

**WESTPORT
COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE**

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S

**THE MURDER OF
ROGER ACKROYD**

ADAPTED AND DIRECTED BY
MARK SHANAHAN FROM THE NOVEL BY
AGATHA CHRISTIE



JULY 14 - AUGUST 1, 2026

STUDY GUIDE

THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD

Adapted for the stage by Mark Shanahan and presented by Westport Country Playhouse July 14 – August 1, 2026.

STUDY GUIDE

This study guide was designed to enrich students' experience of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* at Westport Country Playhouse. It provides context, analysis, and insight into Agatha Christie's inspirations, themes, and characters while highlighting elements specific to our production. The guide aims to deepen understanding, spark discussion, and help students engage more fully with both Mark Shanahan's adaptation and the unique artistic choices of our theatre's interpretation.

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc. www.concordtheatricals.com. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* received its first public reading as part of the Script in Hand Series at the Westport Country Playhouse in Westport, CT, on June 12, 2023. The reading was directed by Mark Shanahan, and the stage manager was Megan Smith. The cast, in order of appearance, was Santino Fontana as Dr James Sheppard, Isabel Keating as Caroline Sheppard, Arnie Burton as Hercule Poirot, Joe Delafield as Ralph Paton, Anna Simone Scott as Helen Russel, Tom Hewitt as Parker, Sharone Sayegh as Ursula Bourne, Anissa Felix as Flora Ackroyd, Kristine Nielsen as Gertrude Ackroyd, Richard R. Henry as Major Hector Blunt, Allen Gilmore as Roger Ackroyd, and John Rapson as Inspector Raglan. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* received its World Premiere Production at the Alley Theatre (Rob Melrose, Artistic Director; Dean R. Gladden, Managing Director) in Houston, TX, opening July 21, 2023. The production was directed by Mark Shanahan, with set design by Klara Zieglarova, costume design by Helen Huang, lighting design by Rui Rita, and original music and sound design by John Gromada. The stage manager was Rebecca R.D. Hamlin, and the assistant stage manager was Emily Bohanan. The cast was Christopher Salazar as Dr James Sheppard, Elizabeth Buncha as Caroline Sheppard, David Sinaiko as Hercule Poirot, Dylan Godwin as Ralph Paton, Melissa Pritchett as Helen Russel, Todd Waite as Parker, Skyler Sinclair as Ursula Bourne, Melissa Molano as Flora Ackroyd, Susan Koozin as Gertrude Ackroyd, Brandon Hearnberger as Major Hector Blunt, Shawn Hamilton as Roger Ackroyd, and David Rainey as Inspector Raglan.

SPECIAL THANKS

This study guide was generously supported by a 2025 Community Grant from the [Westport Rotary Club](#).

Production Supporters: Alison & Mark Smith

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CONTACT

Prepared by Maggie Meath, June 2026

WestportPlayhouse.com/Education

educationteam@westportplayhouse.org

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Theater Audience Etiquette

Welcome to Westport Country Playhouse! Attending a live performance is a special experience. Each show is unique, and every audience plays an important role in making it come to life. Whether this is your first time at the theater or one of many, here are a few tips to help you enjoy the performance and support the artists and audience members around you.

Image from Alley Theatre, starring David Sinaiko as Poirot. Credit: Lawrence Elizabeth Knox



- Please do not bring food or drink into the theater.
- Turn off all phones or anything that makes noise or lights up.
- No texting, please.
- Please talk only before or after the performance or during intermission.
- Remember that this is a live performance, and that in addition to being disruptive to your neighbors, unruly behavior can be heard by the actors on stage.
- Act with maturity during romantic, violent or other challenging scenes.
- Open your eyes, ears and mind to the world on stage. Theater has the power to transport us to another place; open your heart to that experience.
- When we enter the theater, try to look around. There are all kinds of cool posters from shows and interesting things to see. If you have questions about a show or our theater, just ask any Playhouse staff member, and they'll be happy to chat with you.
- Please don't take any photos or videos in the theater at any time.
- Enjoy the show!

Solving a Mystery

Seeing a mystery on stage is a unique experience. Unlike reading a book, you can't flip back to check a clue. You have to watch, listen, and piece things together in real time. As you watch this production, keep the following in mind:

Pay Attention to Details: Small moments matter. A line of dialogue, a glance between characters, or a seemingly unimportant object may become important later. Try to notice *what stands out—and what doesn't*.

Watch the Timing: When events happen is just as important as what happens. Pay close attention to references to time, especially on the night of the murder. Ask yourself: *Who was where—and when?*

Question What You Hear: Not every character tells the whole truth. Some may lie to protect themselves, while others may leave out key details. Consider: *Why might someone not be telling the full story?*

Observe Behavior: Hercule Poirot solves the mystery by studying people. Watch how characters react—are they nervous, confident, evasive? Sometimes behavior reveals more than words.

