Murder on the Orient Express Study Guide

Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This classic detective novel tells the story of a murder committed in the middle of the night on a train traveling from the Far East to Europe. While the train is stuck in a snowdrift, the identities, motives and alibis of the passengers/suspects are investigated by the renowned Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, traveling to England on business. As Poirot delves into the mystery of what happened that fateful night, the novel explores themes relating to the nature of justice, the power of family ties, and the inevitable triumph of logic.

The novel begins with the world famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot waiting to board a train for home. As he waits, he's observed by a young English woman (Mary Debenham) traveling to England, who looks at his eccentric appearance and considers him harmless. After he boards the train, he in turn observes a polite relationship developing between Miss Debenham and another British passenger, Col. Arbuthnot. Meanwhile, an urgent telegram summons him to England, where developments he predicted in a murder investigation there have come to fruition sooner than expected. As Poirot arranges to travel to London on the Orient Express, two things happen - he reunites with an old friend, M. Bouc, a manager of the Orient Express also traveling that night, and encounters an American (Ratchett) with eyes he later describes as similar to those of a caged animal.

When Poirot and M. Bouc attempt to board the Orient Express, they learn that all the available compartments are booked. Poirot is placed temporarily in the compartment of a young American named MacQueen, who turns out to be Ratchett's secretary. The following day in the dining car, Ratchett (who is aware of Poirot's reputation) offers Poirot a job as his bodyguard, saying his life has been threatened. Poirot, in response to both Ratchett's manner and his face, refuses. The following morning, after a night of noisy disturbances and confusion, Ratchett is found murdered. M. Bouc, desperate to preserve the reputation of his train, begs Poirot to investigate. Poirot agrees.

The remainder of the novel chronicles Poirot's investigations and their outcome. With the help of M. Bouc and a Greek doctor, he examines several clues found in the murdered man's compartment - a watch apparently broken at the time of the murder, a burnt note, a pipe cleaner, and a delicate ladies' handkerchief. He interviews each of the passengers, who include Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot, an elderly Russian princess and her German maid, a talkative American widow, Ratchett's secretary and valet, a Hungarian diplomat and his wife, a Swedish missionary, an Italian car salesman, and an American detective. He also interviews the Conductor of the coach on duty at the time Ratchett was murdered. As Poirot is perplexed to discover, the passengers and Conductor give each other alibis, present contradictory facts, and deny involvement in the murder - even when the victim turns out to be the notorious kidnapper Cassetti, and even when the passengers and Conductor all prove to have had a connection with the Armstrongs, one of the families he (Cassetti) victimized.

Eventually Poirot arrives at what he considers to be the truth - that the passengers and Conductor, because of their connection with the Armstrong family, and because Cassetti escaped justice for his crimes, took it upon themselves to administer that justice, and executed him in the way he should have been executed by the legal system. A passionate plea from one of the passengers (the mother of Mrs. Armstrong, a renowned actress posing as the talkative widow Mrs. Hubbard), convinces Poirot that true justice has indeed been served. He (Poirot) agrees to propose a second solution to the crime to the police, a solution that fits with all the clues and evidence but which lets all the members of the extended Armstrong family (including Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot, who are in love and eager to marry) free to pursue their lives.

Part 1: Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Part 1: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

This section is essentially exposition, introducing the characters and the situation.

Early on a cold wintry morning in Syria, a young army officer keeps the famous Belgian detective Hercule Poi-rot company as Poirot waits to board a train. As they make small talk about the weather and about the mystery Poirot has just solved (a mystery the officer knows nothing about), an efficiently attractive British woman named Mary Debenham looks out the window of her compartment, sees Poirot, and comments to herself that he seems both peculiar and harmless (see "Quotes", p. 12). The following day as the train travels across the Middle East, Poirot observes the relationship between the apparently reserved Miss Debenham and the gruff, also British, Colonel Arbuthnot - reserved at breakfast, more friendly at lunch, surprisingly passionate in the evening, when Miss Debenham represses the Colonel's advances with the comment "Not now. When it's all over. When it's behind us - then ..." Narration comments that Poirot was to remember both the passion and the con-tent of their conversation later. The following afternoon the train is brought to a sudden stop by a small fire in the dining car. Miss Debenham asks, with frantic anxiety, whether the delay will be long - she is desperate to catch the Orient Express at 9 PM that night. Poirot reassures her, and again wonders why the usually restrained Miss Debenham is so emotional about something as simple as a missed train. A few minutes later their train journey resumes, and when they arrive at their next stop Poirot seeks out a hotel.

Upon his arrival at The Tokatlian Hotel, Poirot is vexed to discover that he is needed back home in England immediately. After the Hotel Concierge agrees to arrange to get Poirot a first class berth on the 9 PM Orient Express, Poirot goes into the restaurant for a quick dinner. There he encounters an old friend, M. Bouc, a director of the Orient Express line also traveling by train that night. As they dine, Poirot observes two men at a nearby table - both evidently American, the older evidently a successful businessman, the younger evidently his assistant. As they pass Poirot, he experiences a strong feeling of distaste for the older man, telling M. Bouc later that he felt he was looking at an animal (see "Quotes", p. 22). After dinner, Poirot and M. Bouc travel to the train station, where they learn that that all the first class berths are booked - a highly unusual situation for this time of year. M. Bouc uses his influence to get Poirot a berth originally reserved for a Mr. Harris, who hasn't arrived. Poirot is shown to the berth by the Conductor, where he (Poirot) is surprised to learn that he's sharing the room with the young American from the restaurant (MacQueen). At first MacQueen seems uncomfortable with the arrangement, but quickly adopts a positive humor and offers to give Poirot the lower berth. Poirot refuses, and as they argue politely, the train begins its journey.

The next day, Poirot and M. Bouc meet for lunch in a dining car. As they eat, M. Bouc comments on the romanticism of the situation of so many people of so many

nationalities on the train (see "Quotes", p. 27). Narration then describes the thirteen other people in the car - among them Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot (who, Poirot notes, are sitting separately), as well as MacQueen and Ratchett. M. Bouc identifies an ugly old woman as the Princess Dragomiroff, a Russian aristocrat. There is also an attractive young couple whom M. Bouc identifies as a Hungarian diplomat and his wife, a loudly talkative American woman, a quiet plain woman repeatedly described as looking like a sheep, and a silent woman in black (whom Poirot believes to be a ladies' maid). There are also three men sitting together - a harsh-voiced American, a smiling Italian, and a silent man in black whom Poirot believes to be a manservant (it's later revealed that this man is Ratchett's personal valet). One by one, the passengers depart, leaving Poirot alone with Ratchett - who asks Poirot to take a case for him. He (Ratchett) hints that he has enemies from whom he needs more protection than the gun he carries can give him, and offers Poirot "big money" to do the job. Poirot tells him he doesn't need money, that he only takes cases that truly interest him, and that ultimately his real reason for refusing Ratchett's offer is that he does not like Ratchett's face.

Part 1: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

Analysis of a mystery novel must take place on two levels - on the level of the story being told (specifically, on the literary techniques applied) and on the level of the mystery (specifically, what piece of information is a clue and what isn't, and how the detective proceeds to uncover the truth).

On the first level of analysis, there are several techniques at work here, all of which might fall under the umbrella term of exposition - the introduction of character and situation, the creation of mood, and the setting of various plots in motion. In terms of character, in these first three chapters the central characters are all introduced with specificity, economy, and enough intriguing aspects to their personalities to make the reader want to know more, both about who they are and about the mystery with which they're about to become involved. In short, the exposition is highly effective, both in terms of its application of technique and its laying the groundwork for the development of the mystery. It's important to note here that Hercule Poirot, like many other detectives in novels of this genre, is a recurring character - that is, he appears in several books in which he displays consistent characteristics and actions. This means that as the author introduces the story and develops the exposition he (in this case she) has to walk a careful line between offering information that will intrigue new readers but not seem repetitive to regular readers. An effective device utilized here to perform this function is the character of Mary Debenham, whose reflections upon Poirot's appearance and manner simultaneously reinforce what is probably known by familiar readers and intrigue those who are encountering Poi-rot for the first time. Since this is exactly what she is doing, she is in essence an avatar, or projection, of those new readers. The irony, of course, is that Miss Debenham's dismissiveness is completely misguided - as she and the other passenger/suspects will discover, Poirot is eccentric, yes, but he is anything but harmless.

All that said, situational exposition is also developed with well-crafted economy. This manifests in two main ways, physical and motivational. In terms of the former, the circumstances of a group of apparent strangers brought together at an unlikely time (the dead of winter) into a confined space (a train carriage) in which they will have no choice but to relate to each other are vividly, if briefly evoked. Here again, literary technique (well-crafted exposition) adds depth to the mystery (the psychological pressure cooker of large numbers of people in a confined space - for a deeper discussion of the role of setting in Orient Express, see "Style - Setting"). In terms of the motivational situation, the key factor here is the introduction of Ratchett (eventually the murder victim), whose ex-positional appearance here is evocative of both who he is and what's about to happen to him. Here the narrative technique of foreshadowing comes into play - Poirot's reaction to Ratchett foreshadows both the revelation of Ratchett's animalistic true identity (i.e. the ruthless murderer Cassetti) and the negative reactions of the various characters to that revelation, reactions that echo Poirot's here.

In terms of the second function of exposition (the setting of mood), this is mostly done through the use of language - the way in which, for example, narration hints that experiences of the characters (felt, seen, and/or spoken about) will all play important roles later in the action. The mood here is one of suspense and mystery - with each successive hint, the reader is brought deeper and deeper into the narrative, further and further into the questioning, questing desire (parallel, ultimately, to Poirot's) to understand the truth of what's happening. In terms of the third function of exposition (the setting of plots in motion), the three major plots all get their start here. The murder plot begins with Ratchett's claim that he's been threatened, the "trapped in the snow" plot begins with the beginning of the train's journey, and the romance plot between Mary Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot also begins.

This latter also plays a key role in the second level of analysis of a mystery novel, the development of the mystery - specifically, the questioning of what's a genuine clue and what isn't (a false clue is generally called "a red herring"). Specifically, the conversation between Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot overheard by Poirot becomes an important clue later, when he (Poirot) uses what he overheard to force the lovers into revealing the truth. Other important clues include the unusual crowdedness of the train and Miss Debenham's desperation that she makes her connecting train, both of which later provide Poirot with clear indications of the way to the truth.

Part 1: Chapters 4 and 5

Part 1: Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

This section focuses on the circumstances of the murder.

That night, the Orient Express makes a brief stop in Belgrade to take on another carriage. Poirot steps out for some fresh air, but comes back in quickly when he discovers how cold it is. He then discovers that his luggage has been moved. M. Bouc has moved into the new carriage, vacating his berth for Poirot. That berth happens to be next to Ratchett, whose face darkens with anger when he sees that Poirot has moved next door. Meanwhile, MacQueen is surprised to see Poirot still on board, having believed (when he saw that Poirot's luggage was being moved) that Poirot was leaving. MacQueen's easygoing demeanor quickly returns, however, and he resumes a conversation with Col. Arbuthnot. Later, the American lady (Mrs. Hubbard) catches Poirot in the corridor, and talks animatedly to him about how nervous she is. Her berth is on the other side of Ratchett's from Poirot's, and she has a very bad feeling about him. Poirot reassures her and goes to bed. Late that night, Poirot is awakened by a loud cry from Ratchett's room. He goes to look out the door, and sees the Conductor knocking on Ratchett's door. Other passengers ring their bells for the Conductor as Ratchett cries out in French that everything is all right. The Conductor goes to answer the other calls, and Poirot returns to his bed. He notes that the train has come to a stop and that the time is twenty-three minutes to one in the morning.

After the disruption, Poirot finds it difficult to go back to sleep. As he's getting up to call the Conductor to bring him some water, a passenger's bell rings impatiently, and a moment later Poirot hears Mrs. Hubbard complaining loud and long to the Conductor. After he (Poirot) hears her fall silent, he rings for the Conductor, who arrives and tells Poirot, with some disbelief, that Mrs. Hubbard was complaining of a man being in her compartment. He also tells Poirot that the train has gotten stuck in a snowdrift, and may be there for days. Finally, he gets Poirot some mineral water and leaves. Poirot is just dropping off to sleep when a thud on his door wakes him. He looks out, sees a woman in a red silk kimono walking away from him, and at the other end of the corridor, the Conductor quietly working. Finally, Poirot is able to go back to sleep.

The following morning when Poirot arrives in the dining car, he discovers that all the passengers (with the exception of the Hungarian couple, the Princess Dragomiroff and her ladies' maid, and Ratchett and his valet) are discussing, with varying degrees of frustration, their situation. Poirot is struck by the fact that Mary Debenham is impatient, but shows no signs of the desperation she showed at the earlier delay (see Part 1, "An Important Passenger ..."). As he's listening to a rambling commentary to the elderly sheep-woman (a Swedish missionary), Poirot is asked to meet with M. Bouc, where he (Poirot) learns that Ratchett has been murdered. The body was discovered by the Conductor (now given the name Pierre Michel), who tells Poirot that Ratchett's valet knocked on Ratchett's door but didn't get a response, and then called him to unlock it.

He (Michel) goes on to explain that the door was chained from the inside, and the window was wide open. At that point, Poirot is introduced to a Greek doctor, Dr. Constantine, traveling in the same carriage as M. Bouc, who reveals that Ratchett was stabbed twelve times, receiving wounds that ranged from mere scratches to deep cuts that penetrated layers of bone and muscle. It must have been, he adds, someone very powerful who inflicted those wounds. M. Bouc pleads with Poirot to investigate the crime and its circumstances, flattering him into acceptance (see "Quotes", p. 49). Poirot asks to see a diagram of which passenger was sleeping where, and asks for the passengers' passports and tickets. He soon learns that there are no other possible suspects than those in the main coach, leading M. Bouc to comment that "'The murder is with us - on the train now ..."

