

# **Cards on the Table Study Guide**

## **Cards on the Table by Agatha Christie**

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# Plot Summary

Agatha Christie's *Cards on the Table* is considered to be one of her very best locked room mysteries. Her character, the Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot is invited by Mr. Shaitana to an unusual dinner party. Mr. Shaitana, who chooses to adopt a Mephistophelian appearance, is considered by many who know him to truly be a devil. His favorite occupation is to discover secrets, and then to hold such secrets over those who keep them. The dinner, to which he invites Hercule Poirot, is his way of showcasing his most unusual collection; Mr. Shaitana collects murderers who have gotten away with the crime. Mr. Shaitana considers his hobby to be an amusing one. Hercule Poirot considers the hobby to be a very dangerous one.

On the appointed date, M. Poirot arrives at Mr. Shaitana's flat at eight pm sharp, and is introduced to three other individuals who have arrived prior to Poirot. The three individuals include none other than Mrs. Ariadne Oliver, writer of detective stories, a woman with earnest belief in the capabilities of women. Her most cherished belief is that a woman should be in charge of Scotland Yard. The other two men are Colonel Race, and Superintendent Battle of Scotland Yard. Fifteen minutes later four more people arrive, Shaitana's "collection" of murderers: Dr. Roberts, young Anne Meredith, Mrs. Lorrimore, and Major Despard.

Dinner is delicious, but the conversation turns, predictably, to murder and ways of accomplishing it. Mr. Shaitana specifies his choices of the perfect murder methods, his way of speaking to his four unique guests. After dinner the four guests are taken taken to a room where a bridge table is set up. The other four sleuths, Poirot, Race, Oliver, and Battle are shown to another room where a second bridge table is ready.

Mr. Shaitana claims that bridge is not his game, and he finds it agreeable to sit by the fire as his guests play cards. A couple hours later, the sleuths seek Mr. Shaitana out to thank him for his hospitality. What they discover is a corpse. After ascertaining that no one has entered the room during the time they have been playing cards, suspicion falls on the four suspects. Sometime during the evening, one of Mr. Shaitana's collection has killed their host.

Immediately the four sleuths are drawn into the investigation. Because Poirot has the knowledge that Shaitana believes the four suspects to have previously committed murder, they focus on the suspects' past and the possible murder they may have committed. Each sleuth discovers information that is brought to the table, illuminating the investigation a little, but just not quite enough. At every turn they are stymied and misdirected. With perseverance, they discover the suspicious deaths in Dr. Roberts's past. It is quickly determined that the doctor has probably committed at least one murder and quite possibly more murders in the past. What is lacking is motive for the murder of Mr. Shaitana.

Anne Meredith is young, alone, shy, and dangerous. She has a suspicious murder in her past of a former employer. She chooses to not tell the authorities about that short



time in her work history, and her roommate, Rhoda Dawes, is concerned. Rhoda believes in Anne's innocence, but worries that not giving that information will cast unfair suspicion on Anne. This knowledge makes Anne dangerous to Rhoda, who tries to kill Rhoda in order to keep her secret. Major Despard has a death in his past that is quickly determined to have been an accident. Mrs. Lorrimore admits to having killed her husband over twenty years ago, but seems to have no real motive for killing Mr. Shaitana. However, this does not stop her from confessing to the murder, though Poirot refuses to believe her. He discovers the subterfuge in how Mrs. Lorrimore has confessed in order to protect Anne Meredith. Suspicion escalates against Anne when Mrs. Lorrimore is discovered to have committed suicide. Again, Poirot proves that this is really a murder and not a suicide.

The conclusion of the story is Christie's favorite method of a gathering of the remaining living suspects and the revelation of the true murderer. Dr. Roberts is unmasked, having killed Mr. Shaitana in very much the same way he has committed at least three other murders and in the same way he plays bridge. Dr. Roberts has a tendency to overbid his hand both in cards and in his murders. By being very public and open, Dr. Roberts has always been able to make it appear that the deaths were very natural, when in fact they really were murders. Poirot uses his "gray cells" to deduce the character of all suspects, including their bridge playing abilities, to deduce the truth of Mr. Shaitana's murder.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The book *Cards on the Table* by Agatha Christie was written in 1936 and features her famous Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, in Christie's most famous locked room mystery. Poirot has a chance meeting with Mr. Shaitana, a man proud of his unusual collection and who invites Poirot to a party to view his collection. Poirot is reluctant to attend, for Mr. Shaitana's collection is a group of people who have committed murder and gotten away with it.

Hercule Poirot meets Mr. Shaitana at a snuff box exhibition at Wessex House in London. Mr. Shaitana is a foreigner to Britain as is Poirot, yet Mr. Shaitana is referred to in a derogatory manner as a "dago." However, because he is rich he is accepted in most social situations. To refuse one of Mr. Shaitana's invitations is considered a dangerous act by most people; this fear feeds Mr. Shaitana's superior manner. Mr. Shaitana immediately ridicules Poirot's profession as a private detective. Shaitana has a deep and abiding admiration for the very people Poirot seeks - the murderer. In fact, taking his admiration to the next level, Mr. Shaitana claims to collect murderers and wishes to invite Poirot to a dinner party to which he will invite both murderers and detectives. Mr. Shaitana sees the true murderer as an artist, an individual to be admired. Poirot expresses concern that the plan is a dangerous one, but Mr. Shaitana dismisses Poirot's concerns.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The reader is introduced to Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie's most cerebral detective, at a snuff box convention in London. Poirot is a fussy and precise Belgian, often mistaken for a Frenchman. This is an error Poirot finds abhorrent. Describing him as a "ridiculous looking little man" (Chap. 1, p. 3), Dame Christie initially misleads the reader, causing one to believe that if Poirot is ridiculous, he cannot be terribly smart. Such a tactic is diversionary and allows the reader to be lulled into a frame of mind in which a murderer might actually get away with murder.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

The scene in Chapter Two is set in Mr. Shaitana's apartment, where he has invited four sleuths: Hercule Poirot, Mrs. Ariadne Oliver, Superintendent Battle, and Colonel Race. The invitation was issued so that the four upholders of the law arrive first and are introduced prior to the rest of the guests arriving fifteen minutes later. The first of Mr. Shaitana's collection of murder suspects is Dr. Roberts, an ebullient and cheerful man whose geniality makes him seem an unlikely candidate for the crime of murder—after all, he is a doctor. The next suspect to arrive is the lovely and genteel elderly Mrs. Lorrimer. Following Mrs. Lorrimer is Major Despard, who is immediately drawn into conversation with Colonel Race. Last to arrive is Miss Meredith, a lovely, young, shy woman who seems so sweet and retiring that murder and her name cannot be mentioned in the same breath. All guests enjoy a truly magnificent dinner provided by their host with the dinner conversation ranging from the latest treatment for sleeping sickness to unheard of new poisons. Mr. Shaitana prefers a more simple form of murder, domestic or a shooting accident. His remarks on poison being a woman's weapon and how doctors have special opportunities make four of his guests very uncomfortable.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Mr. Shaitana has effectively set the stage for his fantastic dinner party comprised entirely of sleuths and would-be murderers. What is not made clear is whether the suspects have actually committed a murder and gotten away with it or if Mr. Shaitana merely suspects them of having committed murder. The reader has to wonder why Mr. Shaitana chose to host such a fantastic dinner party. Wondering what the man wishes to accomplish is the leading question.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

After dinner, Mr. Shaitana leads his guests into the drawing room where a bridge table is set out. He very cleverly establishes his murder suspects at the table in the drawing room; Mrs. Lorrimer is partnered with Miss Meredith and Dr. Roberts is paired with Major Despard. Once Mr. Shaitana has established that table of four, he opens the door to another room where Poirot and Mrs. Oliver are partnered against Superintendent Battle and Colonel Race. At this point, Mr. Shaitana returns to the drawing room with his suspects and takes a seat by the fire. A little after midnight, Colonel Race declares he must end and return home. Entering the drawing room to say goodnight to their host, the four sleuths see the bridge game still in progress, with Mr. Shaitana asleep by the fire. Race and Poirot approach Mr. Shaitana to say goodnight and discover that he is not asleep, but that he is dead. To further implicate the four individuals Mr. Shaitana considered to be part of his collection, only they were in the room during the time he must have been killed.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

M. Poirot had warned Mr. Shaitana that to invite four probable murderers to a dinner party was a very dangerous thing to do. After Mr. Shaitana's death, Poirot examines the score cards of that bridge game and is further intrigued: "'The stupid little man! Oh, the stupid little man,' murmured Hercule Poirot. 'To dress up as the devil and try to frighten people.'" By inviting four people he believed to have successfully committed murder, Mr. Shaitana played a very dangerous game and he lost. The presence of four sleuths presents an interesting professional challenge for Poirot and the others. It can also be perceived as a professional challenge by the murderer to see which of the sleuths will discover his or her identity.





# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

An hour after the scene of the crime has been investigated and Mr. Shaitana's body removed, Poirot, Superintendent Battle, Colonel Race and Mrs. Oliver begin the process of sorting through the clues and possible evidence in order to identify the murderer. It comes out that Mr. Shaitana had set the dinner up specifically to put his collection of murderers on display for Poirot. Mrs. Oliver believes Dr. Roberts to be the guilty party, based solely on her instinct. Superintendent Battle kindly insists that in real life they must approach the process differently. All four sleuths agree to question the suspects together, starting with Dr. Roberts. Battle handles the bulk of the interrogation, asking routine questions about how well Dr. Roberts knew his host and his card playing companions, with the answer being that he did not know Mr. Shaitana well at all and has little knowledge about his card companions. He does admit to having met Mrs. Lorrimer previously but has never met the other two. Dr. Roberts recalls that he left the table on three occasions and the others did a time or two as well. When asked who he suspected, Dr. Roberts immediately says Despard, for the major is a man used to taking risks. Poirot then questions Dr. Roberts about the bridge game and what Dr. Roberts recalls of it. When asked to evaluate everyone's skill as a bridge player, he states that Mrs. Lorrimer is first rate, that Despard is a sound player, Miss Meredith is a safe player and he himself has a tendency to overbid his hand.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Superintendent Battle establishes that the investigation will be done officially, yet he does not prevent Mrs. Oliver or Poirot from being involved in the investigation. Mrs. Oliver compares the Superintendent's methods to her fictitious ones, yet she does not resist when he chooses to interrogate Dr. Roberts first. Battle is interested in the movements of the card players and who Dr. Roberts suspects. Poirot is more interested in the psychological state of the card players and questions Dr. Roberts on the essentials of their bridge playing. This seems to be a most unusual method of crime investigation.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

After interrogating Dr. Roberts, Superintendent Battle calls for Mrs. Lorrimer. After establishing the questions all will be asked, the second interview goes much more quickly. Again, Battle is the primary questioner and Mrs. Lorrimer claims to not know Mr. Shaitana well at all. She met him in Egypt and thought him to be a bit of a show-off. She confirms her slight acquaintance with Dr. Roberts and that she, too, had just met Miss Meredith and Major Despard that very evening. She confirms Dr. Roberts's recollection that the men moved around more than the women during the card game, providing drinks and poking at the fire. She tells the Superintendent that she spoke to Mr. Shaitana once during the evening, saying that she shared his preference to wood fires over radiators, but realizes that no one witnessed the conversation. She views the stiletto with little emotion and denies having seen it earlier in the evening. Again, Poirot asks his question regarding the abilities of the other three as bridge players. Major Despard is a good player, Miss Meredith a cautious player, and Dr. Roberts has a tendency to overbid.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Mrs. Lorrimer is every inch a lady, and Superintendent Battle treats her as such. She has obviously considered what questions she is likely to be asked and is prepared with her answers. The only question that gets a rise out of her is when Superintendent Battle asks who she believes committed the murder. She believes it to be a most inappropriate question and makes no effort to mask her distaste at the question.



# Chapters 6 and 7

## Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

After Mrs. Lorrimer's interview, Superintendent Battle asks Poirot why he questions the suspects about the bridge game. Poirot believes he can get a bit of a psychological profile of the players by evaluating how they kept score and how they remember the game. He has determined that Major Despard is a man who likes an immediate picture of the game, hence his tendency to cancel as he goes. Mrs. Lorrimer is a brilliant player, a good contrast to Dr. Roberts's tendency to overbid. Miss Meredith is a timid player, easily intimidated by her partner, regardless of who it may have been.

When they question Miss Meredith, Battle becomes solicitous and gentle. The girl is obviously frightened and Battle is very fatherly with her. She met Shaitana in Switzerland nine months previously and always was a little afraid of him. She has no specific reason for her fear, just a general impression. She tries to give Battle the answers she thinks he wants, but is asked to merely speak the truth. When asked her opinion of who might have killed Shaitana, she indirectly points a finger at Mrs. Lorrimer, believing that stabbing seems to be more a woman's preferred method of killing. She leaves, claiming to have no hidden secrets of which she is afraid.

The last of the suspects, Major Despard is questioned by Battle. By now, Battle has his questions well established; how he knows Shaitana, whether he saw the stiletto previously, his feelings for Shaitana, and why, which of the four seem most likely to have killed him, the number of times they each left the bridge table, and his opinion of the other players. Despard's interview is different from that of the others because he is quick and efficient in his responses. He is truthful that he rather disliked Mr. Shaitana; however, he denies having reason to kill him. Despard adds nothing new to the movements of the players, yet his opinion of the players' abilities differs in that he, alone, believes Miss Meredith to be somewhat of a good player.

## Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

M. Poirot has caught the attention of the other sleuths with his persistent questions about the game of bridge. He firmly believes that the true personalities of the players will be much more evident in both the scores and their answers about only the game, saying, "You think, perhaps, that they are foolish, these questions that I ask? But it is not so. I want to get at the characters of these four players, and when it is only about bridge I ask, everyone is ready and willing to speak" (Chap. 6, p. 39). The interviews with Miss Meredith and Major Despard result in an indirect accusation of murder from Miss Meredith of Mrs. Lorrimer, and from Major Despard of Dr. Roberts. Major Despard differs from the others by telling them that Miss Meredith is a good player when all the others believe her to be a timid player. As a man who appears to be more honest than most, perhaps Despard is attracted to Miss Meredith. Battle discontinues his

interrogation of Miss Meredith on the basis that it is merely cruel to continue if she is scared, or useless if she is an experienced actress. Poirot gleans that Miss Meredith has experienced poverty by her resourceful use of the backside of the bridge scorecard.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

With the initial questioning complete, the four sleuths are stymied, although Poirot has a sense of something, but his thoughts are not yet clear enough to put into words. He does believe that the murderer's motivation was a spur of the moment decision based on Mr. Shaitana's comments at dinner. Poirot knows that Shaitana invited the four suspects because he believed them all to have committed a murder at some time in their past. He further speculates that Mr. Shaitana sealed his fate during dinner when he spoke of the various ways a murder can be committed, from poison, a shooting accident, a doctor's opportunities, to a mere household accident. Each of the four sleuths has a preference for investigative techniques. Mrs. Oliver, as a mystery writer, is more apt to flights of fancy, and to sometimes mix fact with fiction. Superintendent Battle cannot prohibit her from investigating, but all three men caution her. After all, the murderer has already killed twice and will likely have no compunction about doing it again. M. Poirot persists in his theory of a psychological study of the four suspects. He believes that by digging into their pasts the vital clue will be found. Man is a creature of habit and even Mrs. Oliver must admit the truth of this, for all thirty-two of her books are essentially the same. Based on this theory, it is decided that they will look into the past lives of the four suspects without them being aware of their motive. It must appear that they are investigating only Shaitana's murder.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

There are several important points to evaluate in chapter eight. The first is to compare the personalities of the four sleuths and how that will direct their investigative style. Mrs. Oliver is a writer of fiction, flamboyant, and very outspoken. The men are right to advise her to proceed with great caution. Battle and Race are both men of the law and will follow proper procedure. Poirot, as a detective, believes profoundly that the answer can be deduced by getting into the heads of the murderers. A red herring and a point of foreshadowing are also presented. M. Poirot mentions walking into the cage of the tiger, the murderer. In a previous chapter he compares Major Despard to a tiger. This seems to point to Despard's guilt. M. Poirot evaluates each of the four suspects psychologically. The doctor is a bluffer and overconfident. His profile matches the nature of the murder well. Major Despard is a man of decision and action and will not shrink from it. Miss Meredith is shy and timid. This would seem to immediately exclude her; however, if she suspected that Shaitana was ready to turn her in, she would have reacted precipitously and have been very capable of murder. Lastly, Mrs. Lorrimer is a brilliant woman, but had she been the murderer, she would have planned it out with great care. This personality type does not seem to be in keeping with a murder that appears to have been committed in the heat of passion.



# Chapters 9 and 10

## Chapters 9 and 10 Summary

Dr. Roberts is visited by both Superintendent Battle and Hercule Poirot. The Superintendent visits him first and asks general questions about the doctor's practice and his personal life. Dr. Roberts is very affable and answers all questions without reservation. Despite not having a search warrant, Battle requests permission to look through the doctor's personal and professional files. Dr. Roberts agrees without reservation. In fact, he gives the Superintendent his keys and allows him total privacy as the doctor has to leave on rounds. This tells Battle that he will find nothing suspicious, and indeed he does not. When he is done with the files, Battle then interviews Miss Burgess, the doctor's secretary. Battle is clever and is able to get Miss Burgess to reveal the difficulties the doctor has had with Mrs. Graves, who thought she was being poisoned by her family, and the more interesting problem with Mr. and Mrs. Craddock. Mrs. Craddock was a man-hungry female. Fortunately for the doctor, the two died, Mr. Craddock died from an anthrax-infected shaving brush and then Mrs. Craddock from blood poisoning illness during a trip to Egypt.

Poirot follows Battle's visit with one of his own to Dr. Roberts. Poirot disarms Dr. Roberts by asking for a favor. By putting certain ideas into the doctor's head, Poirot is able to get an appropriate response. Because a doctor is trained to observe people, heart and respiratory rate, flushing, pallor, Dr. Roberts is the one to answer Poirot's questions regarding the hands of bridge played that evening. Appropriately disarmed, Dr. Roberts tries to recall the hands played and does remember Mrs. Lorrimer being upset at one point with his bidding, but that she is a first class player. His assessment of Major Despard is that he is a conventional player and that Miss Meredith's hands shook toward the end of the evening. M. Poirot's last question is for Dr. Roberts to try to recall any and all objects in the room in which they were playing. The doctor is able to do this with astonishing clarity.

## Chapters 9 and 10 Analysis

Battle's interview with Dr. Roberts leaves him convinced that the doctor has committed murder in the past, but does not believe that the doctor killed Shaitana. Battle's investigative technique is to present the impression that he is slow and methodical. In this way, Battle is able to put his suspect at ease and is given far more information than the person he is questioning believes he has given. Miss Burgess gives Battle a wealth of information, but believes that she told him nothing. M. Poirot is a very astute detective and he, too, chooses to mislead his witnesses. With Dr. Roberts, he claims to only be interested in the bridge game and the nature of the players. In this way, Dr. Roberts, again, gives more information than he intended to give, but Poirot's manner and questions are so unexpected that Dr. Roberts is unaware that he has been bested by both men.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

M. Poirot calls on Mrs. Lorrimer. He finds her to live in a small but very well-kept and tastefully furnished house. She tells M. Poirot that she has no obligation to speak to him about Shaitana's murder, and Poirot gracefully agrees and offers to leave. His old world manners give Mrs. Lorrimer the sense of comfort she needs and she allows Poirot to speak. Rather than asking about the murder, M. Poirot again asks her to recollect the furnishings in the room in which they played bridge. She recalls only some flowers and Oriental pictures and nothing else. As with Dr. Roberts, Poirot asks her to recollect the bridge game, which she is able to do in the greatest of detail. She remembers virtually every card played during the evening of Shaitana's death. Poirot comments on her memory and how events of the past for her must be as vivid today. He is referring to an event in her past not yet revealed.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Mrs. Lorrimer remains in character. She is a true lady. She appreciates and honors proprieties, and refuses to do anything that might be wrong in any way. Yet, Shaitana believed Mrs. Lorrimer to have committed murder at some point in her past. Her memory of the few items in the room demonstrate how little she cares for furnishings and objects. Her virtually totally recall of the cards played speak of a truly remarkable memory of events she wishes to remember. Poirot is certain he has jogged that exceptional memory.