Look for Clues—and Red Herrings: Some details are true clues, while others are meant to mislead. Part of the fun is trying to tell the difference. Don't be surprised if your suspicions change as the story unfolds.

Enjoy the Mystery: You don't have to solve the case to enjoy the show—but you might want to try! Stay curious, keep questioning, and see how your ideas compare to the final reveal.

Challenge: Before the ending, decide who you think is responsible—and why. What clues led you to that conclusion?

Image from a production of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* at Florida Rep.



Glossary of Theater Terms

Act — A major division of a play, like a chapter in a book.

Aside — A short remark a character says to the audience that other characters don't hear.

Backdrop — A large cloth or background piece showing scenery.

Blocking — The planned movement of actors onstage.

Cue — A signal telling an actor or technician when to speak, move, or activate a tech effect.

Dialogue — The spoken lines between characters.

Director — The person who leads the creative vision of the production and works with actors and designers.

Ensemble — A group of performers who work together without one main star.

Foreshadowing — Hints or clues about events that will happen later.

Fourth Wall — The imaginary wall between performers and audience.

Ghost Light — A single light left onstage when the theater is empty, both for safety and as a long-held tradition to keep the space "alive" between performances.

House — The area where the audience sits.

House Manager — The person responsible for the audience's experience, overseeing front-of-house staff, seating, and safety during the show.

Monologue — A long speech spoken by one character to another character or the audience.

Parentheticals — Brief notes in parentheses show how a line should be delivered.

Prop (Property) — Any object an actor uses onstage.

Scene — A smaller division within an act, often marked by a change in time or place.

Set — The physical environment onstage that shows where the story happens.

Soliloquy — A speech in which a character shares thoughts aloud, usually alone onstage.

Stage Manager — The person who coordinates every element of a production, ensuring rehearsals, cues, and performances run smoothly from first read-through to final curtain.

Stage Directions — Written instructions about movement, behavior, or tone. Not spoken aloud.

Stage Left / Stage Right — Directions from the actor's point of view while facing the audience.

Understudy — An actor who learns a role and can step in if the main performer cannot.

Upstage / Downstage — "Upstage" is the back of the stage; "downstage" is the front.

Wings — The hidden areas just offstage where actors wait and scenery is stored before entering the playing space

FURTHER VIEWING

CHECK OUT [THIS VIDEO](https://youtu.be/sU6Ps6rjxII?si=ciyMd9pM93uNpOTa) FROM WCP'S THROWBACK THURSDAYS ON HOUSE MANAGER AND STAGE MANAGER ROLES AT A GLANCE: <https://youtu.be/sU6Ps6rjxII?si=ciyMd9pM93uNpOTa>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A Snapshot of Agatha Christie

Agatha Christie (1890–1976) is widely regarded as one of the most influential and best-selling authors of all time. Known as the “Queen of Mystery,” she transformed detective fiction through her clever plotting, memorable characters, and innovative storytelling techniques. Her works have sold over two billion copies worldwide and have been translated into more than 100 languages, making her one of the most widely read writers in history.

Early Life and Influences

Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller was born on September 15, 1890, in Torquay, England. She was educated at home by her mother, who encouraged her imagination and love of storytelling. As a child, Christie developed a strong interest in reading and creating her own stories, particularly mysteries and puzzles.

During World War I, Christie worked as a nurse and later as a pharmacy assistant. This experience gave her a knowledge of poisons and medicines that would later become a hallmark of her writing. Many of her fictional murders rely on carefully researched chemical methods, adding realism to her stories.

The Beginning of Her Writing Career

Christie began writing detective fiction during the war, and her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), introduced the world to Hercule Poirot, the brilliant Belgian detective who would become one of her most famous creations.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Christie became a central figure in what is known as the “Golden Age of Detective Fiction.” During this time, mystery novels were structured like puzzles, inviting readers to solve the crime alongside the detective.

A Revolutionary Writer

In 1926, Christie published *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, a novel that would become one of the most famous and controversial mysteries ever written. The book challenged traditional expectations of the genre by experimenting with narrative perspective and reader assumptions. While some early critics questioned its fairness, it is now considered a groundbreaking achievement in detective fiction.

Christie continued to push the boundaries of storytelling throughout her career, often playing with structure, point of view, and audience expectations.

Famous Characters and Works

In addition to Hercule Poirot, Christie created another iconic detective, Miss Marple, an observant amateur sleuth who solves crimes using her understanding of human nature. Some of her most well-known works include:

- Murder on the Orient Express (1934)
- Death on the Nile (1937)
- And Then There Were None (1939)

Her play *The Mousetrap* (1952) is the longest running play in the world, continuously performed in London for decades.

Personal Life and Later Years

Christie's personal life included both triumphs and challenges. In 1926, the same year Roger Ackroyd was published, she experienced the death of her mother and the breakdown of her first marriage. During this time, she famously disappeared for several days, sparking widespread public attention. The reasons for her disappearance remain unclear.