Part 1: Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

On the first level of analysis (narrative/literary technique), there is very little worthy of particular commentary in this section. This is not to say that it's badly written - on the contrary. The writing in this section fulfills its purpose (to draw the reader into the mystery) quite admirably. In fact, M. Bouc's final words in Chapter 5 are both chilling and signally intriguing. However, by far the most significant means by which this "drawing in" is accomplished is the result of work on the second level of analysis. Most of the emphasis in these two chapters is laid on development of the mystery, the placement of clues and/or red herrings, and on defining the chain of events around the murder. Those events later turn out to be a carefully plotted series of noises, activities and confrontations designed by the killers to create alibis for themselves, to lay the groundwork for an alternative solution to the crime, and to confuse Poirot. This last is perhaps particularly significant when considered in the larger context of the crime, and the novel, as a whole. It's important to remember that the killing of Ratchett was carefully plotted by the murders over the course of a considerable length of time. The plans were thrown into chaos by the arrival of Poirot, meaning that several of the events taking place in these two chapters (in particular, the passing woman in the kimono) were added to the murderous mix at the last minute. It must also be remembered, however, that at this point the reader knows nothing. S/he only knows, like Poirot, that there's a lot going on on this train at a very unusual hour. The reader interested in solving the mystery (rather than reading the novel as entertainment, which most readers of this genre tend to do) would be well-advised to read this section carefully.

All that said, there are a few particularly important clues to note. Mrs. Hubbard's complaint of a man in her compartment, Ratchett's apparent cry in the night (in French), and the number and quality of wounds in the murdered man all play significant roles in Poirot's understanding of the solution. In that sense, their presentation here constitutes foreshadowing. The reader should, therefore, be like Poirot or any other detective and suspect everything.

Part 1: Chapters 6, 7 and 8

Part 1: Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Summary

This section focuses on Poirot's initial investigation into the murder.

After making arrangements for the collection of the passports of the various passengers/suspects and making plans to interview each of them in the dining car, Poirot conducts his first interrogation - of MacQueen, Ratchett's secretary. MacQueen explains that he worked for Ratchett as an interpreter as well as a secretary, saying that he (Ratchett) spoke no languages other than English. He (MacQueen) then surprises Poirot by not being surprised when Poirot tells him that Ratchett is dead, explaining that he (MacQueen) had had the feeling Ratchett was keeping secrets about himself and his past, and that Ratchett had been receiving threatening letters. When he shows a couple of the letters to Poirot, Poirot points out that each word in each letter was written by a different individual, apparently to prevent the identity of the writer from being easily guessed. In his turn, however, MacQueen is surprised when Poirot tells him that Ratchett asked him (Poirot) to work for him. MacQueen says he last saw Ratchett late the night before he was killed, when he (Ratchett) dictated some correspondence. This, Poirot suggests, makes MacQueen the last person to see Ratchett alive. MacQueen then says that he and Ratchett were generally on good terms, and then is dismissed by Poirot. M. Bouc asks Poirot whether he believes everything MacQueen said, but Poirot admits only to believing that MacQueen was telling the truth when he said that he believed Ratchett kept secrets. He also says, however, that he "cannot see this sober, long-headed MacQueen losing his head and stabbing his victim twelve or fourteen times. It is not in accord with his psychology." This leads M. Bouc to return to his previous idea that the killer was a woman.

Poirot enters Ratchett's compartment and makes several observations. The first is that although the window is open, it would have been impossible for anyone to get through it. In any case, there are no footprints in the snow suggesting anyone has done so. The second observation, guided by Dr. Constantine's examination of the body, is that the wounds in Ratchett's body are of varying severity (some deep and fatal, some light and mere scratches), and appear to have been caused by both a right-handed and left-handed assailant. The third observation is there are a number of clues, among them a woman's handkerchief and a man's pipe cleaner - clues that suggest, in the same way as the different kinds of wounds, that there were at least two murderers. There are also two different kinds of used matches (one of which was different from the type used by Ratchett), a broken pocket watch stopped at 1:15 (which, the Doctor points out, supports his theory of when the crime was committed), and some burnt pieces of paper. Poirot considers this to be the most important clue in the room, and the least likely to be faked. He uses an ingenious method of detection to reveal the remaining writing on the burnt piece of paper "-member little Daisy Armstrong." At this point, he reveals to the Doctor that he knows Ratchett's true identity. He, Poirot says, was in fact a man named Cassetti, connected with a crime in America. He doesn't yet offer any details, but

instead goes through the room one more time to make sure there are no more clues. When the Doctor comments on how impossible it seems for a murder to have left the compartment after killing Ratchett, Poirot comments that finding out how the impossible was possible is his business. He then suggests that they rejoin M. Bouc.

Poirot explains, to M. Bouc and to Dr. Constantine, the connection between Cassetti and Daisy Armstrong. Daisy was the daughter of a British war hero, Colonel Armstrong, and an American woman, the daughter of the famous actress Linda Arden. She (Daisy) had been kidnapped and held for ransom, but after the ransom was paid, Daisy's body was discovered. She had been dead for two weeks. The shock of the discovery made Daisy's mother give premature birth to another child, with both mother and child dying in the process. Colonel Armstrong killed himself from grief, and a French ladies' maid, who had been accused of being involved in the kidnapping, also killed herself. About six months later, Poirot says, Cassetti was arrested and tried, but managed to escape conviction. M. Bouc angrily says he (Cassetti) deserved to be murdered for what he did, but in the same breath expresses regret that it had to happen on the Orient Express. Poirot goes on to wonder whether the murder was the work of a rival gang, wanting to take revenge for something Cassetti did to them in the past, or whether it was an act of "private vengeance"? He offers the opinion that the burning of the note suggests the murder was committed by someone connected to the Armstrong family, but says he doesn't know whether anyone so connected is still alive - "I think," he says however, "I remember reading of a younger sister of Mrs. Armstrong's." After summing up the evidence in the compartment for M. Bouc, the three men adjourn to the restaurant car where they conduct their interviews with the passengers.

Part 1: Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Analysis

There are several important things to note about this section. Two take place on the first level of analysis - on the way in which literary techniques are applied to the telling of the story. The first technique applied here might be described as "the onion technique" - just like an onion consists of several layers, a good piece of writing also consists of several layers. While many non-mystery novels apply the technique in terms of character and/or thematic meaning, mystery novels also apply it to the revelation of factual truth. Mystery novels make particularly effective use of this technique, and in the opinion of several previous critics and analysts, Orient Express does it particularly well. The technique becomes the primary narrative technique used throughout the rest of the novel as the author, through the character of Poirot, begins the process of peeling away layers of truth and lies (the same way as the layers of an onion can be peeled away) to get to the truth of what happened to Ratchett, and why.

The irony, of course, is that by the end of the novel when Poirot has indeed uncovered the truth, he decides to present the police with a lie - out of (perhaps misplaced) sympathy for the killers. This point is, in turn, related to the second irony of the book - the idea that the murder victim arguably deserved what happened to him. M. Bouc makes this statement first, several other characters make it later, Poirot implicitly agrees with it when he agrees to present the alternative solution (the lie) to the police, and

arguably, the author herself makes it. This, in turn, is the second key element to note on this first (literary) level of analysis. Here, the author is making the first of several statements of the book's central theme - that moral justice is more important than strict legal justice (for more on this aspect of the novel, see "Themes").

Other important things about this section take place on the second level of analysis - the development of the mystery. There are several key clues here which, when placed against clues in previous sections, deepen the mystery further. The most obvious example is MacQueen's contention that Ratchett spoke no language other than English. How does this fit with the fearful cry in French Poirot heard coming from Ratchett's compartment the night of the murder? The astute reader will notice this apparent contradiction and, like Poirot, file it away in the little grey cells of the mind for future consideration. Other important clues, eventually pieces of the murderous puzzle, include the number and type of the wounds, the various material clues (the pipe cleaner, the watch, the handkerchief, and the matches) found in Ratchett's room, and of course the burnt note. The revelation of Ratchett's true identity is perhaps the most important of all the clues revealed here, as it lays the groundwork for the later revelation of the true identity, or identities, of the killer(s).

The final key element of this section relates to Poirot's comment about MacQueen's psychology. This is a characteristic statement of Poirot's philosophy, as echoed in most (if not all) of the books in which he appears. As a detective, his focus is almost exclusively on delving into the psycho-spiritual-emotional circumstances of both murderer and victim, a process that begins in earnest here in the following sections

Part 2: Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Part 2: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

In this section, Poirot begins the process of interviewing the passenger/suspects and gathering the information that eventually will lead him to the truth.

The first witness inter-viewed is the Conductor, Pierre Michel, described by M. Bouc as being French, good at his job, and perhaps not too bright. When Michel comes in, he immediately asks for (and receives) assurances that no one considers him to have been negligent in his duty. Poirot then asks a series of questions, beginning with confirmations of identity (to put the nervous Michel at ease), and continuing with questions of the chain of events the night before. These include Ratchett's ringing of his bell and answering Michel in French, the nervous ringing of Mrs. Hubbard, the later ringing of the Princess Dragomiroff, Poirot's appearances in the corridor, and the appearance of the woman in the silk kimono also seen by Poirot. Poirot's key question involves Michel's whereabouts at 1:15 (the apparent time of the murder). Michel asserts that he was at his desk at the end of the corridor. He stepped into the next coach to speak with a colleague about the snow, but only for a moment. Conversation between Poirot and Michel reveals that one of the doors leading outside, normally left locked, is now unlocked. Shortly after this part of the conversation, Michel is allowed to go, following further assurances that no one suspects him of either involvement or negligence.

Poirot asks to see MacQueen, who is both surprised and angered to learn of Ratchett's true identity. His anger, he explains, comes from the fact that he knew the Armstrongs - his father was the district attorney who prosecuted Ratchett/Casetti. He (MacQueen) admits to having found Mrs. Armstrong "...a lovely woman. So gentle and heartbroken." He offers the opinion that Cassetti/Ratchett got what he de-served, but then suddenly realizes that he's making himself sound guilty. Poirot assures him that under the circumstances, he would sound more suspicious if he were suddenly and deeply sorrowful. MacQueen says that wouldn't be possible, but then asks how Poi-rot figured out who Ratchett was. Poirot explains that he found out from the burned note, and MacQueen responds by saying "But surely - I mean - that was rather careless of him." Poirot's answer to this comment is enigmatic, leaving MacQueen somewhat perplexed as Poirot then asks a series of questions confirming earlier statements - that MacQueen took dictation from Ratchett before going to bed, and that he (MacQueen) had a conversation with Col. Arbuthnot that lasted well into the morning. There are two new pieces of evidence here - that MacQueen also saw the woman in the kimono, and that he and Arbuthnot stepped outside briefly for some air, perhaps leaving the door unlatched - the door that according to Michel was always kept locked. Poirot asks whether MacQueen smokes a pipe, and he states firmly that he does not. Finally, Poirot asks MacQueen to send in Ratchett's valet.

Ratchett's valet introduces himself as Edward Henry Masterman. In the course of his interview with Poirot, he reveals that he was in Ratchett's service for about nine months, that Ratchett was moody, that he last saw Ratchett at 9 PM the night before he was murdered, and that at that time he seemed more upset than usual. He had received, Masterman says, another threatening letter and accused him of putting it by his bedside - an action that Masterman denies he did. He also reveals that Ratchett was in the habit of taking medication to help him sleep. What exactly it was he couldn't say. When informed of Ratchett's true identity, Masterman's cool English reserve falters, and he becomes upset at the reference to little Daisy Armstrong. He denies, however, having ever been in America, offering a British reference as proof he's been living and working in England the last several years. He says he was up most of the night with a toothache, and that neither he nor "the Italian fellow" with whom he shares his compartment ever left. As he goes, he tells Poirot that Mrs. Hubbard is anxious to see him (see "Quotes", p. 94), and Poirot agrees to see her next.

Part 2: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

In these three chapters, Poirot begins his interviews of the passengers, examining them for their memory of the events of the night of the murder and analyzing their psycho-spiritual condition. Again, the primary literary technique applied here is the so-called "onion" technique, the ongoing unlayering of truths physical and mental/spiritual/emotional. The most important new physical truth unveiled here is the revelation about the unlocked door, an important component in the alternate solution to the murder proposed by Poirot at the end of his investigation. Another new physical truth is the revelation that Masterman is able to give his Italian traveling companion an alibi. This is the first of several situations in which apparent strangers give each other alibis. A third truth is perhaps better defined as a clue to the truth - MacQueen's passing reference to the burned note. As Poirot later comments, here MacQueen's reaction is unguarded and unconsidered, indicating to Poirot (and to the astute reader) that neither MacQueen nor his story is perhaps as they appear to be.