# Chapters 12, 13, and 14

## Chapters 12, 13, and 14 Summary

Anne Meredith's youth and seeming lack of sophistication make her an obvious target, and as such, an individual to be protected. Anne is the companion to Rhoda Dawes, a young woman who is more a friend than an employer. Rhoda appears to be quite protective of Anne. Mrs. Oliver is the first to visit the girls and appears at the cottage with every expectation that her assistance is not only necessary, but will be quite welcomed. Sitting down and getting right to business, Mrs. Oliver states bluntly that the murderer is Dr. Roberts and they must devise a plan to prove his guilt. Anne is reluctant to play this game, but Rhoda enters in with great enthusiasm, her admiration for Mrs. Oliver quite evident. Mrs. Oliver's fictional approach to the crime is as fantastic as it is bold; her memory of the conversation that night, however, is very accurate. When Anne finally remembers the discussion of murder, she inaccurately gives Mr. Shaitana credit for the remark about a doctor's opportunities and laboratories. Mrs. Oliver corrects her. Major Despard was the author of that remark.

Just then, Major Despard appears, for he is also concerned about how Anne Meredith is faring. He was quite taken with Anne the previous evening and feels a sort of responsibility to help her. He is a bit surprised to see Mrs. Oliver with the girls, but his intention to speak to Anne is too strong to allow him to leave. Rather, Mrs. Oliver leaves, extending an invitation to the girls to visit her when they visit London. Major Despard reiterates Mrs. Oliver's concern for how Anne is handling the events since the murder and he gives her some advice. He suggests that she hire a solicitor and only answer Superintendent Battle's questions with legal counsel. He also hints that Mr. Shaitana might know or suspect something in Anne's past she might wish to remain a secret. Anne denies this, hotly. Despard and Miss Dawes are allied in their determination to protect Anne. They also share much more in their natures with a desire for excitement and the thrill of living. Anne does not. Despard does warn the girls that Battle is very astute, and to not misjudge the man.

Despard's warning is timely, for Superintendent Battle is already in Wallingford asking questions about Anne Meredith. This is routine work for him, and helps him to determine if a suspect is telling the truth. Battle gets all of Anne's vital information; that she was born in India, and she was orphaned at eighteen, and having no family money she had to work as a nanny or companion. Currently she is Rhoda's companion. Battle is satisfied with Anne's history and leaves. After his departure, Rhoda asks Anne why she neglected to tell the policeman about a position she had at Croftways. Anne replies that it was only for a few months and that it does not matter.





## Chapters 12, 13, and 14 Analysis

Anne's lowly and weak manner causes Rhoda, Mrs. Oliver, and Despard to rise up in a protective way around the girl. At first Anne appears to be a sensitive and blameless girl. As she is visited both by sleuths and suspect alike, she becomes determined to not try to find the identity of the killer. This change of character is suspicious and causes the reader to wonder. She does not believe it is exciting to be part of a murder investigation. She is suspicious of Mrs. Oliver's motivation in coming to see her. She resists Major Despard's suggestion that she may have something in her past she wishes to never reveal. Finally, she omits some information when being questioned by Battle. The final line of the chapter points to these falsehoods: "You have just heard the Black Nubians play 'Why do you tell me lies, Baby?'" (Chap. 14, p. 110).



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

M. Poirot is on the case and he manages to arrange a meeting on a double-decker bus with Major Despard. Poirot makes it appear as if the meeting has happened by chance. Because he knows Major Despard to be a very astute man, Poirot needs to take him off guard. By seeming to take the same bus, Poirot is able to catch Despard unaware. The detective asks the same questions he has asked of the other suspects. Despard recalls details only of the rugs Mr. Shaitana had as well as one or two of his knickknacks. He remembers very little about the card game. What Poirot is able to get out of the military man is his intense disdain for Shaitana. Despard especially hated Shaitana because he would take advantage of women, that he worms secrets out of them. He calls Shaitana a spiritual blackmailer, but denies that he refers to either Miss Meredith or Mrs. Lorrimer. Poirot deduces he refers to a woman of his past.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

Poirot has now questioned three out of four of the suspects and so far he suspects that all three of them have something in their past. Perhaps murder, perhaps not, but enough for each of them to be uneasy around Shaitana. Major Despard does not bother to hide his dislike of Mr. Shaitana. He considers the man to be an emotional blackmailer, especially of women, and once he has wormed out a secret he holds it over the one betrayed like some sort of prize. Despard hated Shaitana for that. Hatred can be a great motive for murder.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Superintendent Battle assigns one of his men, Sergeant O'Connor, to unofficially interrogate Mrs. Craddock's former parlourmaid, Elsie Batt. Because he is approaching her unofficially, O'Connor is able to elicit information from Miss Batt that an official interview would never have uncovered. Elsie relates the argument Dr. Roberts had with Mr. Craddock, who believed the doctor to be guilty of some sort of impropriety with his wife. Dr. Roberts told Mr. Craddock that his wife was hysterical and did not know what she was saying. He managed to convince Mr. Craddock to go back to work and calm down and think things over. Before he left the Craddocks' home, Dr. Roberts had the opportunity to wash his hands in the washroom. Shortly after the argument, Mr. Craddock contracts anthrax from an infected shaving brush and eventually dies. The last time Mrs. Craddock sees the doctor is for her inoculations prior to going overseas to wile away her grief. Mrs. Craddock then dies, saving Dr. Roberts a lot of trouble.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

Elsie Batt provides the police with a possible motive for Dr. Roberts to have killed Shaitana. It is very likely that the doctor killed both Mr. and Mrs. Craddock. They were in a position to cause him trouble and he sees an opportunity to dispose of them and he takes advantage of what is at hand. The trick is to prove Mr. Shaitana knew of the Craddock affair.



# Chapters 17 and 18

## Chapters 17 and 18 Summary

Rhoda Dawes accompanies Anne Meredith to London. Anne is taking Major Despard's advice and is seeking counsel of a solicitor. While Anne and Major Despard are occupied, Rhoda vacillates intensely before finally deciding to call on Mrs. Oliver. Mrs. Oliver's home is not exactly what Rhoda expects, yet she is still star-struck with the older woman's celebrity. Mrs. Oliver remarks that Anne seems to have taken Major Despard's assistance with more alacrity than she did Mrs. Oliver's. This statement brings a yowl of protest from Rhoda. She tells Mrs. Oliver that Anne had once been working in a home where a woman had accidentally taken poison and then died. By dismissing Anne's former rudeness with this story, Rhoda makes Mrs. Oliver see that Anne does have a past secret that could have caused her to have killed Shaitana.

Anne meets Mrs. Lorrimer as she seeks out Rhoda, believing her to have come from Mrs. Oliver's flat. Accepting Mrs. Lorrimer's kind offer of tea, Anne joins her fellow suspect for a quiet tea. Anne asks Mrs. Lorrimer about the types of questions Superintendent Battle has asked. Mrs. Lorrimer reassures Anne as to the mundane and routine quality of them. After tea, Anne rejoins Rhoda and accuses her of going to Mrs. Oliver and talking about her with the author. Rhoda denies the accusation. Anne's reflections then turn against Rhoda. In spite of being her friend, Anne always feels like a wallflower around Rhoda and realizes that sometimes she does not really like her friend.

## Chapters 17 and 18 Analysis

Mrs. Oliver is used by Agatha Christie as a bit of comic relief as well as putting forth her opinion of writers and non-writers and the misconceptions of each. Mrs. Oliver's scene does reveal a very important clue regarding Anne's past; that there was a suspicious death in a house where Anne had once worked. Rhoda does not see the significance, she merely believes Anne to have twice had bad luck. Anne's character is being colored in and the reader's initial sympathetic response to her is diminishing. She is a shy, retiring girl, but she also exhibits a bit of manipulation and malevolence in her behavior. The fact that she was around for a previous murder makes the reader suspicious of her behavior and questions she puts to Rhoda. Anne is no longer seen as an innocent young girl.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

The four sleuths meet at Scotland Yard in order to put all their facts together. Colonel Race has information about Major Despard about an event in his past. Major Despard was hired by Professor Luxmore to accompany the professor and his wife on an Amazon trip in South America. On that trip the professor died of fever. Some stories indicate that the professor was shot. Superintendent Battle assigns Poirot to visit the widow and ascertain the real truth. They discuss what they know of Dr. Roberts and all are sure he likely murdered Mr. and Mrs. Craddock, but find no direct reason he would have murdered Mr. Shaitana. Battle has essentially crossed Anne Meredith off his list as a potential murderer until Mrs. Oliver relates the death of one of Anne's employers. Such evidence puts Anne back on the list. Mrs. Lorrimer is a mystery to all of them. So far they have not been able to turn up anything on the woman. Poirot shares his psychological evaluation of the four suspects. Dr. Roberts is a good observer. Mrs. Lorrimer's concentration on cards is unsurpassed. Major Despard only notices those things which interest him, trophies and rugs. Poirot has yet to interview Anne Meredith.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

The four sleuths all approach the murder of Mr. Shaitana in individual ways and all are able to bring something to the table. Race has discovered the event in Despard's past. Mrs. Oliver has uncovered Anne Meredith's secret. Battle has determined that Dr. Roberts is capable of murder, but cannot tell if he killed Mr. Shaitana. Poirot is still approaching the murder using his powers of mental deduction. He believes he will unmask the murderer by assessing his or her mental position and prove a murder done in a manner in keeping with the suspects' psychological profile.