In 1930, she married archaeologist Max Mallowan. She often accompanied him on expeditions to the Middle East, and these travels influenced several of her later novels, which feature exotic settings and archaeological themes.

Christie continued writing into her later years, producing novels, short stories, and plays well into the 1970s. She was honored with numerous awards and was made a Dame of the British Empire in 1971 for her contributions to literature.

Legacy and Impact

Agatha Christie's influence on mystery writing is profound. She helped define the structure of the modern detective story, particularly the idea of the "fair play" mystery, in which readers are given the clues needed to solve the case.

At the same time, she expanded the genre by exploring how perspective and narration can shape truth. Her works continue to be adapted for film, television, and stage, introducing new generations to her stories.

More than a century after her first novel was published, Christie's writing remains widely read, studied, and performed. Her ability to surprise audiences while engaging them in the process of discovery is what makes her work endure.

HERCULE POIROT: DETECTIVE

A Snapshot

Hercule Poirot is one of the most famous detectives in all of literature. Created by Agatha Christie, Poirot first appeared in her 1920 novel *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and went on to feature in more than 30 novels and 50 short stories. With his distinctive appearance and brilliant mind, Poirot quickly became a central figure in Christie's work and a favorite among readers and audiences alike.

Poirot is known for his meticulous nature. He takes great pride in his appearance, often described as impeccably dressed, with a neatly groomed mustache that has become his trademark. But it is his intellect that truly sets him apart. Poirot solves crimes not through physical strength or dramatic action, but through careful observation and logical reasoning. He refers to this method as using his "little grey cells," emphasizing the importance of thinking deeply and paying attention to even the smallest details.

Unlike some detectives who rely heavily on physical evidence, Poirot is especially interested in human behavior. He studies how people speak, how they react under pressure, and what they choose to conceal. To Poirot, understanding a person's psychology is often the key to solving the mystery. This makes his investigations feel as much about character as they are about crime.

Poirot's background also shapes his perspective. He is a former Belgian police officer who came to England as a refugee during World War I. As an outsider in English society, he often notices things that others take for granted. His polite but direct manner, combined with his confidence in his own abilities, can sometimes make him seem unusual, or even amusing, to other characters. However, his results speak for themselves.

One of the defining features of a Poirot story is the final reveal. In many of Christie's mysteries, Poirot gathers all the suspects together and carefully explains how the crime was committed and by whom. These scenes are a hallmark of the genre and have influenced countless mysteries that followed. Poirot appears in many of Christie's most well-known works, including:

- *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934)
- *Death on the Nile* (1937)
- *The ABC Murders* (1936)
- The Murder of Roger Ackroyd

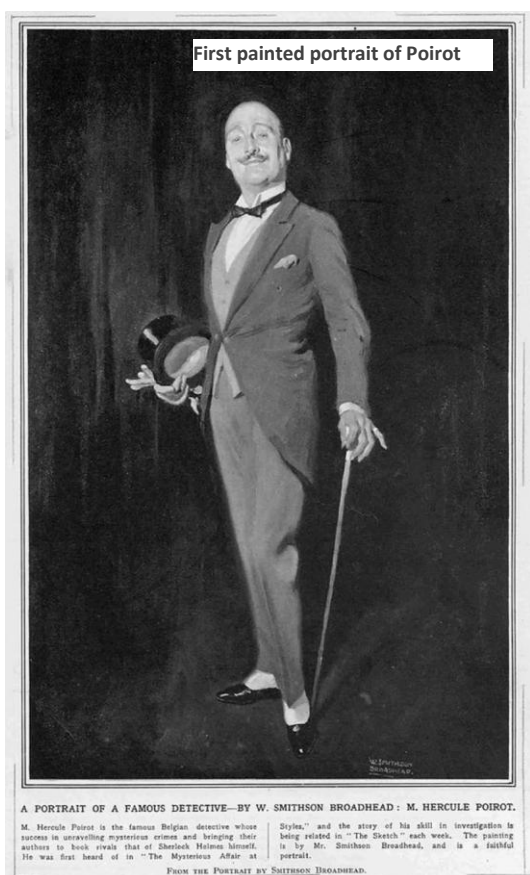
Each story presents a new puzzle, but Poirot's method remains consistent: observe, analyze, and uncover the truth.

Over the years, many actors have brought Hercule Poirot to life on stage and screen, each offering their own interpretation of the character. Among the most notable is David Suchet, who portrayed Poirot in the long-running television series Agatha Christie's Poirot from 1989 to 2013. Suchet's performance is often praised for its faithfulness to Christie's original description of the character and for capturing both his precision and his humanity.

Other well-known portrayals include Albert Finney, who played Poirot in the 1974 film *Murder on the Orient Express*, earning an Academy Award nomination, and Kenneth Branagh, who both directed and starred as Poirot in recent film adaptations such as *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017) and *Death on the Nile* (2022). Each actor brings a slightly different interpretation, highlighting different aspects of Poirot's personality, from his formality and precision to his humor and emotional depth.