The new psychological truth here, and this is perhaps the most important of all the various truths revealed in the novel, is MacQueen's relationship with the tragic Armstrong family. In and of itself, this revelation is important because it more fully defines Mac-Queen as a suspect. On a deeper level, it becomes the first in a series of similar revelations that eventually lead Poirot to the truth at the heart of the entire mystery - that everyone on the train was connected to the Armstrongs in one way or another, and that is the core truth at the heart of the murder. At this point, it's interesting to consider how, with the beginning of Part 2, the focus of the two levels of analysis become more closely inter-twined. The various storytelling techniques (the onion technique, the creation of suspense and mystery, the development of character, etc.) reveal clues to the mystery. They are, in fact, manifestations OF clues. An example of this is MacQueen's comment about the justifiability of Ratchett's death - it simultaneously functions as a literary technique (a manifestation of the book's core theme), a psychological/emotional insight into character, and a clue for Poirot that leads

him eventually into an understanding of the murder. This particular development repeats in almost all the characters throughout the novel at one point or another.

Part 2: Chapters 4, 5 and 6

Part 2: Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Summary

In this section, Poirot continues his psychological and physical investigation of the crime.

Mrs. Hubbard rushes into the restaurant car and at great length tells Poirot, M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine what happened. In the middle of the night, she says, she woke up with the feeling there was a man in her compartment. She says she was frozen in terror for several moments, but then realized that the button for her bell was beside the bed and rang it several times. When the Conductor (Michel) finally came and turned on the light, the room was revealed empty, and the latch on the connecting door between her and Ratchett's compartments was open. She says she told Michel to lock it again and then left. When Poirot asks her whether she's certain of her story, she empties her purse and produces what she says is proof - the button of an Orient Express conductor. As M. Bouc reacts with dismay, Poirot asks Mrs. Hubbard how she can be sure the connecting door was locked, she says she is, having asked "that Swedish creature", who came by earlier in the evening to borrow some aspirin, to lock it. She adds that she had to ask as she was already in bed but couldn't see the handle because it was masked by her sponge bag, hanging from the hook above. She also comments that she heard a woman in Ratchett's compartment sometime later, a woman Poirot suggests was the woman in the kimono seen by himself, MacQueen and Michel earlier that evening. When Poirot tells her Ratchett's true identity, Mrs. Hubbard is surprised and excited, but says she didn't know the Armstrong family. She knew of them and their situation, but didn't know them personally. As she repacks her purse, Poirot offers her the handkerchief found in Ratchett's compartment, saying it was hers. Mrs. Hubbard points out that while the initial may be the same - H - she has her own handkerchiefs, much sturdier affairs than the little lace one offered by Poirot. With that, she goes out.

As M. Bouc wonders aloud whether the button found by Mrs. Hubbard implicates Michel in the murder, the Swedish lady (identified by her passport as Greta Ohlsson) comes in. Her conversation with Poirot reveals that she may have been the last person to see Ratchett alive. She knocked on his door by mistake while looking for Mrs. Hubbard. She confirms Mrs. Hubbard's story about the connecting door, confirms that she is sharing a compartment with a young English woman (understood to be Miss Debenham), that neither of them left their compartment, and that neither of them owns a silk kimono. She explains that she's going to Switzerland to visit her sister and says she has no knowledge of the Armstrong kidnapping, but reacts with angry sadness when she hears the details of what happened. After she leaves, Poirot makes a careful note of the sequence of events on the night of the murder, showing it to M. Bouc who says it's very clear and who suggests a theory. This is the idea that the murder was committed by the Italian who shares Masterman's apartment, a member of Cassetti's gang who was somehow double-crossed and who came after Cassetti to take revenge. Poirot, with a degree of amusement, reminds him that Masterman gives the Italian an alibi.

Confidently, M. Bouc says the alibi can be explained, but Poirot comments that the solution is, in all likelihood, not that simple.

Poirot confronts Michel with the button found by Mrs. Hubbard. Michel protests, with vehement and fearful shock, that the button is not his, saying again that at the time the man was in Mrs. Hubbard's compartment he was in the next coach, talking with his colleagues. The colleagues are summoned and they confirm his story. None of the conductors is missing a button from their tunics. As they confer about this piece of evidence, Poirot and M. Bouc discuss the possibility that the killer may have slipped in and out of Ratchett's compartment by way of Mrs. Hubbard's, hidden in his own compartment during the excitement surrounding Mrs. Hubbard's call to Michel, and then slipped off the train through the door left open by MacQueen. Poirot accepts that it's all possible, but then again suggests that the solution is probably not that simple. Poirot then asks to see the Princess Dragomiroff, who comes into the dining car to be interviewed acknowledging that while Poirot and the others must do their duty, she must do so as well. She recounts her movements of the previous evening, saying that she went to bed early, couldn't sleep, called her maid to her, and fell asleep at one-thirty or two. As she adds that she trusts her maid completely, Poirot abruptly changes the subject, asking whether she's been in America and knows the Armstrongs. The Princess confesses that she was a personal friend of Mrs. Armstrong's mother, Linda Arden, adding that she (Linda) is ill and bedridden. When she asks him why he's interested in the Armstrongs, Poirot reveals Ratchett's identity. The Princess describes Ratchett's murder as an "admirable happening", adding (when Poirot asks her) that she doesn't know where Mrs. Armstrong's younger sister is, suggesting the possibility that she moved to England and married an Englishman. As she's leaving, she asks Poirot his name, saying his face is familiar to her. When he tells her, she responds in a strange and enigmatic way (see "Quotes", p. 116), leading Poirot to wonder what she meant.

Part 2: Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Analysis

In terms of the facts of the mystery, there are several important elements introduced here. The first is the revelation of the embroidery on the handkerchief - the letter "H", which is later revealed to implicate several of the women passenger/suspects. The second is Mrs. Hubbard's story of the sponge bag, the facts of which later prove to be a key component of Poirot's discovery of the truth (when he discovers that Mrs. Hubbard's story is in fact a lie). The third is the repetition of what might be described as the alibi motif. In the same way as Masterman and the Italian, two apparent strangers, give each other an alibi, so Miss Ohlsson does for Miss Debenham and MacQueen does for Col. Arbuthnot. The fourth important element of the mystery introduced here is Mrs. Hubbard's story of the woman in Ratchett's compartment, a story that later ties in with the appearance of the woman in the kimono - with the entire story in fact turning out to be a fabrication. The fifth, and perhaps most important, element of the mystery introduced in this section involves the appearance of the mysterious man in Mrs. Hubbard's compartment and the button "he" allegedly left behind. Both become important components of the "alternate" solution proposed by Poirot at the end of the book.

In terms of the psychology of the mystery, the motif of Ratchett's murder being viewed as justified appears again, this time in the comments of the Princess Dragomiroff. At the same time, the Princess adds a new onion-layer of fact to the story, the fact that Mrs. Armstrong's mother is still alive (which is true - she is later revealed to be Mrs. Hubbard) but ill and bedridden (which is a lie). Finally, the chapter about the Princess also generates an additional layer of psychological intrigue for both the reader and Poirot - specifically, the Princess' comments about destiny (see "Quotes", p. 116). It's important to note here that the author never explicitly defines what she (the Princess) means. There is certainly an element of fatalism about this comment, an element that becomes even more interesting when considered in tandem with Miss Debenham's reflection in Chapter 1 that Poirot is "harmless". Here, the Princess seems to be fully aware of what Miss Debenham is not - that Poirot is far from harmless, at least as far as the passengers on the Orient Express are concerned. However, why does she consider his presence "destiny" - does she perhaps believe that it's inevitable that she and her fellow conspirators will be caught, and that they will all face justice as unavoidable as that faced by Ratchett/Cassetti? Is her comment, therefore, another evocation of the novel's key theme about the tension between moral and legal justice?

At the same time, the novel's two key sub-themes are introduced and developed here. The first relates to the importance of logic, the second key component of Poirot's working process as a detective, here and in all the other novels in which he appears. He does consider psychology, but he also sits, thinks, considers, and puts the pieces of psychology and fact together in a logical fashion. His making and presentation of the list is an example of this methodical way of working. Later, particularly in the chapter titled "Ten Questions", he develops this process further. The second key sub-theme explores the importance and power of family. It first manifests overtly in the comments of Princess Dragomiroff about Linda Arden and the Armstrongs. It's important to note that as the novel unfolds and the mystery deepens, the definition of family simultaneously deepens, and can be seen as referring to anyone who has any kind of strong, positive, emotional tie to another. In this context, it's possible to see MacQueen's earlier comments about Mrs. Armstrong as his expression of extended family ties to the Armstrong family. For further examination of both these issues, see "Themes".

Part 2: Chapters 7, 8 and 9

Part 2: Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Summary

In this section, Poirot uncovers more psychological and physical clues to the truth, some of which are the most important he discovers.

Count Audrey comes in to see Poirot first. He indicates that on the night of the murder, he and his wife retired to bed early, that the Countess always takes a sleeping medication when traveling by train, and that neither he nor his wife heard anything - not even the loud ringing of Mrs. Hubbard's bell. Conversation reveals that the Count spent a year in Washington, and that he has no knowledge of Cassetti or the Armstrong family. As the Count is about to leave Poirot insists, diplomatically but firmly, that he (Poirot) must speak with the Countess. The Count grudgingly agrees, and goes out. Poirot studies the Count's passport, which has a spot of grease dropped on it (see "Quotes", p. 119). M. Bouc comments that the passport is that of an international diplomat and that Poirot must be careful not to give offense, but Poirot reassures him that everything will be fine. A short time later the Countess comes in, confirms her husband's story, and signs a note proffered by Poirot affirming that the particulars of her identity, as shown in her husband's passport, are in fact true - her name is Elena Audrey. As she's about to go, Poirot asks whether the Count smokes (he does - cigarettes and cigars) and the color of her dressing gown (corn-colored chiffon). She also reveals that she met and married the Count after he was posted in Washington, and that she only speaks a little English. As she goes, M. Bouc asks whether it's time to speak with the Italian. Poirot doesn't respond as he's too busy "studying a grease spot on a Hungarian diplomatic passport."

Poirot's interview with Col. Arbuthnot begins with the detective asking the Colonel whether he knew Miss Debenham before they traveled together on the train from Syria (Chapter 1). When Arbuthnot says he didn't, Poirot asks what he thinks of Miss Debenham now that he knows her a little better, explaining his curiosity by telling the Colonel that the murder victim was stabbed twelve times, and that it's possible that such a frenzied attack was made by a woman (see "Quotes", p. 125). Arbuthnot defends Miss Debenham vigorously, saying she is "a lady". After asking several questions that confirm the stories of MacQueen and Michel, and after ascertaining that Arbuthnot smokes a pipe, Poirot asks whether Arbuthnot knew Col. Armstrong. Arbuthnot admits that he knew of Armstrong, and then when told by Poirot who Ratchett truly was, says that he (Ratchett) got what he deserves - although he (Arbuthnot) would have preferred to see him properly tried by jury (see "Quotes", p. 129). After Arbuthnot leaves, Poirot comments on how he (Arbuthnot) is the only man to be interviewed so far who admits to smoking a pipe, but that to envision him frenziedly stabbing someone twelve times simply doesn't fit psychologically.

Cyrus Hardman comes in to be interviewed, but before Poirot can ask many of his questions, he (Hardman) asks who he is and what their official capacity is. When Poirot

and M. Bouc explain themselves, Hardman reveals the truth - that he is a private investigator hired by Ratchett to protect him from what he (Ratchett) believed was an imminent attack. He says Ratchett told him he was fearful of being at-tacked, and offers a description of the anticipated attacker - a small, dark man with a womanish voice. Then, while protesting that he feels bad about failing at his job (i.e. protecting Ratchett), Hardman insists that his compartment was deliberately selected in order for him to watch Ratchett's and make sure nothing dangerous took place. He adds that he saw nothing that could, or would, help in identifying the murderer. His description of the night's events tallies with all the other evidence so far. When Poirot tells him Ratchett's true identity, Hardman reveals that he was investigating other crimes at the time of the Armstrong kidnapping, murder and trial, but adds that there were probably a number of other individuals eager to take revenge on Ratchett - he had been working the kidnapping/ransom scheme for some time. Poirot learns that Hardman smokes only cigarettes, and then allows him to leave.

Part 2: Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Analysis

The first element to note about this section is the moment at the end of Chapter 7, in which the narration explicitly comments on what Poirot is thinking. This is a fairly obvious example of a literary technique particularly valuable in mystery novels - making a clear suggestion that what has just happened, or what has been experienced, is of particular importance without explicitly indicating why, or what's actually important about the comment. There are relatively few occasions in Orient Express when this takes place, this being perhaps the most obvious. What's important to note here is the fact that it's never explained what, exactly, triggers Poirot's curiosity about the grease spot - what, exactly, makes him wonder whether the Count and Countess are telling the truth. Ultimately, the truth uncovered as the result of Poirot's consideration of the grease spot (the revelation of the Countess's identity) proves to be the key to his understanding the truth of who killed Ratchett/Cassetti).

The second noteworthy element here is Col. Arbuthnot's reference to juries - to their value, and to the number twelve (twelve being the number of members on a jury). Both become important components of Poirot's considerations leading him to the true solution of the crime. Twelve members of the extended Armstrong family (here again the theme of family comes into play), having appointed themselves a jury of sorts, pass justice on a man who is not only guilty of the crime affecting them, but potentially of several other crimes. Narrative technique (the development of themes - the power of the moral justice, the power of family) again entwines with presentation of clues (the ideas of "twelve" and "jury").