# Chapters 20 and 21

## Chapters 20 and 21 Summary

Poirot's visit with Mrs. Luxmore is profitable. His manner is already foreign, but he purposely adopts some of Mr. Shaitana's mannerisms for his visit with the widow of the professor who lost his life on the banks of the Amazon. The story Mrs. Luxmore tells is one of forbidden love, how she and Major Despard were desperately in love and a fight broke out between her husband and Major Despard. Mrs. Luxmore insists that the major fired the gun only in self-defense, but that it killed her husband. After he was buried, their love remained secret and prohibited. To this day, they must both pretend it never happened.

After leaving Mrs. Luxmore, Poirot makes a quick stop at a women's store to purchase nineteen pair of the most exquisite and fine ladies' stockings money can buy. From there he returns home immediately, and within half an hour, Major Despard comes to see him. The major is greatly irritated that Poirot should have gotten the story from Mrs. Luxmore. To set the record straight, Despard gives Poirot his version of the story. He had been hired to take the professor into the Amazon, and Mrs. Luxmore formed a romantic attachment that Despard did not reciprocate. They all experienced some jungle fever, the professor the worst case of all. One night, the professor, delirious with fever, was headed toward the river, too far away for Despard to deter him. His only chance at saving the man from certain drowning was to shoot him in the leg. Mrs. Luxmore spoiled his excellent aim and caused the bullet to go astray and kill her husband. Despard agreed to the "death by fever" story in order to protect a foolish woman who did not realize she caused her own husband's death.

## Chapters 20 and 21 Analysis

Despard has given the impression of being a very honorable man. The story of him killing Mrs. Luxmore's husband does not seem to be in keeping with his personality. When he gives Poirot his side of the story, the reader is relieved to know that Despard does not hide any homicidal tendencies. The death of the professor does appear to truly be an accident caused by a ridiculous woman. It would seem to the reader that if Major Despard really was in love with Mrs. Luxmore, they would have already been married. The fact that he did not divulge the information earlier is due to his protective nature toward women, even one as silly as Mrs. Luxmore.



# Chapters 22 and 23

## Chapters 22 and 23 Summary

Superintendent Battle is in Devonshire, at Combacre specifically, looking into the four-year-old death of Anne's former employer, Mrs. Benson. The old woman was a difficult employer and Anne could easily have simply left for another position elsewhere. Perhaps the mix-up of the Syrup of Fig bottles was really an accident. Superintendent Battle can find no motive for murder.

Poirot, too, is focused on Anne Meredith. He has suspicions of the girl and wishes to speak to her in person at his apartment. When Anne and Rhoda arrive, Poirot puts forth one of the questions he has asked the other three suspects. He wants to know what Anne remembers of the room in which she played bridge on that fateful night. Anne recalls the cabinet of Egyptian jewelry and a vase of flowers that needed their water changed. Poirot affects disappointment then asks Anne to help him select half a dozen pair of silk stockings he wishes to use as gifts for his nieces and grand-nieces. While Anne is occupied with this task, Poirot entertains Rhoda with a viewing of a knife used by twelve people to kill a man, a reference to his involvement in the Murder on the Orient Express.

## Chapters 22 and 23 Analysis

Anne Meredith initially seems to be an unlikely murderer, yet Superintendent Battle is troubled by the fact that Anne did not disclose her involvement with the death of her former employer. All the evidence points to a tragic accident, yet Superintendent is uneasy. Poirot, too, has suspicions about Anne and so he sets a trap for the girl. The verbal trap she easily evades, but the trap of the silk stockings snares her. Of the nineteen pairs of stockings, only seventeen are left when the girls leave. Anne Meredith is a thief.



# Chapters 24 and 25

## Chapters 24 and 25 Summary

Superintendent Battle and Poirot put their heads together to discuss their findings. The motive Battle seeks is provided by Poirot. After relating the trap of the silk stockings, Poirot expands his theory that Anne Meredith is capable of murder only if she believes she has been caught in another crime, that of theft. Poirot's hypothesis is that Anne Meredith has a character flaw that allows her to take things, especially if she believes she will not be caught. Poirot proves his theory. By asking Anne to help him to choose stockings for his nieces, then leaving her alone with the very fine stockings, Anne cannot resist the temptation to take two pair for herself. The problem for the men now is that her profile does not fit with that of the murderer of Mr. Shaitana. Unfortunately, at this point, they have excluded Major Despard and Dr. Roberts by the same criteria.

Mrs. Lorrimer is the last on the list, and by coincidental circumstance she requests that Poirot visit her. Poirot pays her a dubious compliment. He believes her to be the most capable of the four suspects to plan and then pull off a successful murder, as her mind is the best suited for such planning. However, the murder of Mr. Shaitana suggests a murder of opportunity and as such should preclude Mrs. Lorrimer. But, Mrs. Lorrimer suddenly confesses to the murder of Mr. Shaitana, taking Poirot completely by surprise.

## Chapters 24 and 25 Analysis

Poirot persists in his psychological evaluation of the four suspects. He believes the major to be incapable of murder. Anne Meredith is capable if she believes herself to be trapped. Dr. Roberts is capable, but they can discover no motive strong enough to persuade him to murder Shaitana. The evaluation of Mrs. Lorrimer's mind suggests a possible murderer, but only if she has had the time and ample opportunity to plan a premeditated murder. By his criteria, Poirot has effectively eliminated all four suspects. There must be an error in his calculations. Then Mrs. Lorrimer tosses all of his speculation out the window when she confesses to the murder. The reader must now evaluate whether Poirot is wrong, or whether he has been given inaccurate information.





# Chapters 26 and 27

## Chapters 26 and 27 Summary

By admitting to the murder of Mr. Shaitana, Mrs. Lorrimer confuses Poirot. She explains that she chooses to speak now because she has been given just a few months to live and wishes to end the suspicion of the other three suspects, none of whom have ever harmed her. She admits that Mr. Shaitana's words on that fateful night were meant for her alone and that the presence of Superintendent Battle and Poirot himself could not have been a coincidence. She confesses that she picked up the dagger and used it during the time she played dummy. After her confession, Poirot considers it and then rejects it completely. He refuses to believe that Mrs. Lorrimer would behave so completely out of character. He suddenly realizes that she is protecting someone. Dismissing the idea that she would protect either of the two men, he knows that she is protecting Anne Meredith. Mrs. Lorrimer admits that he is right and that she actually saw Anne Meredith murder Shaitana.

M. Poirot is stunned to realize that all this time there has been an eyewitness to the murder. He asks Mrs. Lorrimer why she feels the need to protect Anne and is told that she sees a lonely girl, almost helpless, who must make her way in the world. In short, she feels sorry for the girl. Poirot allows her to share her reasons with him, then he hits her with the hard fact that Miss Anne is a murderer, saying, "I have no doubt of it whatsoever. She is so soft—so gentle—one would say. Pah! she is dangerous, Madame, that little Mademoiselle Anne! Where her own safety, her own comfort, is concerned, she will strike wildly, treacherously. With Mademoiselle Anne those two crimes will not be the end. She will gain confidence from them. . . ." (Chap. 27, p. 196). He does not entirely convince Mrs. Lorrimer of Anne's nature and agrees to give her time to consider her position before sharing the information with Superintendent Battle. Poirot does tell Battle that they must close in on Anne quickly, as she could be dangerous.

## Chapters 26 and 27 Analysis

For all of his ratiocination, Poirot is floored when Mrs. Lorrimer confesses to the murder. He does not take long to reject her confession. His experience with people is such that it is highly unlikely that they will act so far out of character. Then he discovers the fact that Mrs. Lorrimer is protecting someone and again his intellect points immediately to Anne Meredith. He is truly troubled because he knows that Anne is capable of murder and that Mrs. Lorrimer has misjudged the girl's character. He agrees to let Mrs. Lorrimer consider things. He does not need her testimony, and now that he knows what must be proven, he is confident that he will uncover the necessary evidence.



# Chapter 28

## Chapter 28 Summary

The next morning, Poirot's breakfast is interrupted by a call from Superintendent Battle notifying the detective that Mrs. Lorrimer has committed suicide. Poirot is initially sad that the woman has not heeded his warning of the danger of Anne Meredith. Dr. Roberts is the one who discovered the woman; he had received a note from her that morning confessing to the murder and apologizing for her behavior. As soon as he received the letter, he rushed straight over to her house in a vain attempt to save her life. Poirot questions the staff and the maid tells Poirot that she had posted three letters for her mistress and that one was to Fortnum and Mason's. The next information alarms Poirot, for after his visit the previous evening. Miss Meredith had come and visited with Mrs. Lorrimer for an hour. A slight bruise on Mrs. Lorrimer's arm further alarms Poirot. They find that Major Despard is down at Wallingford, and Poirot feels a very strong compulsion to get down there immediately. He is very afraid. Anne Meredith is dangerous.

## Chapter 28 Analysis

At Mrs. Lorrimer's home, Poirot is struck by several inconsistencies. What initially appears to be a suicide is really another murder. Only three letters were posted and one was not to one of the suspects. Anne Meredith was Mrs. Lorrimer's last visitor the night before, and the bruise Poirot sees on the woman's arm convinces Poirot that Mrs. Lorrimer was killed. She did not commit suicide. Calls to Despard's residence and to Anne Meredith confirm that they both received a note. The drama is heightened when Poirot is alarmed. For the reader who knows him well, Poirot's urgency truly indicates an emergency.



