be no less righteous than a randomly selected one.

The choice of the dagger as murder weapon initially confuses Poirot, but its advantage is that it could be used by anyone "strong or weak." Additionally, as Ratchett was drugged at the time, each could stab him in turn and remain ignorant of exactly who delivered the killing blow.

The conspirators have conceived of Ratchett's death not as murder but as execution: a sort of firing squad. Just as in a firing squad, none can be convinced that the killing blow was theirs, so that the punishment is abstract and impersonal. In this way, it resembles the kind of justice delivered by a community or a government.

Poirot includes the threatening letters, the identity of the small, dark man, and especially the "red herring" of **the scarlet kimono** as elements expressly designed to confuse him. He speculates that it may have belonged to Countess Andrenyi.

The scarlet kimono had warped the entire progress of the investigation, occupying an undue portion of Poirot's thinking about the case. This was by design. The use of a "red herring" that's actually red points to the brazenness of the approach. It was a clue too obvious to be relevant.

But at the end of it all, Poirot is faced with the reality of thirteen passengers and twelve stab wounds. He grapples with the irony that the person most likely to have killed Ratchett had no part it in it, namely Countess Andrenyi. The Count Andrenyi took her "place" and stabbed Ratchett. Poirot further identifies Hildegarde Schmidt as the Armstrongs' former cook and Mr. Hardman as the lover of Susanne, Daisy's French nursemaid who committed suicide after being targeted for the murder.

Countess Andrenyi had already had to take action to disguise her involvement as the person most likely to want Ratchett dead. It is safer for the coverup, in the end, if she can deny the crime and mean it. Additionally, the fact that the Countess's "place" in the execution could be transferred to her husband further suggests that the justice delivered is impersonal and objective.

All of this requires an artist to choreograph, and Poirot identifies the mastermind as Linda Arden, at which point Mrs. Hubbard drops her false identity and introduces herself as Linda Arden. She does so "in in a soft rich dreamy voice, quite unlike the one she had used throughout the journey." She says that after the Armstrong tragedy, the household down to the servants had been "crazy with grief." They all decided that the "sentence of death" that Cassetti escaped had to be completed.

In the end, the woman whom Poirot and the others had prejudged to the greatest extent (as a hysterical and sheltered American), is the one whose identity is entirely fabricated. Linda's status and performance as an actress affirms Poirot sense that the crime and aftermath was a play "performed for my benefit." But Linda insists that what was inflicted on Ratchett was a "sentence" rather than simple revenge. It illustrates her sense that they were acting in society's interests and with its permission after the normal course of justice had faltered.

Linda Arden goes on to fill in the gaps of the conspiracy. Pierre Michel had been the French nursemaid's daughter and Colonel Arbuthnot had fought with Colonel Armstrong in the war. Then, she appeals eloquently to Poirot to pin the blame on her, as she "would have stabbed that man twelve times willingly."

It's appropriate that Linda Arden, the woman famous for portrayals that brought audiences to tears, makes the final appeal to Poirot. Eloquent, selfless, and wronged, Linda makes the case that what has been done on the Orient Express is justice. She even invites judgment on herself, saying she "would have stabbed that man twelve times," but that, after all, would be personal revenge rather than the "sentence" actually carried out.

Poirot defers to M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine, who both suddenly decide that Poirot's first theory is more credible after all, and they plan to present that to the Yugoslavian police. His work done, Poirot retires from the case.

The necessity of Poirot's first theory, as maddeningly unsatisfying as it is, becomes clear as a way to free the conspirators of blame for the murder. It's significant that Poirot, a former policeman outspoken in his commitment to justice, finds the conspirators' act to be just, and indeed had felt that way even before Linda Arden's speech.

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