The third noteworthy element here is the development of the romantic sub-plot involving Arbuthnot and Miss Debenham. It may be argued that this thread is not in fact a sub-plot at all - for one thing, it receives relatively little narrative focus. However, if the idea of sub-plot involves the idea that a sub-plot has a direct effect on the main plot, then the love story qualifies. At the end of the book, Mrs. Hubbard (Linda Arden) argues that because Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot are in love, they deserve to be free to

explore that love (not to mention a life together) in spite of what they've done. In fact, she never actually says it but the implication is there. Ratchett is dead, and because Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot (like the other passenger/suspects) are no longer bound by their grief and sense of outrage, they're freer than ever before. She makes this argument as at least a partial incentive for Poirot to conceal the truth of who killed Ratchett and to support the alternative solution. The fact that Poirot agrees to this proposal reinforces the idea that the love story is more than just a romantic interlude. His actions seem to be affected by it. Therefore, it is in fact an important sub-plot defining, at least to some degree, the action of the main plot.

The fourth noteworthy element here is the further development of the so-called "alternative solution" - specifically, in Hardman's reference to the small dark man, the first time this reference appears. Here again, narrative technique (the layering, or onion technique in which more information about this non-existent man is revealed) entwines with the mystery (the presentation of clues, albeit false ones).

Part 2: Chapters 10, 11 and 12

Part 2: Chapters 10, 11 and 12 Summary

In this section, Poirot concludes his interviews with the passengers/suspects.

To M. Bouc's satisfaction, Poirot asks to see the Italian - Antonio Foscarelli, whom narration describes as talking at length about his life in America as an immigrant and a successful used car salesman. His recounting of his activities the night before tallies with that of Masterman (with whom Foscarelli shares a compartment). Also, he (Foscarelli) reveals that he only smokes cigarettes, and that he knows of Ratchett/Cassetti and the Armstrongs only by reputation. After he leaves, M. Bouc repeats his strong suspicions of the Italian, because of his beliefs about Italians in general - that they are a passionate people, prone to violence and equally prone to using the knife as a weapon when aroused. Poirot suggests that these beliefs are perhaps true, but adds that Foscarelli has no motive and that Masterman gives him an alibi. Finally, he comments that he has an idea about the origins of the murder (see "Quotes", p. 142), suggesting that it was planned by someone more dispassionate than the Italian - someone like Mary Debenham, whom he asks to see next.

Miss Debenham comes in, and narration describes how Poirot reacts to her cool, distant, self-possession. He asks her a series of questions about how she feels about a murder having been committed on the train (she's non-committal) and how she felt about Ratchett (she says she hadn't thought about it), explaining that he tailors his style of questioning to the character of his witness (see "Quotes, p. 144-145). Miss Debenham tells him frankly that she doesn't see how such a line of questioning can help find the killer. Under further questioning, she tells Poirot she was in the Far East (Baghdad) acting as a governess to two young children, and that she plans to make her home again in England once the term of her position is finished. When Poirot asks whether she's planning to be married, she doesn't respond - she only looks at him, in a "...glance [that says] plainly 'You are impertinent.'" Additional questioning reveals that Miss Debenham's story of the events of that night tallies with that of Greta Ohlsson, with whom she shares a compartment, and that she (Miss Debenham) also saw the woman in the silk kimono. As she finishes, Poirot seems perplexed, and then dismisses her. As she goes, Miss Debenham asks whether she can tell Miss Ohlsson that she is not suspected - she (Miss Ohlsson) is worried that, because she was the last person to see Ratchett alive, Poirot and the others believe she might be the killer. After conferring with the Doctor about the time Ratchett was killed, and confirming with Miss Debenham that Miss Ohlsson left their compartment much earlier, Poirot tells Miss Debenham she's free to reassure Miss Ohlsson. Miss Debenham leaves.

Before seeing the next witness, Poirot tells M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine about the conversation between Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot that he overheard while all three of them were on the train from Syria (see Chapter 1). The three men agree that while this makes it likely that Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot committed the crime

together, the alibis provided for them by complete strangers (Miss Ohlsson and MacQueen) make the likelihood nearly impossible. Finally, Poirot summons the maid of the Princess Dragomiroff, Hildegarde Schmidt. Questioning reveals that she spent much of the night of the murderer attending to the needs of the Princess, during which time she almost bumped into one of the train's conductors hurriedly leaving a compartment in the middle of the train (which sounds, to M. Bouc, like it could have been Ratchett's). When confronted with the three conductors on the train, Schmidt immediately tells Poirot that the man she saw was none of them. The conductor that almost ran into her, she says, was a small, dark man, who spoke in a light, womanish voice when he apologized for bumping into her. When confronted with the lacy handkerchief found in the murdered man's compartment, Schmidt says it's not hers and adds that she doesn't know to whom it belongs. Narration comments that "Of the three listening, only Poirot caught the nuance of hesitation in the reply."

Part 2: Chapters 10, 11 and 12 Analysis

On the first level of analysis (that of literary technique), in this section there is another example of how the author at times creates such unavoidable suspense and/or intrigue that the reader can't help but continue to read on. The reference to Poirot's consideration of the grease spot at the end of Chapter 7 is one example, while the end of Chapter 10 (the juxtaposition of Poirot's comment about logical minds and his summoning of Miss Debenham) is another. The implication is that Poirot clearly thinks Miss Debenham has exactly this kind of mind, and because he is already suspicious of her (because of her mysterious relationship with Col. Arbuthnot), he is eager to see whether he has even further reasons to wonder about her. It's important to note here that he's right. Later, when confessing to the truth, Mrs. Hubbard (Linda Arden) reveals that Miss Debenham was indeed involved in the planning of the murder. The irony is that Miss Debenham is caught by the man she considered (Chapter 1) to be "harmless". Meanwhile, it's important to note that in this moment there is another manifestation of the novel's secondary theme relating to the importance of logic - not only is the murder solved by a logical mind, it's also planned by one. Meanwhile, the appearance of Miss Debenham and her avoidance of telling the truth about her relationship with Col. Arbuthnot also develops the romantic sub-plot.

The interview with Hildegarde Schmidt develops several previously established motifs or patterns. In terms of the mystery, her evidence reinforces the story of the small, dark man first mentioned by Hardman. In terms of literary technique, the narrative comment after her exit on how only Poirot caught the hesitation of her reply both tells the reader that something important has just happened and draws the reader further into the mystery in the hopes that what that "something important" actually is will be revealed.

Part 2: Chapters 13 and 14

Part 2: Chapters 13 and 14 Summary

After Hildegard Schmidt leaves, Poirot, M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine go over the evidence they've gathered, and the questions that arise from that evidence. They consider the time of the crime, which Schmidt's evidence suggests occurred at the time Ratchett's watch stopped. However, Poirot comments that the watch could have been deliberately faked to cover up the fact that the murder was actually committed earlier or later. They also consider the mysterious conductor, who couldn't have been any of the men on the train (who are all of large build), who could be one of the women, who may either still be on the train or who may have escaped, and whose uniform may have been the source of the missing button found by Mrs. Hubbard. They then consider the identity of the woman in the silk kimono, and Poirot proposes that the mysterious woman and the equally mysterious conductor might have in fact been the same person. After discussing the varied nature of the wounds (deep/shallow, right handed/left handed), M. Bouc comments that it's all too mixed up to make any sense. Poirot comments that it does indeed seem mixed up, but adds that he can't help but feel the solution is ultimately very simple. The men agree that the next step is to search the passengers' luggage for the kimono and the uniform. Poirot makes a prediction - that the kimono will be found in the luggage of one of the men, and the uniform will be found in the luggage of Hildegarde Schmidt. Before they can leave, however, they are interrupted by the sudden, frantic appearance of Mrs. Hubbard, crying out that she's found a bloodstained knife in her sponge bag. Before she says any more, she faints.

Poirot, M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine leave Mrs. Hubbard to the care of a couple of restaurant attendants and hurry off to her compartment, where they find the rest of the passengers gathered curiously. The three investigators go inside, and immediately see the knife - a cheap, faux-Oriental dagger, stained with blood and lying on the floor where it had evidently been dropped by the horrified Mrs. Hubbard. As Constantine examines the dagger, Poirot examines the sponge bag, noticing that the bolt of the door connecting Mrs. Hubbard's compartment with Ratchett's is above the handle from which the sponge bag was hanging. As Constantine confirms that the dagger was in fact the weapon used to kill Ratchett, Poirot protests that that makes things too coincidental. M. Bouc comments that it does make sense - the murderer, slipping out of Ratchett's compartment via Mrs. Hubbard's, slipped the dagger into her sponge bag as he left. At that point, Mrs. Hubbard returns, insisting that she be moved to another compartment. Poirot and M. Bouc agree immediately, and assist in the moving of Mrs. Hub-bard's baggage to another compartment in another coach. Poirot manipulates the situation so that the new compartment is identified by an even number - Mrs. Hubbard's previous compartment was identified by an odd number. When in the new compartment, Poirot asks Mrs. Hubbard to confirm her story of how Miss Ohlsson checked the bolt on her compartment, and as Mrs. Hubbard does so, discovers that in this even numbered compartment the bolt is BELOW the handle of the connecting door - thus confirming the story. Poirot takes advantage of the situation to begin his search of the passengers' lug-

gage with that of Mrs. Hubbard, which reveals no new evidence. Narration describes how the search is impeded somewhat by Mrs. Hubbard insisting upon showing the investigators photographs of her two, rather ugly, grandchildren.

Part 2: Chapters 13 and 14 Analysis

Chapter 13 is notable for three reasons. The first is that develops the secondary theme about the importance of logic, as Poirot leads his (less logical) colleagues through a series of thought processes relating to the various pieces of evidence in front of them. It is, in short, the next "logical" step for them to take. The second noteworthy element here is also literary - not only is Poirot instructing his fellow investigators, but the author is also instructing the reader. Both Poirot and reader have the same evidential information, and the author is telling the reader to do what Poirot is telling M. Bouc and the Doctor to do, sit and think.

The third reason this chapter is noteworthy is that once again, the author entwines technique (leaving the reader at an unavoidably intriguing point where s/he can't help but need to know more) with the presentation of a new clue (the sudden appearance of the knife). It's important to note here that in the bigger scheme of things (the fact that every-thing about the murder was carefully planned), it's never explained whether the appearance of the knife was part of the original plan or whether it was an action taken in response to Poirot's being present on the train. In other words, did the passengers/suspects/ killers decide to produce the knife (as support for evidence they're presenting about the small dark man being the murderer) in response to fear that Poirot might be drawing too close to the truth? Or, did they plan to do it no matter who was investigating.

Chapter 14 is also noteworthy for several reasons. The first is that with the addition of the dagger (and the circumstances of its discovery) to the collection of clues, the alternative solution becomes even more supported by the evidence (in ways described by Poi-rot). The second, and perhaps more ironic, is that Mrs. Hubbard's previously presented evidence about her sponge-bag concealing the bolt on Ratchett's door is revealed (to Poi-rot and to the perceptive reader) to be a lie. Thus, the mystery deepens even further, for both the reader and the detective. The third noteworthy element here is also ironic - specifically, the narrative comment about Mrs. Hubbard's grandchildren. The irony only comes into play when the later revelation of Mrs. Hubbard's true identity (Linda Arden, the mother of Mrs. Armstrong) is taken into account. Linda Arden's one grandchild (Daisy Armstrong) was murdered, while her other grandchild was born prematurely and died. In other words, the character of Mrs. Hubbard is happily devoted to her two living grandchildren, while the actress playing her is bitterly devoted to avenging the deaths of her two dead grandchildren. It's ironies and juxtapositions like these that have, in the commentaries of other critics and analysts in the past, defined this and other works by this author as having somewhat more depth and/or humanity than what might be de-scribed as the "average" murder mystery.

Part 2: Chapter 15

Part 2: Chapter 15 Summary

In this chapter, Poirot examines more physical evidence and simultaneously uncovers more psychological evidence.

Poirot, M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine continue their search of the passengers' luggage with that of Mr. Hardman. As the others go through the suitcase, Poirot converses about America with Hardman, commenting that while the country is admirable in many ways, the women of Europe, particularly of France or Belgium, are much more attractive. Narration describes how Hardman looks out his window, tears coming into his eyes from the white brightness of the snow as he comments that "every nation likes its own girls best." Next is Col. Arbuthnot, whose luggage contains a box of pipe cleaners of the same sort as the one found in the murdered man's room.

The next luggage to be searched is that of Princess Dragomiroff, with whom Poirot converses while the others look through her bags. Poirot comments on how unusual it is for someone of the Princess's stature to have a German ladies' maid rather than a French one. The Princess asks what he means, but he doesn't reply. They discuss what the aristocratic and once-powerful Princess might have done to men like Cassetti, and Poirot says he thinks the Princess's strength "is in [her] will, not in [her] arm." The Princess says he's right, and comments that she doesn't know whether she's sorry or glad. Nothing of interest is discovered in the Princess's luggage. Poirot and the others move on to the Count and Countess Andrenyi, who agree to waive their diplomatic immunity and allow their luggage to be searched. Poirot discovers that one of the Countess's cases has a damp label. Narration describes how, when this is mentioned to her, the Countess seems too bored to take any interest.

When Poirot and the others move into the second-class section of the coach, they first investigate the compartment of Miss Debenham and Miss Ohlsson, whom Poirot sends to take care of Mrs. Hubbard. When nothing is found in Miss Ohlsson's luggage, M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine move on to that of Miss Debenham, who confronts Poirot with her belief he deliberately got Miss Ohlsson out of the way so he could talk with her (Miss Debenham) privately. Poirot in turn confronts her with his knowledge of the conversation she had with Col. Arbuthnot on the train from Syria (see Chapter 1), and demands to know what she was referring to. Miss Debenham tells him that she's not at liberty to discuss the details of the conversation but that it had to do with a task the two of them had to perform. Poirot then confronts her with what he sees as a contradiction - when the train from Syria was delayed, he says, she was frantic. However, now that this train is delayed, she seems perfectly calm. He asks why her attitude is so different, but she responds by suggesting he's making a fuss over nothing. Finally, he asks whether she knows Col. Arbuthnot well, and whether she has anything to say about the fact that a pipe cleaner similar to his was found in the murdered man's compartment. She briskly says that to suggest the Colonel of anything inappropriate is ridiculous.