# Chapter 29

## Chapter 29 Summary

A hurried trip to Wallingford is essential. Anne and Rhoda are still disagreeing over Anne's omission in her interview with Superintendent Battle. Rhoda still believes Anne should come clean and Anne is irritated at her fussing. Twice she remarks that Rhoda is the only one who knows the circumstances under which she left Mrs. Benson's employ. Then Rhoda turns the conversation to Major Despard and teases Anne that he likes Anne. Anne replies that he likes Rhoda too. Suddenly Anne suggests going out on the river while they wait for Despard and Battle to arrive. Despard actually arrives at the cottage a little early and only just misses the girls. He is directed toward the river. Likewise, Battle and Poirot are sent the same way when they arrive. All three men see Anne knock Rhoda into the river. Neither girl can swim. Despard immediately swims to the rescue, going first for Rhoda. By the time Battle and Despard reach Anne Meredith, she has drowned. Rhoda and Despard are now romantically involved.

## Chapter 29 Analysis

Poirot's intuition regarding Anne proves accurate. Fortunately, Despard was early, otherwise both girls might have drowned, a murder-suicide. The reader has to wonder at Anne's motivation to kill Rhoda when they were expecting Despard very shortly. For Anne, suicide seems strangely out of character. She does see her opportunity to get rid of Rhoda, the only one who can tie her to Mrs. Benson's death, so she thinks. Anne never did know that Rhoda had told Mrs. Oliver of the incident. The last straw is Rhoda's obvious attraction to Despard. Poirot was right to fear Anne Meredith.



# Chapters 30 and 31

## Chapters 30 and 31 Summary

Rhoda can hardly believe that Anne intended to murder her, and Battle tells her that Anne was not a very nice friend. All are back at Poirot's flat, with Dr. Roberts and Mrs. Oliver having been summoned as well. Dr. Roberts expresses his disbelief that Anne, too, was a murderer. Poirot stops Dr. Roberts by saying that it was Dr. Roberts who killed Mr. Shaitana. Dr. Roberts tries to bluff his way out of it, but Poirot produces an eyewitness, a window cleaner who had seen Dr. Roberts inject a supposed restorative into Mrs. Lorrimer's arm, when it was in fact a medication called Epivan that when combined with the sleeping draught Veronal is very dangerous, and can result in death. Mrs. Lorrimer took Veronal to aid in her sleep. Dr. Roberts pretended to receive a note himself to make it look as though Mrs. Lorrimer was the killer.

Poirot then reveals how he has suspected Dr. Roberts all along. He takes them back to the night of the murder and finally explains his interest in the bridge scores. Dr. Roberts was a flagrant over-bidder and it was he who bid the Grand Slam, but not in his suit. This made the other three players very focused on the game and allowed him the freedom of being the dummy. He did this when partnered with Mrs. Lorrimer because she was the best player of the four and would do everything in her power to win. Poirot also reveals his belief that Dr. Roberts was the killer based on the very public nature of his previous murders. Dr. Roberts is a flamboyant and ebullient character, both as a doctor and as a bridge player. His tendency to overbid in both is true to his character.

## Chapters 30 and 31 Analysis

Christie has Poirot tie up all the loose ends of the case in his usual fashion of gathering all involved in the case, sleuths and remaining suspects, together in one room and then presenting the facts as he has uncovered them. Poirot postulates that he has suspected Dr. Roberts all along, but was unable to discover a real reason for the murder of Shaitana. Had Dr. Roberts simply allowed the evening to play out and not been so sensitive to Shaitana's hints, Dr. Roberts could have kept living his murderous life unfettered. Dr. Roberts's personality, however, prevented him from this strength. Major Despard was able to ignore Shaitana's words, and even Mrs. Lorrimer did not feel too terribly threatened by the man either. Only the true murderers of the group, Dr. Roberts and Anne Meredith, reacted with guilt and a plan of action to stop Shaitana from his nefarious intentions. Both murderers demonstrated aspects of their character in their bridge game, as did the other two players. Poirot was able to discern, with amazing accuracy, the characters of the suspects and determine who needed to be investigated and who really was not a threat to society.



# Characters

## Hercule Poirot

Hercule Poirot is one of Agatha Christie's greatest detectives. He is a Belgian, often mistaken for being French. She chose the Belgian nationality because of the time in which the book was written, 1936, during a time when Germany invaded Belgium and England was allies with the country. This also explains why Poirot is now living and working in England rather than in his home country. Poirot is a small man, very precise in every aspect of his life and character. He is neat, has a moustache of which he is very proud, and jet-black hair that is always perfectly in place. His manners are above reproach, and his mannerisms are European. There are some who find him to be affected, and dislike that about him. Others who have had the opportunity to experience his mind find him to be fantastically brilliant when it comes to solving crime.

Poirot believes firmly in the psychological approach to solving a crime. He knows that if he can get into the head of the criminal, he will likely be able to identify the guilty party. Throughout the book, *Cards on the Table*, he appears to be far behind the other sleuths in what he is able to bring to their joint conferences; however, that is not the real truth. Poirot keeps many things to himself for fear of casting false accusations on a suspect, and continues to try to prove his position before telling what he knows. In this story, he claims to have suspected Dr. Roberts right from the very beginning, just as Mrs. Oliver did. The difference between the two is that Mrs. Oliver says it was merely her intuition, and nothing more. Poirot had suspicions that the death of Shaitana was very similar to the manner of deaths of Dr. Roberts's former patients, but he had to prove his case before making the accusation. Poirot is not above using subterfuge in his investigations. He gives the appearance of being at the right place at the right time in order to disarm a witness, as he does with Major Despard on the bus. He also adopts mannerisms that are foreign to his own, as he does with Mrs. Luxmore, in order to invite confidences that she might not otherwise have given. Lastly, he out and out lies in order to get a suspect to confess, as he does with Dr. Roberts. Poirot tells Dr. Roberts that there was a window washer outside the window when Dr. Roberts gave Mrs. Lorrimer the fatal injection. This was enough to cause Dr. Roberts to confess, but there never was a window washer. Poirot simply hired an actor friend of his to pretend to be that window washer. While this might seem deceitful, his motivation is to get a murderer apprehended, and this somehow justifies his behavior.

## Mr. Shaitana

Mr. Shaitana is a wicked man who purposefully adopts external characteristics of Mephistopheles, the devil. Shaitana has no compunction about delving into the past lives of people and discovering anything that he can about them that would be an embarrassment in their future. His greatest skill is inviting the confidences of women, coaxing them to share their greatest secrets with him. Then, once he knows the secret,



whether about them or someone else, he enjoys using that knowledge to the discomfiture of everyone else. He is arrogant, attractive, foreign, and much hated by men. Women are afraid of him, but men have a great tendency to hate him, likely because he preyed on women, seen in 1936 as the weaker sex who needed to be protected. Poirot tries to convince Shaitana that his idea of his unusual dinner party is not amusing but instead dangerous, but Shaitana does not heed this advice. Before the night is over, Shaitana is dead, having been slain by one of the four of his murder suspect collection. Shaitana's interest in the secrets of people must now be passed on to Poirot, Battle, Mrs. Oliver, and Race. The difference is that they seek only to unmask a killer, not to embarrass or hurt anyone. Shaitana's motivation was always to injure and inflict pain as often as possible.

## **Mrs. Ariadne Oliver**

Mrs. Oliver is a great character. Agatha Christie created the woman to be a needle in Hercule Poirot's side. Mrs. Oliver is a writer of mystery fiction, very much like Dame Christie herself. Christie uses Mrs. Oliver to share with her public the facts and fiction about writers, poking fun alternatively at herself and at the law-enforcement establishments in turn. By being such a colorful and forceful character, Mrs. Oliver functions as a bit of comic relief in the story, and the reader cannot help but be drawn to the woman who does not put on airs of any kind. She is very open about how hard it is to write a novel, and that she has no concern about whether she is accurate or not. This leaves the reader wondering if Agatha Christie felt the same way about her novels. While Mrs. Oliver is drawn from Christie herself, it is not evident that she is totally autobiographical. Her approach to crime solving is based only on her experience as a mystery writer, and yet she has enough understanding of human nature to be able to discover Anne Meredith's most incriminating secret, that she was once involved in a suspicious death four years before. This is Mrs. Oliver's greatest achievement in the book and she enjoys her moment of glory fully. She does not appear to be one to hold grudges, and has a knack of making herself at home whether she is in her own home or in M. Poirot's flat. As a character, Mrs. Oliver lends a great deal of enjoyment to the story.

## **Superintendent Battle**

Superintendent Battle is a representative of Scotland Yard, invited to Mr. Shaitana's dinner party. He gives the appearance of being rather wooden and unimaginative. This is strictly a pose. The man is a brilliant investigator, and very thorough. Once he discovers that the four individuals in the room with the dead Shaitana, he agrees to work with all four sleuths present that evening, despite the fact that he does not really agree with Mrs. Oliver's methods of confusing fact and fiction. He is a gentleman, and he is not so hung up on his own accomplishments that he refuses the assistance of his three fellow-sleuths. His many years of investigation demonstrate just how effective he has become at solving crimes, from using Poirot and Mrs. Oliver to having his own Sergeant O'Connor pretend to date Elsie Batt in order to get inside information about



the Craddock household. He does not intend to allow any murderer go free, and will work day and night to apprehend the guilty party.

## Colonel Race

Colonel Race fifty-year-old man who can always be found in some outpost of the British Empire. He is involved in Secret Service activities. He is one of the sleuths invited to Shaitana's dinner party.