What makes Hercule Poirot endure as a character is not just his intelligence, but his belief in order and justice. He seeks to restore balance when something has gone wrong, and he approaches each case with a deep sense of purpose. At the same time, Poirot is not without compassion. He understands that crimes often arise from complex human emotions, and his solutions sometimes take those complexities into account.

Today, Poirot remains a central figure in the mystery genre. Whether encountered on the page, on stage, or on screen, he invites audiences to look more closely, think more carefully, and question what they believe to be true, making every mystery not just a story, but an experience.



A NOVEL EVOLUTION

Cultural History of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

When Agatha Christie published *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* in 1926, it immediately stood out as something unusual, even controversial, within the popular mystery genre of its time. To understand why, it helps to look at the cultural moment in which the novel first appeared.

The Golden Age of Detective Fiction

The 1920s and 1930s are often called the “Golden Age of Detective Fiction.” During this period, readers were drawn to puzzle-like mysteries in which a crime, usually a murder, was carefully solved through logic, clues, and deduction. Writers like Christie created stories that invited readers to play along, gathering evidence and attempting to solve the case before the detective revealed the answer.

These stories followed an unspoken agreement between writer and reader: the author would “play fair” by including all the necessary clues, and the reader would try to piece them together. The satisfaction came from solving the puzzle or at least understanding how it was solved.

A Shocking Innovation

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd challenged that agreement in a bold and unexpected way. Without revealing details here, the novel uses a storytelling technique that caused many early readers to feel that Christie had broken the rules of the genre. Some critics argued that the solution was “unfair,” while others admired the ingenuity of the structure.

What made the book so groundbreaking was not just *who* committed the crime, but *how the story itself was told*. Christie shifted the focus from simply solving a mystery to questioning the reliability of the narrative itself. This move transformed the detective story from a straightforward puzzle into something more complex—an exploration of perspective, truth, and trust.

At the time, this was a risk. Readers were not used to having their assumptions challenged in this way. But over time, what was once controversial came to be seen as brilliant.

Changing Audience Expectations

As the novel gained recognition, it helped reshape what audiences expected from mystery stories. Writers began experimenting more with structure, narration, and point of view. The idea that a story could mislead the audience, not by hiding clues, but by shaping how those clues were presented, became an important part of modern storytelling.

Today, many books, films, and television shows use similar techniques, including unreliable narrators and twist endings. Stories that ask audiences to question what they are being told from psychological thrillers to crime dramas owe a great deal to the innovation of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

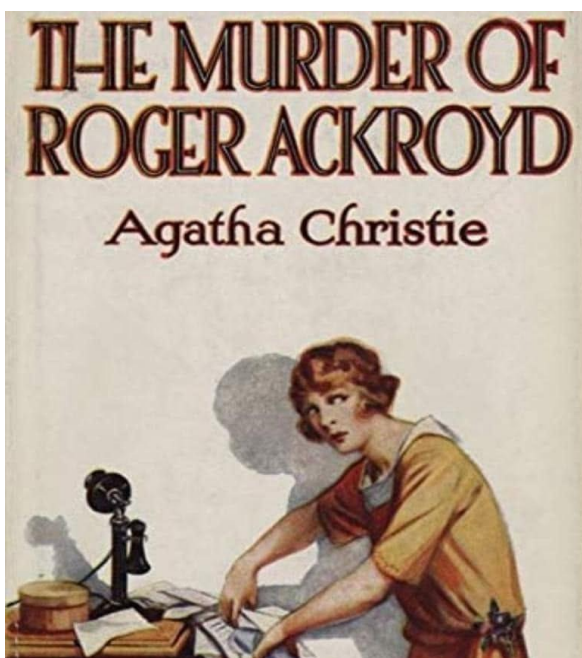
Adaptation and Performance

Over the decades, the story has been adapted into multiple formats, including radio dramas, television episodes, and stage productions. Each adaptation faces a unique challenge: how to preserve the novel's central twist while translating a highly controlled narrative voice into a visual, live experience.

On stage, this often means rethinking how information is revealed. Without the internal narration of a novel, playwrights must rely on dialogue, staging, and performance choices to guide the audience's understanding. This makes productions of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* especially engaging, as audiences become active participants in the mystery, watching closely for clues and questioning what they see.

Enduring Legacy

What began as a controversial experiment is now considered one of the most important works in detective fiction. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is frequently included in lists of the greatest mystery novels ever written and is widely studied for its structure and impact on the genre. More than a century after its publication, the story continues to captivate audiences—not just because of its clever solution, but because it challenges a fundamental question: **Can we trust the story we are being told?** That question remains just as relevant today as it was in 1926, making Christie's work feel both classic and surprisingly modern.