The search of Miss Debenham's luggage having been completed, Poirot and the others move on to Hildegarde Schmidt's compartment, where they find, as Poirot predicted, the apparent uniform of the mysterious wagon lit conductor. Schmidt reacts with immediate fear, but Poirot reassures her, saying "'I am as sure you did not hide the uniform there as I am sure that you are a good cook.'" Schmidt agrees that she is a good cook and that all her "ladies" have said so, but then stops herself before she can say anything else, again frightened. Again, Poirot reassures her, saying that her luggage is the logical place for the murderer to have put the uniform. At the time he was attempting his escape, her's was the only unoccupied compartment (she was off attending to the Princess). Meanwhile, he discovers that a button is missing from the uniform, and that in one of its pockets there is a conductor's pass key. This was the means, Poirot suggests, by which the murderer got into Ratchett's compartment. With that, the detectives leave Schmidt's compartment and move on to that of MacQueen, where the young man again comments (in passing conversation) on how Ratchett didn't know any language other than English. His luggage, however, is empty.

Poirot then suggests that the three investigators return to the dining car and consider all the evidence in front of them. M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine agree, but go off without Poirot - he needs, he says, to retrieve some cigarettes from his suitcase. When he opens it, however, he finds not only his cigarettes, but the missing red kimono. "'So,' he [murmurs].'It is like that. A defiance. Very well. I take it up.'"

Part 2: Chapter 15 Analysis

The first intriguing element of this long chapter is the fact that for the most part, the searching of the luggage turns up relatively little physical evidence, at least on the surface. The only important pieces of such evidence are the discovery of the conductor's uniform and the discovery of the pipe cleaners in Col. Arbuthnot's luggage. The discovery of the damp of the label on the Countess's luggage also has significance, but this is defined not so much by the fact that it was found at all (as is the case with the uniform) but by the fact that narration draws attention to it by indicating that the Countess doesn't seem to care. In other words, in mystery novels narrative attention of ANY sort is an indication of the potential importance of even the most passing, apparently trivial discovery. The second intriguing element of this chapter is the development of the Col. Arbuthnot/Miss Debenham story which, as it has throughout the novel, functions on two levels - as a sub-plot and as an important element in/clue to the solution of the mystery. Here again, literary technique (the development of sub-plots) and the unfolding of the mystery (the connection between the lovers and the mystery) entwine.

The third, and perhaps most important, element of this chapter is the fact that while Poirot is searching through the passengers/suspects' physical baggage, he is also searching through what might be defined, in contemporary terms, as their psychological baggage. In other words, he is searching their minds and hearts at the same time as he's searching their belongings. His comments to Hardman about European women, his baiting of Miss Debenham, his conversation with the Princess about strength, his

comments to Schmidt about cooking - all are attempts to get to the psychological truth of who these people are and the physical truth of their relationship to the Armstrong family (which is, of course, an aspect of their psychological truth).

It's important to note several things here. First, in each case Poirot's digging into the characters' psyches and experiences turns out to be the product of accurate suspicions. In short, he makes a series of logical, correct deductions - a direct manifestation of the book's theme about the importance of logic. Second, the truths all contribute to the picture of the Armstrong's extended family - a manifestation of its other secondary theme, relating to the value and power of family. Third, his uncovering of various truths (in particular Hardman's, Miss Debenham's, and Schmidt's) seems to trigger an outpouring of truth from the other characters - specifically, their various relationships with the Arm-strong family, all of which come to life in the following section. It's similar to a dam breaking - a small hole appears in the dam, the dam weakens, more holes develop, pres-sure on the dam increases, and finally the dam breaks, allowing the water to burst free. Here the dam can be likened to the tissue of lies and alibis constructed by the passengers/suspects, while the water can be likened to the emotional truth behind their determination to end Ratchett's life. This chapter begins the process of the emotional / psycho-logical dyke breaking, which in turn leads to the fourth, and perhaps most important element of this section of the book.

With the weakening of the psycho-emotional dam and the relentless truth beginning to pour through, another narrative technique kicks into gear - the movement of a novel towards its climax. In most works of narrative writing (novel, poetry, drama), "climax" is defined (at least on one level) as the peak of emotional release. Such a peak is preceded by a series of increasingly intense points of similar release. To continue the metaphor, the cracks appearing in the dam - or to develop another, the climax is similar to the top of a mountain, with a series of steps (increasingly intense levels of emotion, more and more revelations of truth) leading the way there. The steps to the peak of emotion/climax of this particular book (Poirot's revelation of the truth and Mrs. Hubbard's passionate plea for that truth to be concealed) begin here with Poirot's psychological unpacking of the passengers, and builds throughout the following sections.

Part 3: Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Part 3: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

Throughout this section, action builds to the novel's climax as Poirot considers the situation and confronts the passenger/suspects with his deductions.

Poirot rejoins M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine, who comment on how impossible the entire case seems. Poirot, however, says this very impossibility is what makes it so intriguing - it must, he says, be thought carefully about (see "Quotes", p. 189), adding that all the evidence he needs is contained in what has already been learned in conversation with the passengers and in the search of their luggage. He offers an example - MacQueen has said at least twice that Ratchett spoke no English. This, Poirot suggests, indicates that the person heard by both himself and by Michel crying out in French that he was having a nightmare was the murderer. This leads to excited commentary and conjecture from both M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine, as they theorize about when and how the murderer entered Ratchett's compartment, and whether the watch was deliberately broken to lead them to false deductions about the time. Their theories lead them again to the question of which of the passengers posed as the false conductor. This, in turn, leads Poirot to present them with a detailed, written list of the passengers, their nationalities, their alibis, and their possible motives. M. Bouc looks at it, but says it's not helpful. Poirot then hands him a second sheet of paper, one with ten questions on it.

These questions relate to the ownership of the handkerchief and the pipe cleaner, who wore the kimono and/or the uniform, why the hands of the watch pointed to the time they did, and whether the murder was committed then, earlier, or later. Other questions include whether it's a sure thing that Ratchett was stabbed by more than one person, and what other explanation for the wounds is possible. Poirot, M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine consider each question in order, and in detail. The only certain conclusion drawn by their considerations at this point is that due to their nature (deep/shallow, right handed/left handed) the wounds MUST have been caused by more than one person. Poi-rot summarizes their considerations by saying that all the facts have been both presented and arranged, and that the only avenue of pursuit at this point is for the three men to sit and think.

After briefly describing the thought processes of M. Bouc (whose thoughts turn quickly from the murder to the worries of it having been committed on his train line) and of Dr. Constantine (whose thoughts turn just as quickly from the murder to his wife), narration describes how Poirot wakes from his reverie with a series of ideas. The first is that the murder was carefully planned, but the plan had to be revised slightly to accommodate the train having been stuck in the snowdrift. He suggests that had the train continued on its normal course, the stories of MacQueen, Hardman, and Mrs. Hubbard would have been told to the police, the uniform would have been found, and no suspicion of any kind would have fallen on the passengers. He also deduces that the threatening letters found by Ratchett were faked, more evidence to be presented to the police in the event

the murder had gone according to the original plan. The exception, he suggests, is the letter referring to Daisy Armstrong, a genuine warning that the murder realized, once the train got stuck, had to be fully destroyed - there was someone on the train so intimately connected with the Armstrong family as to be immediately suspicious. Finally, he details a complex chain of deduction resulting in his belief that this person is the Countess Andrenyi, whom he says is the missing younger sister of Mrs. Armstrong (the Countess' true identity having been, according to Poirot, hidden by the grease spot on her passport). At that moment, an attendant arrives with news that dinner is ready to be served. Poirot and M. Bouc agree that dinner can go ahead.

Part 3: Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

This is essentially a transitional section in the novel, a period of summing up on the part of both the author and her detective to prepare the reader for the climactic revelations to come. In both Chapters 1 and 2, there is no new information presented, no more clues are uncovered - in essence, the mystery doesn't deepen, but is instead summed up as the author gives the reader the same chance to consider and draw conclusions that Poirot gives M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine. Another way to consider it might be as a kind of calm before the storm. It's the emotional storm of the future series of confrontations between Poirot and the passengers/suspects. Alternatively, it's the intellectual storm of Poirot explaining the complicated brilliance of his deductions. Finally, it may be considered the thematic storm in which the tension between moral and legal justice comes to a head.

That storm begins with the revelation that closes Chapter 3 of this section, Poirot's claim that the Countess Andrenyi is Mrs. Armstrong's younger sister. At this point, the book's focus returns to developing and deepening the mystery as Poirot's deductions at the same time as the actions triggered by those deductions, and the reactions (of the passengers / suspects) to those actions, raise the novel's emotional temperature. To this point, the book's narrative style had been fairly objective. There had been moments of passion (such as those between Col. Arbuthnot and Miss Debenham), excitement (anytime Mrs. Hubbard is on the scene), and mysterious melancholy (any time the Princess Dragomiroff) appears. However, from this point on, the emotions of the passengers become increasingly important, culminating in Mrs. Hubbard's passionate final plea for true justice. In other words, in this section momentum begins to build towards the book's emotional and logical climax.

Part 3: Chapters 4 and 5

Part 3: Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

The meaning of a key clue is revealed in this section, as Poirot confronts, and is confronted by, both the truth and more lies.

Narration describes how, at dinner, Poirot arranges for the Count and Countess Andrenyi to be delayed. After everyone else has left, he confronts them with the initialed handkerchief, saying it belongs to the Countess. When she denies it on the basis of the initial H embroidered on it not being hers, he then accuses her of having altered her passport - the Countess' real name, Poirot suggests, is not Elena but Helena. He also suggests that she is the younger sister of Mrs. Armstrong. At first, the Count denies the accusation but the Countess, whose exotic European accent suddenly disappears, tells him the time has come to stop lying, and she admits that what Poirot says is true - she is Mrs. Armstrong's younger sister. She explains that she and her husband realized that once word got out that Ratchett and his murder were both somehow connected to the Armstrong family, she would be in very real danger of being accused, and perhaps even (wrongly) convicted of the murder. They, therefore, took steps to conceal her identity. This is the reason, she says, that they dropped the grease on the passport and soaked the label off her luggage. She and the Count both swear that she never left her compartment on the night of the murder, and that the handkerchief isn't hers. Poirot tells them that if they want him to believe their story, the Countess must help him uncover more of the truth about the Armstrong household. The Countess agrees, but adds that she probably won't be much help. She was, after all, just a girl. She does, however, manage to remember the name of Daisy's nurse (Stengelberg), and of her governess (Miss Freebody). She concludes by saying that she recognized no one else on the train.

After the Count and Countess leave, M. Bouc congratulates Poirot on his reasoning, commenting that even though the Countess must be guilty, she probably won't get a death sentence because of "extenuating circum-stances". Poirot chides him for jumping to conclusions. Before M. Bouc can protest, Princess Dragomiroff returns and demands the return of her handkerchief - her first name, she says, is Natalia, but "N" in the Russian alphabet is written as an "H". Therefore, the initial identifies the handkerchief as her's. She says, however, that she has no idea how it came to be in Ratchett's compartment. When Poirot asks gently how he can believe her (since she lied about not recognizing the Countess as Mrs. Armstrong's sister), the Princess says haughtily that she prizes loyalty above all the virtues, adding that her maid (Schmidt) lied out of the same kind of loyalty when she (Schmidt) said she didn't recognize the handkerchief. When Poirot suggests that telling the truth would have "further[ed] the ends of justice", the Princess, just as haughtily, tells him she believes that "strict justice" has been done. As she goes, Poirot wonders whether she could have committed the murder. Dr. Constantine tells him there is no way the frail Princess could have delivered the deeper blows. This leads Poirot to recall his conversation with the Princess in which they talked about her strength lying in her will rather than in her arm (Chapter 15). M. Bouc

comments on how many lies the investigators have uncovered in the last hour, and Poirot tells him there are more to come (see "Quotes", p. 223).

Part 3: Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

On the first level of analysis (that of storytelling techniques being employed), the primary technique at work here is the steady building of narrative suspense and emotional intensity. The reader, like M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine, is placed in a position of increasing disbelief as Poirot's deductions prove again and again to be right, and increasing wonder as the question repeatedly arises of what truth is going to surface next. As it has throughout the book, narrative technique entwines with the deepening mystery - the reader, again like M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine, is drawn further and further into the complex truth as revealed and defined by Poirot under circumstances that ultimately can't help to be moving.

At its emotional core, this is a novel about grief - about its power, about the lengths to which people will go to ease their grief, and the impact of powerful grief on others. It's interesting to consider, in this context, the relationship between grief and the kind of moral justice the novel seems to advocate - does moral justice exist out of respect for grief? Is legal justice most effective when such grief is given what many might consider its proper place? In the contemporary legal system, there is such a thing as "the victim impact statement", in which direct and indirect victims of a crime are allowed to tell the court about their pain and suffering, in the hopes that it will affect (somehow) the course of justice. Might it be appropriate to consider the actions of the passengers / murderers in the same light? Is their killing of Ratchett not a kind of victim impact statement (albeit an extreme one)? Moreover, is Poirot justified in making the decision he does at the end of the novel? The Princess Dragomiroff, in Chapter 5, clearly thinks so. So do several of the other characters throughout the book.