## Dr. Roberts

Dr. Roberts is cheerful, middle-aged, agreeable, confident, congenial, and a murder suspect. He is a guest and part of Mr. Shaitana's collection of murderers. Dr. Roberts is an effusive and cheerful man who fools everyone but Poirot. He puts on an act of being a very confident and genial doctor, who will most certainly get your diagnosis correct, and the treatment will be easy to handle. He works mostly with wealthy patrons, and has a very lucrative practice. His secret is that he has a tendency to murder those patients who begin to cause trouble. It seems as though Dr. Roberts likes the ladies and when they or their husbands start to cause trouble, he simply disposes of them in such a public and overt manner, that rather than pointing toward Dr. Roberts, suspicion is cast elsewhere, or it is put down to an accident. Mr. and Mrs. Craddock are likely two victims of Dr. Roberts unsavory tendency to dispose of irritating patients. He infected Mr. Craddock's shaving brush with anthrax and then inoculated the widow with a poison just before she left on a trip for Egypt. It is apparent that Shaitana knew of Dr. Roberts's methods and wished to include him in his collection for an evening of fun at his expense. Dr. Roberts decided to take care of Shaitana in a similar manner, overtly and virtually in public.

## Mrs. Lorrimer

Mrs. Lorrimer is a well-dressed woman of about sixty, very attractive face, well-coiffed hair, with a clear incisive voice, a true lady. She is one of Shaitana's guests and suspects. She admits to Poirot that she killed her husband over twenty years before, but she never tries to justify it or explain why. Mrs. Lorrimer remains a bit of a mystery to the reader; all we know is that she is a true lady, she is an amazing bridge player, one of the best, and that she has a soft spot for Anne Meredith. This is likely because Mrs. Lorrimer recognizes a young woman, alone in the world, and feels a need to protect the girl. Mrs. Lorrimer is dying, probably of some sort of cancer or tumor, it is never fully divulged. She is murdered by Dr. Roberts to put an end to the Shaitana affair.

## Major Despard

Major Despard is a tall, thin, good-looking man with a scar on his temple. The major is a man of high adventure and strong personal integrity. He does not suffer fools easily



when it comes to men, especially Shaitana. He is more easily taken in by a pretty young woman, as he was with Miss Anne Meredith, until he meets her roommate, Miss Rhoda Dawes. Because of his strict moral code, Despard advises Anne to seek legal counsel, and with his knowledge of Shaitana's devilish personality in regard to women, advises her that she may wish certain facts about her past to remain a secret. Despite his initial attraction to Miss Anne, he is much more attracted to her more dynamic and vivacious roommate, Rhoda Dawes. When he comes across the two drowning women, he does not hesitate for an instant. He chooses to save Rhoda first. The secret in Despard's past is that he did, indeed, kill a man. However, it was an accident. His intention was to save the man from drowning, but because a foolish woman spoiled his aim, he took a man's life. This secret is what Shaitana was trying to use to expose and embarrass Despard.

## **Miss Anne Meredith**

Miss Anne Meredith is a twenty-five-year-old woman at Shaitana's party, pretty, with brown hair, fashionably dressed, grey eyes, quiet voice, and a slow style of speaking. She is very shy. She was orphaned at the age of eighteen, and left with no money. As a result, Miss Meredith must find work, and not being terribly well educated, all she is able to do is to be a companion or a mother's helper. Because of her life of poverty, Miss Meredith has a tendency to covet the possessions of others, and from time to time acts on those thoughts. One of her employers likely caught her stealing something, and Anne's reaction was to switch a bottle of poison with a bottle of Syrup of Fig that resulted in her employer's death. Anne gives the impression of being alone and unable to deal with the rigors of living in the modern world, causing many people to become protective of her. She accepts such behavior until one who is close to her discovers something unsavory about her character. That is when she turns murderous. She even attempts to murder her best friend, Rhoda Dawes.

## **Miss Burgess**

Miss Burgess is Dr. Roberts's secretary. She believes she has not divulged anything of interest to Superintendent Battle, when in fact she has given him a great deal of information.

## **Mrs. Graves**

Mrs. Graves is a patient of Dr. Roberts who believes her family is poisoning her.

## **Mr. Craddock**

Mr. Craddock is the husband of one of Dr. Roberts's patients, Mrs. Craddock. Mr. Craddock believes Dr. Roberts to be guilty of behavior unbecoming a doctor in regard to one of his female patients and threatens to expose him to the medical board. He dies





very soon after that confrontation from an anthrax infection supposedly gotten from an infected shaving brush.

## **Mrs. Craddock**

Mrs. Craddock is a patient of Dr. Roberts who has caused the doctor some difficulty by causing her husband to become jealous. Because of this and the fact that Dr. Roberts has to kill her husband, she is injected with a slow-acting poison under the guise of required typhoid inoculations for a trip to Egypt, where she dies.

## **Rhoda Dawes**

Rhoda Dawes is a friend to Anne Meredith, a woman of some wealth, who finds great excitement in life. She is diametrically opposed to the character of Anne Meredith. Rhoda is envious of Anne's relationship with Major Despard, but has no intention of stealing the man from her friend; however, if Anne is not interested in Major Despard, Rhoda would like very much to become better acquainted with him. She shares his zest for life, his sense of adventure, and joy of living. Rhoda is also a great admirer of Mrs. Oliver, believing her to be a wonderful writer, and enjoys sharing a simple meal with the woman.

## **Sergeant O'Connor**

Sergeant O'Connor is Superintendent Battle's man who questions Elsie Batt.

## **Elsie Batt**

Elsie Batt is the former parlourmaid to Mrs. Craddock.

## **Professor Luxmore**

Professor Luxmore is a biologist who hires Despard to guide him and his wife through the Amazon.

## **Mrs. Luxmore**

Mrs. Luxmore is the wife of Professor Luxmore, who spoils Despard's aim and accomplishes the demise of her husband.

## **Window Cleaner**

The Window Cleaner is really Poirot's friend, Gerald Hemmingway, an aspiring actor.



## **Objects/Places**

### **London, England**

Scene of most of the story

### **Snuff Box Exhibition**

Where Shaitana and Poirot meet to arrange the fateful dinner party

### **Wessex House**

Location of Snuff Box Exhibition

### **Moustache**

Both Poirot and Shaitana have memorable moustaches. Poirot's is more luxuriant, Shaitana's stiff waxed ends and a tiny black imperial. Poirot's is one of his distinguishing characteristics.

### **Bridge Scorecards**

Bridge scorecards are documents that reveal more about the personalities of the card players and the events of the evening more accurately than the players' testimony.

### **Stiletto**

The unique knick-knack used to kill Mr. Shaitana

### **Shaving Brush**

Mr. Craddock died of anthrax that had contaminated his shaving brush.

### **Apples**

Mrs. Oliver's favorite snack when she is writing; she eating them by the pound.



## **Wendon Cottage**

The house shared by Rhoda Dawes and Anne Meredith, owned by Rhoda Dawes

## **Wallingford**

Town where Anne and Rhoda live

## **Thames**

The river beside Wendon Cottage where Anne Meredith tries to kill Rhoda Dawes

## **Devonshire**

Where Miss Rhoda Dawes is originally from

## **Cheltenham**

Town Anne's father retired to

## **The Larches**

Anne's first job taking care of two boys

## **Switzerland**

Anne and Rhoda meet Mr. Shaitana during the winter festivities

## **Croftways**

The Croftways is the home where Anne worked for a few months where a woman accidentally took poison and died.

## **Willy Nilly Revue**

Show Sergeant O'Connor takes Elsie Batt to in order to question her unofficially

## **Silk Stockings**

The temptation Poirot uses to evaluate Miss Anne Meredith's character



## **The Affair of the Second Goldfish**

Book written by Mrs. Oliver, signed and presented to Rhoda Dawes

## **Scotland Yard**

Law Enforcement establishment in London where Superintendent Battle works

## **South America**

Location of suspicious death of Professor Luxmore

## **Egypt**

Where Shaitana meets Mrs. Lorrimer and where Mrs. Craddock dies

## **Combeacre**

The area of Devonshire where Anne Meredith poisoned her employer

## **Syrup of Figs Bottle**

One of two bottles that is filled with a poison and results in the death of Mrs. Benson

## **Punt**

The small boat Anne Meredith and Rhoda Dawes use on the Thames

## **Veronal**

Sleeping medication prescribed for Mrs. Lorrimer for her sleeping difficulties

## **Epivan**

Epivan is the medication Dr. Roberts injects into Mrs. Lorrimer that in combination with her sleeping medication kills the woman.

## Letters

Purported to be written by Mrs. Lorrimer confessing to the murder of Shaitana before her apparent suicide

# Themes

## Theme 1: Appearances Can Be Deceiving

In *Cards on the Table*, an evil man, Mr. Shaitana, invites four sleuths to a strange dinner party, for he has also invited four individuals he believes to have committed murder and gotten away with it. Christie's characters are fairly well developed, and of the round characters, only two are exactly what they appear to be. All the rest have a tendency to hide some facet of their personalities or their past for their own purposes. Of the sleuths, Poirot, Battle, Mrs. Oliver, and Colonel Race, all but Colonel Race are very well described and will be used in support of the theme. All four sleuths have hidden aspects of their personalities in order to gain access to information. Poirot knows that he must get into the minds of his suspects and witnesses in order to extract important information. That knowledge justifies his use of subterfuge, especially with Miss Meredith, Major Despard, Dr. Roberts, and Mrs. Luxmore, in order to get the information he desires. Superintendent Battle, too, pretends to be what he is not in order to get around the natural defenses people erect when they know they are being questioned by law enforcement officials. When he goes to interview Miss Meredith, he spends time in the village pretending to be interested in leasing the cottage, or a London builder, or a tennis court installer. He teaches his subordinates to do the same thing as evidenced by Sergeant O'Connor's deceit with Elsie Batt to get information about the Craddocks. Lastly, Mrs. Oliver is a writer of fiction. From some of her conversations, it is very possible that the woman really cannot tell truth from fiction, for she mixes it up quite often. She is, however, able to get some information by being just who she is, a writer of fiction.