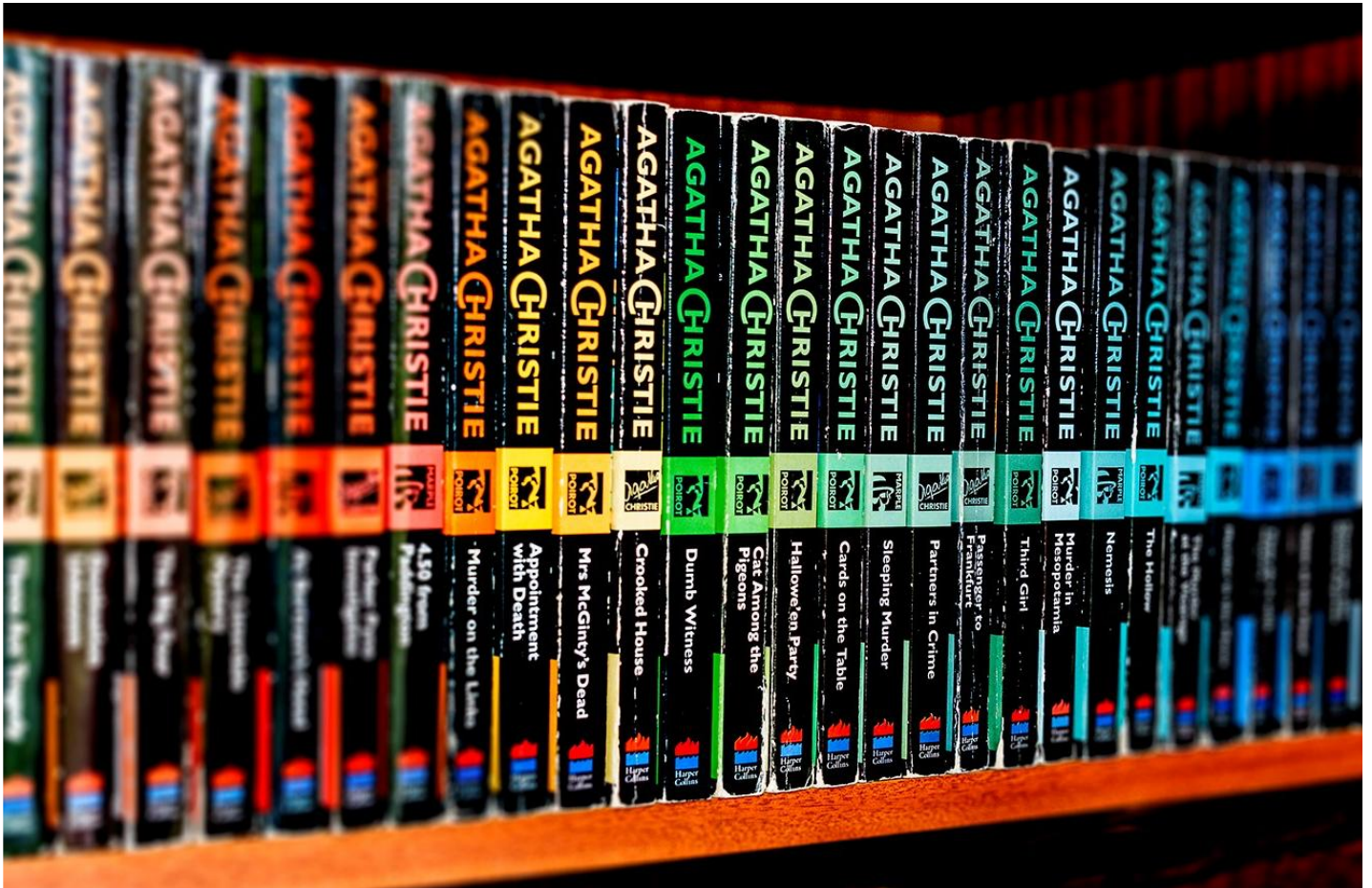
Original Book Cover



Recreation by Alley Theatre. Credit: Lawrence Elizabeth Knox

PAPERBACK READER: ON THE JOYS OF A CHRISTIE PAPERBACK

By Adaptor and Director Mark Shanahan

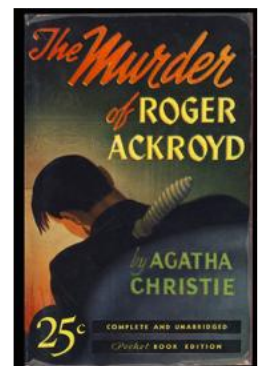


It's true you can't judge a book by its cover, but the cover of an Agatha Christie novel is often the perfect invitation to all that awaits you on the pages inside.

And what covers they are! Plastered with illustrations of bloody knives, poisoned cocktails, smoking revolvers, country mansions, vintage cars, Egyptian pyramids, romantic locomotives, stolen jewels, freshly dispatched and oh-so-well-dressed corpses slumped in armchairs, and a host of mysterious suspects looking awfully guilty of something devious...perhaps even murder.