Part 3: Chapters 6, 7 and 8

Part 3: Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Summary

The emotional, psychological and factual truths emerge thick and fast in this section as Poirot draws closer to the truth and confronts the passengers one after the other with what he's discovered.

Col. Arbuthnot is summoned into the dining car for once more, and when Poirot confronts him with the pipe cleaner, he (the Colonel) recognizes it but claims to have no knowledge of how it came to be in Ratchett's compartment. Poirot then surprises him by saying he (Poirot) isn't really interested in the pipe cleaner, but in the conversation the Colonel had with Miss Debenham on the train from Syria. Arbuthnot refuses to answer that question and spiritedly defends Miss Debenham when Poirot describes her as "a highly suspicious character", but then falls silent when Poirot suggests that Miss Debenham was in fact the governess in the Armstrong household. After Poirot explains his reasons for making the deduction, the Colonel accuses him of being mistaken. Poirot then sends for Miss Debenham, who soon comes in.

With Col. Arbuthnot still present, Poirot confronts Miss Debenham with his suspicions about her identity. Miss Debenham admits the truth, defiantly telling him that she lied because she still has her living to earn - it would be impossible, she says, to get work as a governess if word got out she'd had any connection with a criminal investigation (such as that which will inevitably result from Ratchett's murder). She claims to have not recognized Countess Andrenyi as the younger sister of Mrs. Armstrong, admitting that the Countess reminded her of someone but she couldn't figure out whom. When Poirot again asks her what she meant during her conversation with Col. Arbuthnot, she says she can't tell him, and then suddenly breaks down in tears and rushes out. Col. Arbuthnot speaks angrily to Poirot and the others, and then goes after her. When M. Bouc compliments Poirot on "another miraculous guess", Poirot tells him it wasn't much of a guess at all. He says the Countess' reference to "Miss Freebody" was an associative substitution of names, put into play in order to perpetuate Miss Debenham's lie, Debenham and Freebody having been the names of two partners in a successful British department store. M. Bouc wonders aloud whether everyone on the train is lying. Poirot suggests that they are about to find out.

M. Bouc comments on the strangeness of so many people on the train being connected to the Armstrong kidnapping case (see "Quotes, p. 232), and Poirot says that he's made a "very profound remark". Poirot then calls in several passengers, one by one, confronting them with his beliefs about their relationship to the Armstrong family. As a result of these confrontations, it's revealed that Foscarelli was the Armstrong's chauffeur, Greta Ohlsson was Daisy's nurse, and Masterman was Col. Armstrong's personal valet. Hardman then comes in, confessing admiration for Poirot's deductive skills and asking where he (Poirot) thinks Mrs. Hubbard and Schmidt fit into the picture. Poirot smilingly suggests they might be the Armstrongs' housekeeper and cook. M.

Bouc suggests that that would be stretching coincidence too far. "They cannot all be in it," he says. Poirot gently tells him he doesn't understand at all, and then tells Hardman to call all the passengers together. '"There are two possible solutions of this case,' Poirot says. 'I want to lay them both before you all."'

Part 3: Chapters 6, 7 and 8 Analysis

The principal narrative technique at work in this section is the building of intensity towards the climax. It's applied with particular effectiveness here as both factual and emotional intensity increases with steady inevitability. More facts are revealed, more emotions come to the surface - the dam referred to earlier is about to break, and does in the following, final section. Once again, narrative technique combines with development of the mystery, as the reader can't help but feel that s/he and the novel are coming quite close to a truth that, in all honesty, might seem hard to believe. It's a tribute to the author's skill in developing characters psychologically and emotionally, without doing so in a particularly overt and/or heavy-handed way that the reader is likely to feel that the solution makes both emotional and logical sense. At this point there are still lies being told (such as Miss Debenham's comment about not recognizing Countess Andrenyi), but there is the sense that these are essentially acts of desperation. At the same time, Poirot has been right too often, and will continue to be even more right, for the reader to accept such comments at face value.

It's particularly interesting to note how, in the confrontation between Poirot and Miss Debenham, the emotional eruption of the hitherto reserved and unflappable young woman confirms Poirot's suspicions and reveals a truth without actually saying so in so many words. That truth is not that she was the Armstrong's governess, but that she and everyone else associated with the Armstrong family has been under immense emotional strain - not just on the train, not just while they were committing the murder, but ever since Daisy was kidnapped and murdered, a period of several years. In other words, Miss Debenham's tears are essentially the tears of the entire extended family. It is perhaps these tears that influence Poirot's decision to advocate for the alternative solution. It might not be going too far to suggest that the tears here have even more of an impact than Mrs. Hubbard's plea for compassion in the following section.

Poirot's final words in Chapter 8 are the last, and perhaps most intriguing, usage of the hitherto very effective technique of leaving the reader at such a place of suspense that moving forward into the mystery is irresistible. The truth, emotional and factual, is about to be revealed. It's doubtful that any reader could put the book down at this point.

Part 3: Chapter 9

Part 3: Chapter 9 Summary

This chapter contains the solution of the mystery, and Poirot's explanation of how he came to understand it.

After all the passengers (and the Conductor, Michel) have assembled in the dining car, Poirot tells them there are two possible explanations for how Ratchett was killed. The first, he suggests, is that the murderer was "a certain enemy" of Ratchett's who snuck onto the train at one of its early stops disguised as a conductor, killed Ratchett, left through Mrs. Hubbard's compartment (where he lost a button and hid the weapon into her sponge-bag), hid the uniform, and jumped off before the train left its stop. The watch, he says, displays the time it does because Ratchett forgot to adjust it as the train crossed the time line. The voice crying out in French from Ratchett's compartment, he concludes, was someone else who went in (for whatever reason) to visit Ratchett, discovered he was dead, panicked, and lied. Dr. Constantine angrily jumps up and protests that there are too many holes in this story - the murder could not possibly have happened this way. Poirot then, with seeming reluctance, agrees to discuss the second solution.

Poirot begins his explanation with a reference made by M. Bouc at the beginning of the journey (Part 1, Chapter 3 - see "Quotes", p. 27) on the unusual range of nationalities grouped together. He says that after he started thinking in depth about the case, realized that only in America might there be "a household composed of just such varied nationalities - an Italian chauffeur, an English governess, a Swedish nurse, a French ladies' maid, and so on." This, he says, led him to his casting each passenger in a possible position in the household. He then refers to several facts and/or stories that struck him as being particularly interesting. First is MacQueen's comment about the burnt letter (Part 2, Chapter 2), which Poirot says suggested that MacQueen was about to say "But surely that was burnt" but stopped himself, an indication that MacQueen was somehow involved in the murder. Poirot also refers to Hardman's statement about the placement of his compartment with a view of Ratchett's (Part 2, Chapter 9), a statement that Poirot says led him to believe it was impossible to consider anyone outside the coach as a potential murderer.

Poirot then refers to the conversation he overheard between Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot on the train from Syria (Part 1, Chapter 1). He refers also Mrs. Hubbard's statement that she couldn't see the handle of the connecting door because of her sponge bag, which would have been true in her second, even numbered compartment but not in her first, odd-numbered compartment. Finally, he discusses the evidence that suggests the watch found in Ratchett's pocket was faked evidence to misdirect his attention, some-thing that he suggests is also true of the mysterious cry in French from Ratchett's compartment - MacQueen had stated on more than one occasion that

Ratchett spoke only English. In conclusion, Poirot offers the opinion that Ratchett was actually killed closer to 2 AM, and then turns his attention to the question of who did it.

Poirot begins his analysis of that question by commenting on how strange it seemed to him that pairs of apparent strangers gave each other alibis (Masterman/Foscarelli, MacQueen/Arbuthnot, Miss Debenham/Miss Olsson), a coincidence that first led him to believe that there was no way all the passengers could be involved, but then to deduce that they all were. At this point he recalls a comment by Col. Arbuthnot about the value and importance of juries (Part 2, Chapter 8 - see "Quotes", p. 129), realizes there were twelve wounds in Ratchett's body and twelve passengers connected to the Arm-strong family. He visualized, he says, "a self appointed jury of twelve people who condemned him to death and were forced by the [circumstances] of the case to be their own executioners." With that, he says, the truth "fell into beautiful shining order" - a mosaic of lies and alibis and false evidence that explained everything. He suggests that each member of the "jury" passed into Ratchett's compartment through Mrs. Hubbard's, and that when his (Poirot's) presence on the train was discovered additional contradictory clues (the pipe cleaner, the handkerchief, the mythical woman in the red kimono) came into play. He adds that he suspects the kimono is the property of Countess Andrenyi, "'since her luggage contained only a chiffon negligee...", and presents the theory that when the Count and Countess protested that she had nothing to do with the murder, they were actually telling the truth. He suggests that because her connection with Ratchett (Cassetti) was the most easily discoverable, she truly did sleep through the whole thing and her husband took her place.

Poirot then goes on to suggest that if his theory about the Count and Countess were true, it would mean that the Conductor (Michel) was also involved. He suggests that Michel is in fact the father of the wrongly accused French maid who killed herself (Part 1, Chapter 8), and adds that he believes Hardman's connection to the family was his love for that maid. He cites Hardman's reaction to his (Poirot's) comments about the attractions of French women (Part 2, Chapter 15) as evidence.

Finally, Poirot comes to Mrs. Hubbard - who, if his theory is correct, "'played the most important part in the drama ..."' Her compartment was next to Ratchett's, she could have no alibi to rely on, and her "part" (her lies, the character she presented) was more challenging than that of any of the others. "'To play the part," he says, "'an artist was needed. But there was an artist connected with the Armstrong family - Mrs. Armstrong's mother - Linda Arden, the actress..."' Narration describes how Mrs. Hubbard, "in a soft rich dreamy voice, quite unlike the one she had used all the journey..." reveals the truth - that she is, in fact Linda Arden, that she and everyone else connected with the Armstrong household were distraught when Ratchett/Cassetti escaped justice, and that they all decided to take justice into their own hands. She describes how Col. Arbuthnot came up with the idea of the self-appointed jury of twelve, how Foscarelli had the idea of multiple stabbings, and how Miss Debenham and MacQueen worked out the details of how it would all unfold. She then describes how Michel became involved, how MacQueen and Masterman were gotten into Ratchett's employ, how MacQueen arranged for Ratchett to be on the right train at the right time, how everything was thrown into chaos by Poirot's sudden appearance, and how everyone decided the plan

had to go ahead regardless. Finally, she pleads for the blame to be put on her alone - she would, she says, have "stabbed that man twelve times willingly ..."" (see "Quotes", p. 253), and adds that the others have lives to live.

Poirot asks M. Bouc for his opinion. M. Bouc considers, and then suggests that Poirot's first solution is "decidedly" correct, and will be the one offered to the police. Dr. Constantine agrees. Poirot then withdraws from the case.

Part 3: Chapter 9 Analysis

The primary literary technique at work in this chapter is one applied to almost every book of the mystery genre - the detective's revelation of the truth. The technique and its application have, in fact, almost become a cliché - but when the truth is as emotionally and factually intriguing as the one revealed here, the use of such a cliché can almost be forgiven.

The main reason, however, that the application of the technique in Orient Express is so effective is that it's also thematically relevant. In terms of the book's primary theme, the nature of justice, this climactic section functions on two levels. First, the facts that the murderers were as determined as they were and as successful as they are suggests that moral justice is a profoundly important, essential, and irresistible manifestation of the human psyche. As Mrs. Hubbard/Linda Arden says, the self-appointed jury could have aborted the mission when faced with the potential of encountering legal justice was so strong that they decided to go ahead anyway. In other words, moral justice can't be suppressed. In short, the facts of the case (as Poirot defines them) are a manifestation of a spiritual truth - and, as such, develop the second level of development of the book's theme relating to justice. Because Poirot recognizes the murder as a manifestation of justice, he decides at the book's conclusion to support the alternative solution - he has become an agent/advocate of moral justice more than legal justice. In other words, a character is transformed not so much by story but by what the story's about - transformation as embodiment of theme, a technical component of many of the most successful and well regarded non-mystery novels.

In terms of the book's two secondary themes, the power of logic and the power of family, Poirot's lengthy story is itself a manifestation of the power of logic. In terms of the power of family, the facts of the story rather than the story itself do the work. The action of the murder develops and illustrates the theme, rather than the telling of the story.

There is one final irony in Orient Express, and as is the case with others of its principal ironies, it rests with the character of Mrs. Hubbard / Linda Arden. She's an actress being, at least to some degree, experts in the creation of what some might describe as realistic falsehoods, and others might describe as and outright, calculated lies. The irony in the final truth presented by the book, the revelation of the true identity of Mrs. Hubbard, is that she becomes an advocate for the novel's truth, the power of moral justice. In other words, a character who makes a living being (at least to some degree) false defines the ending of her story, and the stories of the others, by being true. There

is, perhaps, a glimpse of yet another secondary theme here - the complex, shadowy, elusive relationship between truth and lies. Mrs. Hubbard/Linda Arden tells the truth, and as a result, Poirot lies. Poirot lies, and Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot are free to live their truth. There is moral ambiguity here, but ultimately the necessity to resolve it itself becomes less important - a causer of pain has been prevented from causing more pain, and has received what many would agree is justice for having caused pain in the past. Surely, that is the larger concern. Poirot, M. Bouc, Dr. Constantine, the passengers / killers, and the author would all seem to agree. The most interesting question raised by the book, however, is whether the reader would, as well.