As for the suspects, there is only one who is exactly as he appears, Major Despard. While he does not offer the information regarding Professor Luxmore's death in the Amazon years ago, it is because of his integrity that he does so. He really does not care about his own reputation, but he does concern himself with the reputation of the professor's widow, even though he feels her to be a foolish woman. The other three suspects, as one would expect, hide their past. Mrs. Lorrimer's past is kept very secret, and all the reader ever finds out is that she killed her husband twenty years ago, but one never discovers why. The other two suspects are the best examples of deceiving appearances. Anne Meredith exemplifies a young girl, innocent, shy, fearful, non-worldly, and greatly in need of protection. Immediately she is treated as such by her roommate, Rhoda, by Superintendent Battle during the initial questioning, by Major Despard, and by Mrs. Lorrimer, who actually believes Anne to be guilty of Shaitana's murder. All of those intelligent people misjudge the girl, and do not immediately see that she is a snake and a murderer who will not hesitate to take a life should the person be inconvenient to her. The other skilled actor is Dr. Roberts. He gives the impression of a confident, friendly, and dedicated doctor. Most people like him and give glowing references. Only a few, specifically men whose wives have been his patients, distrust the man. Mr. Craddock found out just how dangerous the good doctor really is. Of all the characters in the book, only Major Despard and Rhoda Dawes seem to be exactly as



they are, filled with the joy of living, and looking forward to an exciting future. All the rest use deception to get what they want.

## **Theme 2: Murder is Wrong, Regardless of Admiration of Style**

Poirot and Shaitana are on opposite sides of a moral argument. Shaitana has made it a hobby of his to collect people who have committed murder and gotten away with it. He finds the very act of murder having been successfully committed without detection to be the utmost in a great collection, saying, "My dear, dear man, you and I look on these things as from ples apart! For you crime is a matter of routine: a Murder, an Investigation, a Clue, and ultimately (for you are undoubtedly an able fellow) a Conviction. Such banalities would not interest me! I am not interested in poor specimens of any kind. And the caught murderer is necessarily one of the failures. He is second rate. No I look on the matter from the artistic point of view. I collect only the best!" (Chap. 1, p. 4). To Shaitana, a murderer who is caught is a failure. A murderer who accomplishes what he sets out to do, to take the life of another human being and get away with it is the highest form of art there is. Shaitana wishes to put such celebrities on a pedestal and admire them publicly and openly. In Shaitana's opinion, to take a murderer, detect his crime, apprehend him, try him, and eventually lock him up is very unimaginative. To do murder well is justification enough to attempt it.

To Poirot, murder is the greatest violation of human law and civilized society there is, illustrated by his statement, "I am not as insensitive to art in crime as you think. I can admire the perfect murderer; I can also admire a tiger—that splendid tawny striped beast. But I will admire him from outside his cage. I will not go inside. That is to say, not unless it is my duty to to so. For you see, Mr. Shaitana, the tiger might spring" (Chap. 1, pp. 5-6). Poirot considers it to be of the utmost impertinence for a murder to have been carried right underneath the noses of himself and the other law enforcement officials that attended Mr. Shaitana's party that night. This belief spurs Poirot on throughout the entire investigation. The only murderer he seems to have any sort of compassion for is that of Mrs. Lorrimer. The reader never does find out why she took the life of her husband, and Poirot actually admires her for her reticence, the fact that she chooses not to try to justify her actions. Other than this slight abeyance of his standards, Poirot works hard to find the murderer of the man who suffered at the hands of one of those he admired. The final proof of Poirot's position is exactly that. He is determined to bring to justice the very individual Shaitana believed to be an artist. That is the greatest irony of the entire story, that Mr. Shaitana was killed by one he actually admired.

## **Theme 3: Understanding Motivation and Character Leads to De**

Poirot is famous for his use of the "little grey cells", referring to his skills of using his mind to solve crime. In *Cards on the Table*, Poirot begins his investigation with two very



strange questions, and one clue. Poirot focuses on the card game of the evening, the accompanying score cards, and the articles that the four suspects remember being in the room where the murder takes place. Poirot's position is that he is establishing a psychological profile of each of the murderers with their approach to bridge, how they keep score, and what they observe around them. In this way, Poirot establishes that each individual will always act in character, whether it is in bridge playing, or in carrying out a murder. By determining each suspect's character, Poirot intends to prove that they are capable of carrying out Mr. Shaitana's murder. In this story, Poirot is given a few red herrings himself, and he is led to a murderer, but not the one who killed Shaitana. There are two really dangerous suspects in the room, and both have no conscience about having killed, nor do they intend to eliminate killing as a means to an end in their future. Major Despard killed a man, but it was truly an accident. He is a man of integrity, very open, very direct. His character matches his observations and his bridge playing and score keeping tendencies. Mrs. Lorrimer is the next suspect. She is a lady of high intelligence, and Poirot pays her a dubious compliment, saying that if anyone were to actually commit a murder and get away with it, it would be she. However, her character and tendencies refute the method of Shaitana's death, and despite her claim to have killed the man, Poirot rejects it. This leaves Anne Meredith and Dr. Roberts. Both have killed. Poirot can prove from their psychological profile that they are capable of killing, have killed, and will likely kill again; therefore, they are very dangerous. Only one of the two, however, demonstrated the psychological profile of Shaitana's killer, and that was Dr. Roberts. Miss Meredith is, indeed, a dangerous young woman, but her murder style and motivation is very different. Once Poirot discovers her motivation, he acts in time to see her attempt her last murder. He is unable to prevent Dr. Roberts last murder, but the reader is sympathetically disposed to the death of Mrs. Lorrimer because she has a terminal illness, and by her own admission, she is not without guilt.





# Style

## Point of View

Third person omniscient, particularly from Poirot's perspective, is the point of view in *Cards on the Table*, with the common story-telling technique of revealing certain thoughts of secondary characters to move the story along and inform the reader as events unfold. The reader is present physically at each scene where either a sleuth or suspect is involved, and is privy to many thoughts and ideas any of the characters have. The murderer's thoughts in the case of Dr. Roberts, however, are well hidden from the reader, as well as Mrs. Lorrimer's thoughts. A good number of times the reader is invited to share Poirot's thoughts, but only up to a certain point: "His mind was not quite at rest. He sat for a long time in front of his fire, frowning to himself. At last, putting his fears and doubts aside, he went to bed" (Chap. 27, p. 198). However, the reader is allowed in up to a certain point: "In the street he said to himself, I am right. . . . I am sure I am right. . . . It must be that!" (Chap. 11, p. 84). So, too, is the reader allowed into the mind of Anne Meredith: "She felt definitely annoyed with Rhoda. Rhoda was a nuisance. And what had she been doing going to see Mrs. Oliver?" (Chap. 11, p. 136). However, the reader is allowed in only up to the point of causing the reader to feel some alarm—not enough to completely anticipate Anne Meredith's intentions, but just enough to be uneasy. This manner of story-telling is the most fair for the reader, as it allows the reader access to all facts that are uncovered; in fact, the reader finds things out faster than some of the sleuths because the facts are exposed prior to all four sleuths converging and discussing the case again. Christie handles this by not allowing the reader to know the thoughts of the sleuths until they gather and explain their position to the others. Christie is a world expert on the mystery novel, and her techniques have been copied over and over because of their effectiveness.

## Setting

*Cards on the Table* was written by British mystery novelist, Agatha Christie, in 1936, after World War I and at the brink of World War II. Christie uses England for her setting, specifically London with a couple of excursionary trips to the country, Wallingford and Devonshire specifically. The story opens with the meeting of Poirot and Shaitana at Wessex House, London at a snuff box exhibition. Today's readers have only a vague acquaintance with the purpose of snuff boxes; this helps the reader to move back in time to the era of the story's setting. Christie's contemporary readers understood the world of bridge parties as entertainment, of trips to the Amazon as events of high excitement and adventure, of country houses and young women left penniless and alone in the world. Christie's story is filled with class distinction, where the rich hire the poor to work for them as maids, gardeners, or nannies. Today's reader is acquainted with such jobs, but few people today actually have such jobs as individuals. One is more likely to hire someone from an establishment or company that provides landscaping service, home health care, or child care. The setting of Christie's story is nearly eighty



years in the past, when the presence of the telephone in one's home was considered a luxury, and the writing of letters was used to dispense information. Today's reader most likely has a personal cell phone and e-mail has become the favorite method of written communication. The reader is invited into the homes and apartments of numerous characters, and each experience is a journey to the past, from Mr. Shaitana's luxurious flat in London to Rhoda Dawe's Weldon cottage, to Mrs. Lorrimer's well kept house back in London.

## Language and Meaning

*Cards on the Table*, written in 1936, uses certain language that is sometimes unusual today. From time to time she uses terminology that is considered very politically incorrect in today's society. For example, Christie refers to Shaitana as a "Dago", a xenophobic term for someone who is foreign. The reader must remember that the world is between two World Wars, and foreigners were frequently viewed with a great deal of suspicion. Major Despard is the one who calls Shaitana a dago, and his title indicates military experience. Such experience will have exposed Despard to a great many horrors that the general public knows nothing about, perhaps excusing his terminology. Poirot is a very precise speaker, saying exactly what he means. His language is short and very formal. It sounds as if English is his second language, where he follows the rules of British grammar far more exactly than an Englishman. Poirot, after all, is from Belgium, though he is frequently mistaken for a Frenchman. From time to time he does use French phrases. His general phraseology is formal and slightly stilted, very much in keeping with his character. Christie's other characters are fairly easily identified by their speech patterns. Mrs. Oliver is a bold woman, not averse to making fantastic statements about law and crime detection. She easily mixes fact with fiction and is not interested in being correct. Anne Meredith's manner of speech is short, shy, and timid, much as her character appears to be. Even a minor character such as Elsie Batt is given a characteristic speech pattern: "You mean Dr. Roberts? He was a nice gentleman, he was." (Chap. 16, p. 119). By giving each character specific speech characteristics, Christie is able to create individuals on paper who are very easily identified.