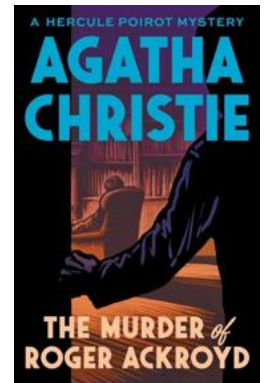
I recall that summer when, as a teenager, I happened upon a cardboard box of Christie paperbacks at a yard sale and, enticed by the intriguing covers, bought the whole box for a song. Like so many of you, I spent a summer devouring those books one after the other, taking imaginary trips to exotic locations and puzzling over Christie's intricate plots. Once hooked, it's hard to shake her spell.

Usually, Mrs. Christie's name on a cover takes up as much room as the title itself. After all, isn't she really the star attraction? Though her books have been published in all forms, from serialized newspaper installments to handsome first edition hardcovers, I've always been

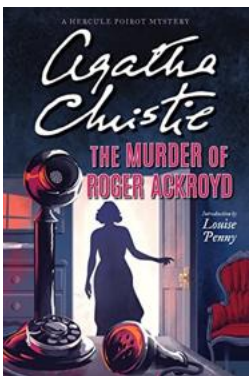


partial to coming across her novels as paperbacks, found casually thrown into a backpack or lying about a bedside table. They're fun to collect and revisit, even if you know the outcome, and can be a welcome respite as a cozy comfort.

Though the solutions to her mysteries are usually more than merely satisfying, I suspect that I have always cared less about "whodunit" than I do about the way in which Christie leads you to the conclusion of her tales. In her most classic stories, the author parades a colorful cast of characters before the reader and hides the clues to solving some wild crime in plain sight, often nestled amidst red herrings or delivered as a throwaway detail later revealed to be of colossal importance. Christie invites you to participate. She practically begs you to match wits with her, demanding you to consider the criminal potential which lies within us all. Even as her books are great fun, they manage to send a little tingle down the spine.



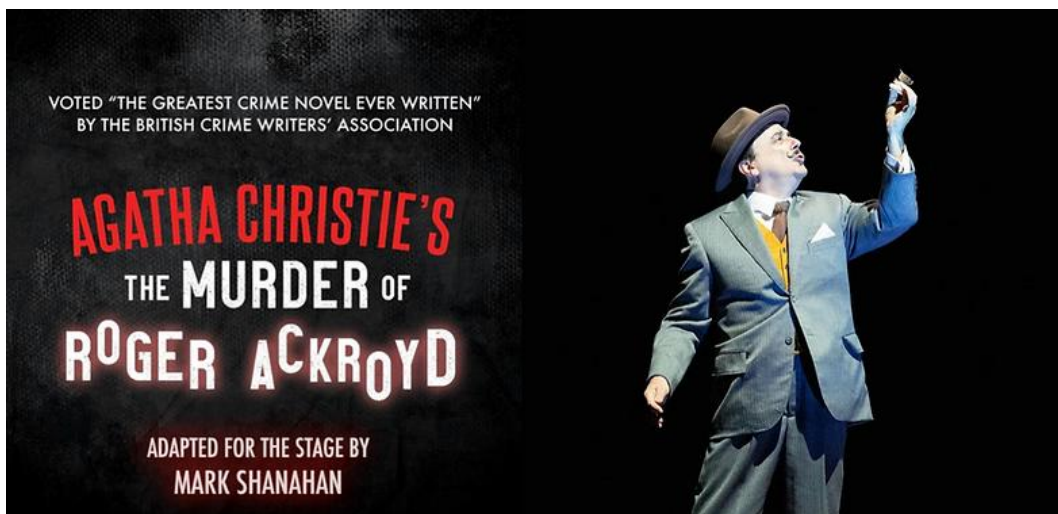
"I always play fair, with the reader" the author stated. And certainly, that is not to be argued. The mystery behind *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is laid out clearly and cleverly, and those final pages can still make a reader gasp with delight. I own several published editions of the book these days, from fancy hard-cover copies to dusty older printings to versions in languages I can't even speak or read. But I'll always treasure that first little paperback with Ackroyd himself depicted on the cover, done in by a Tunisian dagger.



The first time I read *The Murder Of Roger Ackroyd* was one of the great reading experiences of my life. As soon as I finished it, I instantly went back to the first page and started to read it again, eager to study how the author had managed such an astounding feat of suspense and surprise. There's no way to recapture that thrill after the initial reading, but over the years it's been a pleasure to hand someone the book as a gift and invite them to share the experience I once enjoyed. Adapting it for the stage was a labor of love as I attempted to honor the book while making it something uniquely theatrical. It has been a great joy in rehearsal to see Christie's characters spring to life onstage.