How many, of the thousands of mystery novels throughout literary history, can claim to have at least the potential to trigger that kind of (thought? questioning? moral uncertainty?) in those who probably opened the cover just wanting to be entertained?

Characters

Hercule Poirot

Hercule Poirot is the book's central character, a world-famous detective who solves the crime and whose presence on the train where the crime takes place causes the criminals to take extra steps to conceal their guilt. Murder on the Orient Express is one of several appearances made by Poirot in mystery novels by this author. In each book, he is portrayed with similar characteristics - among them eccentricity, a capacity for brilliant logic, a passion for order and symmetry, and a penetrating insight into human psychology. All that said, Orient Express contains a vivid example of his most striking characteristic, a combination of compassion and remorselessness, evident in varying degrees in most of the other books in which he appears but most manifest here. He is sympathetic to those who deserve it (such as Ratchett/Cassetti's various victims and those who survive them), coldly unsympathetic to those who don't (such as Ratchett himself), and prepared to temper his judgments about criminal behavior based on these opinions.

What's particularly interesting in ... Orient Express is that he displays both characteristics to the same individual at different times. Throughout the book, he is remorseless in his pursuit of the truth - his continued insistence on learning the truth from Mary Debenham about the meaning of her statements to Col. Arbuthnot is a particularly noteworthy example. Once he learns the truth of her situation, however, he is compassionate enough that he understands the reasons for both her statements and her actions - in the same way as he is understanding of the actions of all the passengers on the train once he understands their truths, their reasons for doing and saying what they did.

In short, while Poirot's presence on the train is described by one of the other characters (Princess Dragomiroff - see "Quotes", p. 116) as "destiny", he might more accurately be described as a personification of justice - not just justice as found in a court of law, but arguably, the true spirit of justice. By allowing the guilty parties here to go free, he is tacitly and compassionately agreeing with their contention that their actions resulted in the removal of a genuine danger to humanity from the world. He was a danger who had escaped true justice at least once and perhaps many more times.

M. Bouc, Dr. Constantine

M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine are Poirot's assistants as he conducts his investigation. Dr. Constantine provides valuable medical evidence, while M. Bouc, because he is a director of the company under which the Orient Express runs, makes Poirot's presence and investigations official. In other words, because M. Bouc is who he is, the passengers have no choice but to cooperate with Poirot. M. Bouc also functions, to a degree, as comic relief. His impulsive outbursts are often humorous - and even, at

times, lead Poirot to clever deductions. M. Bouc is also the first to suggest that the death of

Ratchett/Cassetti was perhaps justified.

Ratchett (Casetti)

Ratchett is the victim of the murder, the source of the mystery that anchors the narrative. He is American, and is described by Poirot as being somewhat animalistic (see "Quotes", p. 22). As Poirot investigates his death, it's revealed that he is in fact a notorious kidnapper named Cassetti, who escaped American justice after being unarguably implicated in the kidnapping and murder of a little girl, Daisy Armstrong.

The Armstrong Family

In the book's pre-story, the Armstrong family is victimized by the criminal Cassetti. Little Daisy Armstrong is kidnapped and murdered by Cassetti and his gang. Then, when Daisy's body is found, her pregnant mother Sonia is forced by the shock into premature labor, with the result that both the baby and Sonia herself die. Daisy's father, Colonel Armstrong, shoots himself out of grief, and a French maid, wrongly implicated in the kidnapping, kills herself. Cassetti is, directly or indirectly, responsible for five deaths. Various surviving members of the Armstrong family, as well as servants and friends, are the twelve self-appointed executioners who stab Ratchett/Cassetti to death.

Mrs. Hubbard

Most of the other individuals portrayed in the book have two aspects to their characters. The first is the personality they initially present, the second is the truth of who they actually are and of why they're on the train. In the case of Mrs. Hubbard, the presented personality is that of a talkative, silly, self-centered, American tourist. The truth is that she is the passionate, grieving mother of Sonia Armstrong, the famous actress Linda Arden. As Mrs. Hubbard, she plays a key role in defining the false story of the murder, telling of a mysterious man passing through her compartment at approximately the time Ratchett is killed. As Linda Arden, she is an instigator of the plot to kill Ratchett, a powerful believer that that plot is in fact a manifestation of true justice, and an emotional advocate for the freedom of the other participants in the plot. It is perhaps her passionate conviction that justice has in fact, and at last, been done that persuades Poirot to let her and the other conspirators go free.

The Count and Countess Andrenyi

These characters present the personalities of cosmopolitan diplomats - worldly, sophisticated, exotic, gracious, and under the murderous circumstances, a bit bewildered. In terms of their reality, however, the Countess, is discovered by Poirot to

be the younger sister of the tragic Mrs. Armstrong - in many ways a straightforward, passionate American and not nearly as exotic as she appears to be. She is the true daughter of Linda Arden, who presents herself as Mrs. Hubbard - the "performance" of the daughter is, in some ways, as necessary and as skilled as that of her mother. For his part, the Count is essentially who he presents himself to be - an aristocratic diplomat. He lies about the identity of his wife, but only to protect her

The Princess Dragomiroff

This character is, of all the passenger/suspects, is perhaps the most similar in terms of the personality she presents and the truth of who she is. In both cases, she is an elderly Russian aristocrat, willful and autocratic. When confronted with the truth by Poirot, she readily admits to having been a devoted friend of Linda Arden, and godmother to Mrs. Armstrong. She doesn't admit, however, to being a member of the conspiracy to kill Ratchett - the only point of disparity between what she presents and who she is. She is the first among the passengers to suggest that Ratchett's murder might be considered to be not such a bad thing, and also suggests that Poirot's presence on the train was fated (see "Quotes", p. 116).

Hector MacQueen, Masterman

These two characters present themselves as being in Ratchett's employ, which, indeed, they are. MacQueen is his secretary, and Masterman is his valet. The truth, however, is that they were both involved in the Armstrong household - MacQueen had strong feelings of affection and respect for Mrs. Armstrong, while Masterman was Col. Armstrong's man-servant.

Greta Ohlsson, Hildegard Schmidt, Antonio Foscarelli

These three characters present themselves as unconnected travelers - the Swedish Ohlsson as a missionary, the German Schmidt as a lady's maid to Princess Dragomiroff, the Italian Foscarelli as a used car salesman from Chicago traveling on business. In fact, all three were devoted servants in the Armstrong household. Ohlsson was Daisy's nurse, Schmidt was the household cook, and Foscarelli was the chauffeur.

Mary Debenham, Colonel Arbuthnot

These two characters present themselves as dispassionate British travelers, strangers to each other. Their true identities, however, are perhaps more complicated than those of the other passenger/suspects. Not only were they both affiliated with the Armstrong family (Miss Debenham as a secretary governess, and Arbuthnot as Col. Armstrong's best friend). They are also passionately in love, desperate to continue their relationship. A private conversation overheard by Poirot, in which Miss Debenham urges Col. Arbuthnot to restrain his passion for her until '"it's all over ..."' (Part 1, Chapter 1), is a

key question that throughout his investigation Poirot feels must be answered before he can uncover the truth.

Pierre Michel, Cyrus Hardman

These two individuals are connected to the Armstrong family through Susanne, the wrongly accused French maid who, out of despair at being suspected, kills herself. Michel is her father, and Hardman is the man who loved her. Michel presents himself as an efficient, businesslike conductor, while Hardman presents himself as a private detective hired by Ratchett to protect him.

The Unknown Conductor

This individual doesn't truly exist - he is a fabrication invented by the true killers to explain Ratchett's death (see Part 3, Chapter 9 for an explanation of his presence). This fabrication is nevertheless accepted by Poirot, M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine as a truth - they decide, for various reasons, that the actions of the passengers in killing Ratchett were justified, and agree that the story of the Unknown Conductor is the story that will be presented to the police who will inevitably be called in to investigate the murder.

Objects/Places

The Orient Express

The Orient Express is the setting for the bulk of the story, but is not a fully fictional creation. The real-life Orient Express was a luxurious train running from the Far East through Continental Europe, terminating in France. In addition to a powerful engine, it was made up of several coaches that were both added to, and destined for, various cities. It's on one of these coaches that both the murder and the investigation into the murder take place.

The Calais Coach

The Calais Coach is one of the previously described coaches attached to the Orient Express. It is, in fact, the first connected (in the Far East) and the last removed (in the port city of Calais, where passengers could make connections for England. It's in a compartment in this coach that the book's murder is committed.

Ratchett's Compartment

Ratchett's first class compartment in the Calais Coach is where the murder is committed, and where the body is found.

Mrs. Hubbard's Compartment

Mrs. Hubbard's first class compartment, also in the Calais Coach, is the temporary "home" of Mrs. Hubbard, one of the key witnesses to the murder, who is also one of Poirot's key suspects and is, in her true identity of Linda Arden, one of the murder's key instigators. Her confusion about the room's layout is a key factor in Poirot's unraveling of the truth.

The Burnt Note

The burnt note is one of four key clues found in the compartment of the murdered man. The note, whose mostly charred message is revealed by Poirot's investigations, reveals the murder victim's true identity and is the trigger for Poirot's ever-deepening understanding of the truth of the situation.

The Broken Watch

The broken watch is the second of the four key clues found in Ratchett's compartment. Apparently broken while one of the multiple stab wounds was being inflicted upon the victim, it sets the time of the murder at 1:15 AM. Poirot eventually deduces, however, that it was deliberately set at this time to steer him away from the truth - which is, as he points out in his final summation of the case, that the murder took place much later.

The Pipe Cleaner, the Handkerchief

The pipe cleaner and handkerchief are the other two key clues found in Ratchett's compartment. The pipe cleaner implicates Col. Arbuthnot, while the handkerchief implicates several of the women (it's eventually revealed to be the property of Princess Dragomiroff). Arbuthnot and all the women have tight, unbreakable alibis, meaning that the presence of these clues is for some time inexplicable. When Poirot reveals his solution, however, he claims that these clues were planted in order to create confusion in his mind and direct him away from the truth.

The Dagger

The dagger is the murder weapon, apparently discovered by Mrs. Hubbard in her sponge bag (which was hanging from a knob on the door connecting her apartment with Ratchett's), and which was apparently put there by the fleeing murderer. The truth, however, is that the knife was deliberately placed there by the actual murderers to provide evidence in support of their story of the false murderer.

The Conductor's Uniform

The conductor's uniform is a key component of the false story concocted by the true murderers to direct attention away from themselves. Found eventually in the luggage of Hildegard Schmidt, the uniform was (according to Poirot's first solution to the crime) a disguise worn by a disgruntled gang member who wore it to take revenge on Ratchett for some previous, unknown crime.

The Silk Kimono

The silk kimono is essentially a dressing gown or housecoat, worn by a mysterious woman seen by several witnesses at around the time Ratchett was murdered whose presence is intended to confuse Poirot about the sequence of events during the night. The kimono is eventually found in Poirot's own luggage (a circumstance which Poirot takes as a direct challenge to him to uncover the truth), and the detective eventually surmises that it is the property of the Countess Andrenyi.

Themes

The Nature of Justice

This is the novel's central theme, in that its action is based almost entirely upon the question of what true justice is, how it's served, and whether it's possible and/or right for it to be served by means outside the traditional justice system (police, lawyers, courts, etc). It explores the question of which is more valid - legal justice (as manipulated and eventually escaped by Ratchett/Cassetti) or human justice (as embodied in the actions of the ex-tended Armstrong family).

It's important to note that Poirot, ostensibly an agent of the first sort of justice, eventually becomes an advocate for the second. For him, legal justice becomes secondary when faced with both the magnitude of Ratchett's crimes and the entwined logic and passion of Mrs. Hubbard and the other self-appointed members of Ratchett's jury. This transformation of the central character's perspective combines with the comments of many of the book's characters (about the ultimate good being served by Ratchett being eliminated) to create the sense that the book advocates the belief that human justice is much more important. This is not to say that legal justice in this author's work is never validated - on the contrary. There are numerous occasions where killers in this author's work are remorselessly forced, despite attempts to justify what they did, into the traditional legal system - many times by Hercule Poirot. Murder on the Orient Ex-press, therefore, stands almost unique in Christie's work, and arguably in the entire canon of detective fiction, in that it allows the murder to be fully justified, the killer(s) to go free, and perhaps most importantly, the reader to agree with the novel's outcome.

Family

Manifestations of family feeling abound in Murder on the Orient Express, making it one of its key secondary themes. In the first place, the destruction of a family (the Armstrongs) is the core motivation of the action - the killers seek and administer justice for what has happened to those whom they loved whose lives were destroyed. In the second place, it's important to note that in this context, "family" refers not only to family-of-origin, although there are certainly members of that sort of family involved. Mrs. Hubbard and Countess Andrenyi are related by birth to the Armstrong family, while Pierre Michel (the Conductor) is related by birth to an equally tragic member of the Armstrong household - Susanne, the wrongly accused ladies' maid. Their feelings of pain and anger are, because they're family, completely understandable. The majority of suspects / murderers here, however, are not members of the family of origin, but are nonetheless bound to the Armstrongs by deeply wounded feelings of affection and devotion, sentiments that serve to make them family of the heart and soul, rather than family of blood. The thematic point made here is that family is, and can be, defined more by what people feel for each other than by how they are genetically related.