## Structure

The structure of *Cards on the Table* is essentially a chronological mystery story that begins from the moment Mr. Shaitana and Poirot meet at Wessex House and a dinner invitation is extended by Shaitana and accepted by Poirot. The reader is made aware of the danger of Shaitana's proposed dinner party right away, and so to have a murder take place that evening comes as no surprise to the reader. Christie's plot of a locked room mystery is what heightens the reader's interest, for Mr. Shaitana is murdered in a room of four possible murder suspects; only one of those four and no one else can possibly be responsible for the murder. The other four guests, all sleuths of a sort, immediately band together in an effort to identify the killer. What starts out as a seemingly simple investigation begins to reveal complications, such as individual



motivation for murder on the part of each of the four suspects. It takes the combined efforts of the four sleuths to uncover all the facts salient to the case. There are, in true Christie style, a number of red herrings, misdirections, dead ends, and surprising revelations. The reader is given the clues as they are uncovered, making it a very fair mystery for the reader to solve. The book is divided into thirty-one chapters ranging in length from four to ten pages each. Each chapter is titled. The book ends with Christie's "stock in trade" revelation scene, with Poirot unveiling the solution to the mystery in a room full of people, including all remaining potential suspects.



## Quotes

"You do not quite understand me, Mr. Shaitana. My words were in the nature of a warning. You asked me just now to admit that your idea of a collection of murderers was amusing. I said I could think of another word other than amusing. That word was dangerous. I fancy, Mr. Shaitana, that your hobby might be a dangerous one!" Chap. 1, p. 6

"Is it twenty to or twenty past? An angel passing. My feet are crossed—it must be a black angel!" Chap. 2, p. 15

"The routine of the detection of crime had begun." Chap. 3, p. 23

"That's all clear. I hadn't the shadow of a motive for doing away with poor Shaitana. I didn't even know him very well. He amused me—he was such a fantastic fellow. Touch of the Oriental about him. Naturally you'll investigate my relations with him closely; I expect that. I'm not a fool. But you won't find anything. I'd no reason for killing Shaitana and I didn't kill him." Chap. 4, p. 7

"I should not care to do anything of the kind. I consider that a most improper question." Chap. 5, p. 36

"I like it for very short periods. To come back from the wilds to lighted rooms and women in lovely clothes, to dancing and good food, and laughter—yes, I enjoy that—for a time. And then the insincerity of it all sickens me and I want to be off again." Chap. 7, pp. 45-46

"You are right; psychology is very important. We know the kind of murder that has been committed, they way it was committed. If we have a person who from the psychological point of view could not have committed that particular type of murder then we can dismiss that person from our calculations. We know something about these people. We have our own impression of them, we know the line that each has elected to take, and we know something about their minds and their characters from what we have learned about them as card players and from the study of their handwriting and of these scores." Chap. 8, pp. 52-53

"You have seized the idea correctly. It would be a clue of the first excellence if you had been four players who knew each other's game well. A variation, a sudden lack of brilliance, a missing opportunity—that would have been immediately noticed. Unluckily you were all strangers to each other. Variation in play would not be so noticeable. But thin, Monsieur le docteur, I beg of you to think. Do you remember any inequalities—any sudden glaring mistakes—in the play of anyone?" Chap. 10, p. 75

"Memory is a wonderful gift. With it the past is never the past. I should imagine, Madame, that to you the past unrolls itself, every incident clear as yesterday. Is that so?" Chap. 11, p. 82



"Oh, I quite understand that the police won't let it drop. They'll probably come here and ask me a lot more questions—I'm prepared for that. But privately, I mean, I don't want to think about it—or be reminded of it in any way. I daresay I'm a coward, but that's how I feel about it." Chap. 13, p. 93

"Usually', said the other simply, 'Get your bearing, figure out your route, weigh up the pros and cons, make your decision—and stick to it.'" Chap. 15, p. 113

"Sergeant O'Connor heartily concurred in this sentiment, reflecting how fortunate it was that Elsie was being approached unofficially. On interrogation by Sergeant O'Connor of the Police she would have virtuously protested that she had not overheard anything at all. . ." Chap. 16, p. 120

"I knew you'd probably not remember. Yes, you see Ann had a ghastly experience once. She was in a house where a woman took some poison—hat paint, I think it was—by mistake for something else. And she died. And of course it was an awful shock to Anne. She can't bear thinking of it or speaking of it. And your saying that reminded her, of course, and she dried up and got all stiff and queer like she does. And I saw you noticed it. And I couldn't say anything in front of her, but I did want you to know that it wasn't what you thought. She wasn't ungrateful." Chap. 17, p. 129

"Rather odd, that, the way she hadn't wanted Rhoda. She had wanted, definitely, to keep Despard to herself. She had felt jealous. Jealous of Rhoda. Rhoda was so bright, so ready to talk, so full of enthusiasm and life. The other evening Major Despard had looked as though he thought Rhoda nice. But it was her, Anne Meredith, he had come down to see. Rhoda was like that. She didn't mean it, but she reduced you to background. No, definitely she hadn't wanted Rhoda there." Chap. 18, p. 136

"In war you do not exercise the right of private judgment. That is what is so dangerous. Once a man is imbued with the idea that he knows who ought to be allowed to live and who ought not—then he is half way to becoming the most dangerous killer there is, the arrogant criminal who kills not for profit but for an idea. He has usurped the functions of le bon Dieu." Chap. 19, p. 142

"No,' he said decidedly. 'Cards on the table. That's the motto for this business. I mean to play fair.'" Chap. 19, p. 143

"Suddenly I saw Luxmore in the distance staggering off into the bush by the river. He was absolutely delirious and quite unconscious of what he was doing. In another minute he would be in the river, and at that particular spot it would have been the end of him. No chance of rescue. There wasn't time to rush after him, only one thing to be done. My rifle was beside me as usual. I snatched it up. I'm a pretty accurate shot. I was quite sure I could bring the old boy down—get him in the leg. And then, just as I fired, that idiotic fool of a woman flung herself from somewhere upon me yelping out: 'Don't shoot. For God's sake don't shoot.' She caught my arm and jerked it every so slightly just as the rifle went off—with the result that the bullet got him in the back and killed him dead!" Chap. 20, p. 164



"Superintendent Battle was silent, thinking. Such an easy business. A bottle taken down from an upper shelf, put in place of the other. So difficult to trace a mistake like that to its source. Handled it with gloves, possibly, and anyway the last prints would be those of Mrs. Benson herself. Yes, so easy—so simple. But, all the same, murder! The perfect crime." Chap. 22, p. 168

"Yes, it's useful. It tells me a good deal. Mademoiselle Meredith was suspicious. Very suspicious. She takes nothing for granted that young lady. So that good dog, Hercule Poirot, he does one of his best tricks. He lays a clumsy amateurish trap. Mademoiselle mentions a case of jewelery. I say was not that at the opposite end of the room from the table with the dagger? Mademoiselle does not fall into the trap. She avoids it cleverly. And after that, she is pleased with herself and her vigilance relaxes. So that is the object of this visit! To get her to admit that she knew where the dagger was and that she noticed it! Her spirits rise when she has, as she thinks, defeated me. She talks quite freely about the jewelery. She has noticed many details of it. There is nothing else in the room that she remembers—except that a vase of chrysanthemums needed its water changed." Chap. 24, p. 178

"I am,' said Poirot. 'Always I am right. It is so invariable that it startles me. But now, it looks, it very much looks as though I am wrong. And that upsets me. Presumably you know what you are saying. It is your murder! Fantastic, then, that Hercule Poirot should know better than you do how you committed it.'" Chap. 26, p. 192

"Quickly, my friend. We, too, must go to Wallingford. I tell you I am not easy in my mind. This may not be the end. I tell you again, my friend, this young lady, she is dangerous." Chap. 38, p. 207

"Sweet on one or other of 'em, he is,' she observed to herself. 'I think it's Miss Anne, but I'm not certain. He don't give away much by his face. Treats 'em both alike. I'm not sure they ain't both sweet on him, too. If so, they won't be such dear friends so much longer. Nothing like a gentleman for coming between two young ladies.'" Chap. 29, p. 211

"The two murders attributed to Dr. Roberts, when examined closely and from the psychological point of view and not the material one, proved to be almost exactly the same. They, too, had been what I might describe as public murders. A shaving brush boldly infected in the victim's own dressing room while the doctor officially washes his hands after a visit. The murder of Mrs. Craddock under cover of a typhoid inoculation. Again done quite openly—in the sight of the world as you might say. And the reaction of the man is the same. Pushed into a corner, he seizes a chance and acts at once—sheer bold audacious bluff—exactly like his play at bridge. As at bridge, so in the murder of Shaitana he took a long chance and played his cards well. The blow was perfectly struck and at exactly the right moment." Chap. 31, pp. 223-24



## Topics for Discussion

Is Mr. Shaitana's dinner party an ill-advised attempt to study the mind of a murderer? Discuss Shaitana's motivation for the party.

Do you believe Poirot could have prevented the murder? Why or why not?

Explain Poirot's motivation and reasons for paying close attention to the score cards from the bridge game. What do the score cards reveal?

Discuss Major Despard's character. Compare and contrast him with Rhoda Dawes. With Anne Meredith.

Why did Mrs. Lorrimer protect Miss Meredith? Explain with details from the text.

What specifically did Poirot do to evaluate Miss Meredith's character? Why was this important?

Discuss the detecting techniques of the four sleuths; cover how they each approach the murder and whether their intuitions were correct. Who actually solves the crime?

List the four suspects and detail the murders of their past that Shaitana knew about. Were they all true murders?

What gives Dr. Roberts away? Why does he believe he will not be caught?

Discuss Miss Meredith's last murder attempt. Who did she try to kill and why? How did Poirot figure this out?

Who kills Mrs. Lorrimer? How? Why?

Discuss the character of Mrs. Ariadne Oliver. How closely does Christie identify with the character? What is the significance of the book "The Body in the Library?"

Discuss Poirot's psychological assessment of each of the four suspects? Support your answers with evidence from the text.

Discuss Christie's references in Cards on the Table to some of her other stories.