Perhaps, if you like our play, you'll decide to go to the bookstore and pick a Christie off the shelf, preferably the one with an appealing cover. Curl up in bed with it, chip away at a chapter over a lunch break, or feast on it as you travel, pretending to be aboard the Orient Express or a riverboat on The Nile. Dame Agatha will keep you in good company. And when you're done with your paperback, pass it along. We could all use a good, old-fashioned summer chill.

Article originally published by Alley Theatre, July 14, 2023



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

A Biography of Writer and Director Mark Shanahan

Mark Shanahan was named Westport Country Playhouse incoming artistic director for 2023-24. He assumed the position in February 2024. Since 2018, he has been the curator of the popular Script in Hand series, originated by Annie Keefe.

Shanahan is the writer/director of The New York Times Critics' Pick "A Sherlock Carol" (Off-Broadway Alliance nomination, Best New Play 2021), which he wrote as a sequel to his own "A Merry Little Christmas Carol". "A Sherlock Carol" played two seasons in New York and plays annually at London's Marylebone Theatre. He directed his own adaptation of "Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd," in partnership with Agatha Christie Ltd. in a World Premiere production at the Alley Theatre. Additionally, he is the author of "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," "See Monsters of the Deep," the Off-Broadway and regional hit comedy "The Dingdong," and numerous radio plays as creator of the White Heron Ghost Light series, featuring Christopher Plummer, Judith Ivey, Rhonda Ross, and other notable actors.



Shanahan has directed at stages around the country such as Alley Theatre, George Street Playhouse, Virginia Stage, Arkansas Rep, White Heron, Mile Square Theatre, Hudson Stage, Theatre Squared, Fulton Opera House, Weston Playhouse, Orlando Shakespeare Festival, Florida Rep, Penguin Rep, Merrimack Rep, The Cape Playhouse, and many more. As an actor, he has appeared on and Off-Broadway ("The 39 Steps," "Tryst," "The Shaugraun," and others) and at many celebrated regional theatres.

Shanahan has appeared on the Westport Country Playhouse stage as an actor in "Journey's End" (2005) "David Copperfield," directed by Joanne Woodward and Annie Keefe, (2005), "Sedition" (2007), "Tryst" (2008), and "Around the World in 80 Days" (2009) and over twenty Script In Hand readings. He has also directed his play "A Sherlock Carol" on the Playhouse stage.

During the pandemic, he was the creator of the Westport Country Playhouse Radio Theater, in partnership with WSHU Public Radio, and served as writer/director of the Playhouse radio adaptation of "A Merry Little Christmas Carol," and served as director of scripts commissioned for the series. For more, please visit mark-shanahan.net.

A List of Plays by Mark Shanahan

"The Dingdong (or *How the French Kiss*)" – Adapted from *Le Dindon*, by Georges Feydeau

"A Merry Little Christmas Carol" – Adapted from the novella by Charles Dickens

"A Sherlock Carol" – Based on characters by Charles Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

"See Monsters of the Deep" – From a concept by Mark Shanahan and Steve Pacek

"The Chronology Protection Case" – Adapted for the radio from the short story by Paul Levinson

"Whistle" – A short ghost play based on a story by M. R. James

ABOUT THE PLAY

A MURDER. A MANSION. A MYSTERIOUS CAST OF SUSPECTS. AND ONLY ONE MAN CAN UNCOVER THE TRUTH: HERCULE POIROT. AGATHA CHRISTIE'S THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD IS MORE THAN JUST A MYSTERY—IT'S THE GOLD STANDARD OF THE GENRE, WIDELY HAILED AS "THE GREATEST WHODUNNIT EVER WRITTEN." IN THIS NEW ADAPTATION BY MARK SHANAHAN, DAME AGATHA'S TWISTIEST TALE IS BROUGHT TO THE STAGE WITH ALL ITS CUNNING, CHARM, AND CHILLING SUSPENSE. SUMMON YOUR "LITTLE GRAY CELLS" AND PREPARE TO BE OUTWITTED.

Adapter's Note (from Mark Shanahan)



My grandmother always had a Christie on her bedside table. My daughter has several on her bookshelf, too. Agatha Christie's work transcends generations, gaining new fans with every passing year. Like so many others, I fell in love with her novels and plays as a teenager. One summer, I happened upon a yard sale with a cardboard box filled with Christie paperbacks and I bought them all. Those books helped make me a voracious reader. I have my favorites, of course, the ones to which I always return. But *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* will always be at the top of my list. It is, after all, the greatest whodunnit ever written. Adapting the novel for the stage was a labor of love. I've been fortunate to work on many of Mrs. Christie's plays as both an actor and

director, and I have learned a great deal from studying her wonderful sense of theatricality. To appreciate her as a playwright is to marvel at the economy of her puzzles, the parade of wonderful characters she introduces, and the healthy doses of both suspense and humor she routinely serves up at just the right moment. It is my hope that you'll find all of those elements in this adaptation, too. I am grateful to the good people at Agatha Christie, Ltd. for their faith in this adaptation. Additionally, I'd like to thank the Westport Country Playhouse where the play received its first public reading, and to the Alley Theatre for producing its World Premiere production. Most importantly, my gratitude to Dame Agatha Christie herself, whose stories have kept me riveted throughout my life, and whose spine-tingling mysteries continue to bring much joy to her ever-growing audience!