A secondary manifestation of this theme can be found in the references to Ratchett / Cassetti being a member of the Mob, or the Mafia - a "family" of organized crime. In this sort of family, the individuals therein are bound by violence and by desires for power and/or money. Individuals here are perhaps a family of blood, but of blood-shed rather than blood-shared. Finally, it might not be going too far to suggest that Poirot, M. Bouc and Dr. Constantine are themselves a sort of family. They are united initially by feelings of outrage that a human being has been violently murdered, then by their mutual desire to uncover the truth, and finally by their mutual agreement to cover up the truth of the case and present a false story to the police. They are arguably a "family" bound by justice - ironically enough, a similar sort of family to that gathered together by Mrs. Hubbard in her quest for justice to be done in the wake of the deaths of so many of her loved ones.

The Power of Logic

There are three manifestations of this theme in Murder on the Orient Express. The first, and perhaps more obvious, is the way logic (as practiced by Hercule Poirot) leads to the ultimate unraveling of the mystery and the revelation of the truth. Poirot sits and considers, thinking through all the stories and all the incidents, all the individuals and all the clues, systematically putting the pieces together to create a whole picture of the truth. It is, as M. Bouc says here (see "Quotes", p. 49) and as Poirot himself says in several other books in which he performs similar feats of logical deduction, the work of the "little grey cells" - detection as a process of the brain. A second manifestation of this theme can be found in the ingenious plotting of the murderers, specifically (as described by Mrs. Hub-bard when confronted with the truth) Mary Debenham and Hector MacQueen, who work out the details of how Ratchett's murder is to be safely committed. It's important to note here that while there are slips in their logic (the mistake about Mrs. Hubbard's sponge bag being the most notable), their plan is successful in that it accomplishes their goals - Ratchett is killed, justice is served, and those who executed that justice remain at liberty.

The third manifestation of logic in this book is, in fact, the book itself, with the logic on this level being that of its author, Agatha Christie. For a book's characters to be clever, the creator of that book has to be clever him/her self, and Agatha Christie was known over the course of her long career (and is still known today) for the complicated, generally surprising but usually thorough logic of her plotting. There are occasions in her dozens of books where she occasionally lapses, but for the most part the works of Agatha Christie are exemplary in their inexorable, inevitable, manifestations of a deeply logical, albeit mischievous, mind.

Style

Point of View

For the most part, the novel is narrated from the third person omniscient point of view, anchored by the perspective and experience of Hercule Poirot, its central character. In general, the reader experiences events and conversations from his point of view - s/he hears what Poirot hears and sees what he sees, clues and red herrings (false clues) alike. This is an effective narrative technique in a mystery novel such as Murder on the Orient Express, in that for the most part, the reader has exactly the same information as the detective (in this case Poirot), and has the opportunity to challenge him/herself to come up with the solution before the detective actually presents it. There are occasions in which Poirot has information the reader will likely NOT have - for example, his knowledge of the mercantile partnership of Debenham and Freebody, which leads him to realize the truth of what Countess Andrenyi is telling him (Part 3, Chapter 2). All in all, however, the novel's narrative perspective effectively draws the reader into its mystery, creating in him/her a powerful interest in finding out, to use the traditional phrase, "whodunit."

That being said, in the novel's initial chapters, there are a few occasions in which the narrative perspective shifts, for a few paragraphs or even a few lines adopting the point of view characters other than Poirot. Specifically, in Part 1 Chapter 1, there are moments at which the thoughts of Mary Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot are described in an unusual degree of detail (see "Quotes", p. 12). Any reader familiar with Poirot from the other mystery novels in which he appears will see comments such as this one as ironic almost to the point of being humorous - they will know that he is anything but harmless. The apparent purpose of these diversions, therefore, is to create in the reader the sense that Miss Debenham and the Colonel, and by extension the other passengers/murderers, underestimate Poirot because of his appearance. In other words, this brief shift in point of view is, in effect, ironically informing the reader that once again the guilty are mistaken -Poirot will, as usual, prevail.

Setting

The novel's setting is a key component in three ways. Firstly, by placing the action within the limited confines of a train, first moving and then stuck in a snowdrift, the author is limiting the scope of her explorations. Under these circumstances she is unable to, and evidently doesn't want to, explore much of the outside world - her attention is instead focused on the inner emotional/spiritual world of the characters. Yes, the narrative is anchored by an externalized event - a murder and the events of the investigation into it. However, like the detective conducting that investigation (Poirot), the author (Agatha Christie) finds the inner motivations and experiences of the characters to be much more relevant not only to the truth of the murder but the themes explored by the book. The limited con-fines of the setting also make the mystery itself,

its facts and the theories arising from the facts, more interesting. How, in this limited environment, is such a murder possible?

The third value of the novel's setting is metaphoric. In the same way as the passengers are trapped within the confines of the train and by the snow, they are also trapped by their grief, their rage, and their desire for justice. This idea is never explicitly developed by the author. In fact, it's only hinted at once - at the end, when Mrs. Hubbard pleads with Poirot to let the blame for the murder rest entirely with her. When she suggests everyone else only acted out of love for the Armstrong family, evoking pity for Pierre Michel and exclaiming that Miss Debenham and Col. Arbuthnot are in love, she is essentially implying that until they are released (both from the potential for criminal prosecution and from their obsession with justice), they cannot fully live, thrive, and be happy. This plea for freedom ultimately leads Poirot and the other investigators to support the first solution to the crime, a solution that will eventually enable the passengers to leave the confines of both the train and their pasts behind.

Language and Meaning

Language in Murder in the Orient Express is of key significance, most particularly in terms of its dialogue. Many of the clues that eventually lead Poirot to the solution of the crime are contained in what the characters say. Comments like Col. Arbuthnot's reference to juries (see "Quotes", p. 129), Schmidt's agreement with his suggestion that she is a good cook (Part 2, Chapter 14), and MacQueen's reiterations that Ratchett speaks no language other than English (Part 1, Chapter 6 and Part 2, Chapter 15) all play key roles in helping Poirot discover the truth. Another key use of language can be found in occasional narrative references to Poirot's thoughts, such as the reference at the end of Part 2 Chapter 7 to his distracted consideration of the grease spot on Count Andrenyi's passport. These are indications to the reader that there is something more going on than what has been presented - in other words, the author is drawing the reader further into the mystery by suggesting that this particular piece of evidence, like so many others, is not what it at first seems to be.

Finally, language is used to evoke a sense of the deeper feelings of the characters, the sense that what they say and what they appear to feel is not in fact the truth, or the depth, of what they're really experiencing. For the most part the characters are successful at concealing themselves - only the Princess Dragomiroff allows her true feelings to surface almost from the beginning. Later, however, as Poirot draws closer and closer to the truth, ALL the characters (almost without exception) become more and more forthcoming, albeit unwillingly. The use of language in this context evokes the sense of their deeply felt, long-suffered pain, a sense that reinforces the previously discussed idea (see "Setting") that the characters are, in some way, as trapped by their feelings as they are by the walls of the train and by the snow surrounding them.

Structure

The novel is structured along the lines of the traditional murder mystery - introduction of the setting, the characters, and the situation ... occurrence of the murder ... investigation of the murder ... final revelation of the truth. It's a template, or pattern, followed by countless stories of this genre. The virtue of this structure is that it tends to embody the theme of this and most murder mysteries - the inexorability of justice. Just as in the end of a crime novel the detective will reveal the truth about the crime committed, by following this structure the novelist is suggesting that ultimately justice will be served - in life as in literature. In most murder mysteries, even though the truth is shaped by the author to be something that the reader doesn't expect (a technique called the twist ending), revelation of the truth will inevitably lead to justice of the fully legal sort. In the case of Murder on the Orient Express, however, this classic structure has a profoundly ironic twist - justice here is not what the reader expects that it's going to be. In other words, structure here is itself a red herring, or false clue. Where the idea of justice being both legal and moral is reinforced by structure in most other detective stories, the idea of simultaneous legal and moral justice in Orient Express turns the reinforcing power of structure on its ear. Structure in this case may lead to truth, and may lead to moral justice - it may even lead to reader satisfaction with the ending. However, it doesn't necessarily lead to what the reader has come to expect from other stories following the template so intriguingly revised by Agatha Christie in what has become one of the most famous mystery novels of all time.

Quotes

"In spite of her preoccupations Mary Debenham smiled. A ridiculous-looking little man. The sort of little man one could never take seriously." p. 12

"'When [Ratchett] passed me in the restaurant ... I had a curious impression. It was as though a wild animal ... had passed me by ... The body - the cage - is everything of the most respectable - but through the bars, the wild animal looks out ... I could not rid myself of the impression that evil had passed me by very close." p. 22.

"'All around us are people of all classes, of all nationalities, of all ages. For three days these people, these strangers to one another, are brought together. They sleep and eat under one roof, they cannot get away from each other. At the end of three days they part, they go their several ways, never, perhaps, to see each other again." p. 27.

"'I know your reputation. I know something of your methods. This is the ideal case for you. To look up the antecedents of all these people, to discover their bona fides - all that takes time and endless inconvenience. But have I not heard you say often that to solve a case a man has only to lie back in his chair and think? Do that ... Lie back and think - use (as I have heard you say so often) the little grey cells of the mind - and you will know!'" p. 49.

"'...the elderly American lady is in what I might describe as a state, sir. She's saying she knows all about the murderer. She's in a very excitable condition, sir.'" p. 94

"'Hercule Poirot," [the Princess Dragomiroff] said. 'Yes. I remember now. This is Destiny.'" p. 116

"... [the] passport set out the Count's name and titles. [Poirot] passed on to the further information - accompanied by wife. Christian name Elena Maria; maiden name Goldenberg; age twenty. A spot of grease had been dropped some time by a careless official on it." p. 119.

"'...to judge of an Englishwoman is difficult. They are very reserved, the English. So I appeal to you, [Colonel Arbuthnot], in the interests of justice. What sort of a person is this Miss Debenham?'" p. 124.

"'Say what you like, trial by jury is a sound system.'" p. 129.

"'I have the little idea, my friend, that this is a crime very carefully planned and staged. It is a far-sighted, long-headed crime. It is not - how shall I express it - a Latin crime. It is a crime that shows traces of a cool, resourceful, deliberate brain - I think an Anglo-Saxon brain ... let us now ... see Miss Mary Debenham." p. 142.

"'...I, Mademoiselle, have my little originalities. I look first at my witness, I sum up his or her character, and I frame my questions accordingly. Just a little minute ago I am ask-

ing questions of a gentleman who wants to tell me all his ideas on every subject. Well, him I keep strictly to the point ... I see at once that you will be orderly and methodical ... you answers will be brief and to the point. And because, Mademoiselle, human nature is perverse, I ask of you quite different questions. I ask what you feel, what you thought.'" p. 145.

"'The impossible cannot have happened, therefore the impossible must be possible in spite of appearances.'" p. 156.

"'...if you wish to catch a rabbit you put a ferret into the hole, and if the rabbit is there he runs. That is all I have done.'" p. 183

"'We are cut off from all the normal routes of procedure. Are these people whose evidence we have taken speaking the truth or lying? We have no means of finding out - except such means as we can devise ourselves. It is an exercise, this, of the brain." p. 189

"'If you confront anyone who has lied with the truth, they usually admit it - often out of sheer surprise.'" p. 223.

" 'Nothing would surprise me now,' said M. Bouc. "Nothing! Even if everybody in the train proved to have been in the Armstrong household I should not express surprise." p. 232.

"'It wasn't only that he was responsible for my daughter's death and her child's, and that of the other child who might have been alive and happy now ... there had been other children before Daisy - there might be others in the future. Society had condemned him; we were only carrying out the sentence.'" p. 253.

Topics for Discussion

Debate the book's perspective on justice. Consider particularly Mrs. Hubbard's comments (see "Quotes", p. 253). Was Ratchett/Cassetti justifiably murdered? Would it be appropriate to call his death an execution? Did Poirot, the Doctor, and Monsieur Bouc make the morally and/or legally correct decision about the solution?

Debate the question of capital punishment and/or execution. Consider again Mrs. Hubbard's comments (see "Quotes", p. 253). Is the execution of a criminal such as Ratchett/Casstti, or any other repeat offender guilty of a series of life/soul destroying crimes, ever justified? Why or why not?

Consider and discuss what might move you to the extremes of action taken by the passengers on the Orient Express. What o you feel passionately enough about that you might take matters of law and justice into your own hands? What might you commit murder for? What are the moral implications of this act - would you feel justified enough to say you were innocent?

Obtain and view a copy of the film made in the 1970's from this book. Determine the differences between the two narratives. In what way are the changes an improvement? A detriment? Is the film ultimately true to the letter of the book (i.e. its facts and/or story)? Is the movie true to the book's themes?

Discuss the meaning of the comment made by Princess Dragomiroff about the presence of Poirot on the train (see "Quotes", p. 116). What point is she making? Is there a relationship between Poirot being described in this quote as "destiny" and in this analysis as a "personification of justice"?

Several times, the killing of Ratchett is justified by his self-appointed journey as being justified as it may prevent crimes similar to that of Daisy Armstrong's murder. In the criminal justice system, there is an element of this perspective - the "dangerous offender" status, in which criminals with a proven record of repeated behavior are imprisoned indefinitely to "prevent" them committing similar crimes again. Is such a legal perspective justified? Should habitual offenders be prevented, by any means, from possibly offending again - or does everyone deserve another chance to prove themselves a non-criminal, no matter what they've done or how many times they've done it.

Debate which aspect of the human psyche plays the more important role in this book - passion or logic. What is the relationship between the two that defines and/or motivates the murder? The revelation of the truth? Poirot's decision? Is, in fact, his choice to support the alternative solution based on logic, or on feeling? Does the reason for the choice make it right or wrong?