The Setting

Though many locations are visited throughout the play, the setting is mostly that of the main room at Fernly Hall. As the scene of the crime, it is, as Dr. Sheppard says, always looming, always present. Stage right, there is an entrance leading offstage to the front hallway and the east wing of the house. Within the main room, a set of French doors leads to a terrace with a garden. A handsome fireplace is nestled in a corner. Upstage centre, two doors open to a small, elegant writing room which contains a desk and chair, a window, and a second, more comfortable chair. These doors may open into the main room or be sliding pocket doors, so long as what is in the writing room can be fully seen by the audience. Stage left, an archway with a door leads to the west wing of the house. A rolling bar cart might be present should one wish to pour a drink. A small curio cabinet with a glass lid house of a set of prized objects and sits to the side of the room in plain sight. A stairway leads to Fernly's upstairs quarters, though this could be placed offstage in the front hallway and out of view. Sheppard's home can be suggested with the quick placement of a few nondescript chairs or benches, and perhaps a tea tray which can be taken on and offstage. The chairs, which may double as a part of Fernly's décor throughout the play, must be easily moved into place, effortlessly and quickly creating the confines of Sheppard's house. Simple, imaginative use of lighting can create settings such as the garden, the boat house, the woods, and various other locations for actors to appear during flashbacks, phone calls, and the reading of letters, all of which take place "elsewhere."

The Characters

DR. JAMES SHEPPARD – Our narrator. The local doctor for King's Abbot. Affable, smart and a good storyteller. A self-described "old fogey."

CAROLINE SHEPPARD – The nosey older sister of James. She prizes gossip above all else and uses it to her advantage whether it is correct or not.

HERCULE POIROT – The Belgian detective, in retirement.

RALPH PATON – Young and handsome, Ralph is Ackroyd's foster son. Wild, with a restless past, Ralph is a bit of a loner and hates his status as the ne'er-do-well foster child of a wealthy man.

HELEN RUSSELL – Roger Ackroyd's personal secretary. A stern and tight-lipped woman. She controls Ackroyd's personal and business affairs with a steady hand, while keeping secrets of her own.

ROGER ACKROYD – The wealthy businessman and lord of Fernly Hall. Ackroyd is an emotional man and the center of much attention in the town of King's Abbot.

FLORA ACKROYD – Roger Ackroyd's niece. Young, beautiful and willful. Though she has lived a life of privilege, she and her mother have fallen on hard times. She appears to have a warm and generous nature, though can turn suddenly cold when confronted.

MAJOR HECTOR BLUNT – A big game hunter and friend of Roger Ackroyd's who has come to stay at Fernly. A man who has lived all over the world, he believes he understands human nature better than anyone at Fernly.

PARKER – The butler at Fernly Hall. He is proper and seemingly meek at first glance. The job is everything to him, or so it seems. He often appears underfoot when you least expect him.

URSULA BOURNE – A young maid at Fernly. She possesses a strong backbone. Though often outspoken, she keeps much to herself and knows more about the comings and goings at Fernly than she is willing to admit.

GERTRUDE ACKROYD – Roger Ackroyd’s eccentric sister-in-law and mother to Flora. Flamboyant and overbearing, she resents her dependence on Roger Ackroyd.

INSPECTOR RAGLAN – An Inspector from Cranchester. Not the best of the lot, though seemingly well intentioned. But why can’t he see the obvious?

The Story

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd unfolds in the quiet English village of King’s Abbot, a place where routines are familiar and neighbors know one another’s business or at least think they do. The story begins in the wake of a shocking death that stirs unease throughout the community. Not long after, a second, more mysterious death occurs: Roger Ackroyd, a wealthy and well-respected man, is found murdered in his home.

What follows is not just an investigation, but a gradual unraveling of secrets hidden beneath the surface of village life. Nearly everyone connected to Ackroyd seems to have something at stake, whether it be money, reputation, or personal relationships, and as details emerge, suspicion shifts from one character to another. The case becomes increasingly complex, with new information raising as many questions as it answers.

Living nearby is retired detective Hercule Poirot, who had hoped to leave his investigative work behind in favor of a quieter life. However, he is soon drawn into the mystery, bringing his sharp eye for detail and deep understanding of human nature to the case. Rather than focusing only on physical evidence, Poirot pays close attention to behavior; what people say, what they avoid saying, and how their stories fit together (or don’t).

As the investigation progresses, the audience is invited to piece together the puzzle alongside Poirot. Clues are revealed gradually, and certain details that may seem unimportant at first begin to take on greater significance. At the same time, misleading information, known as “red herrings”, complicates the search for the truth, encouraging both characters and audience members to question their assumptions.

The tension builds as secrets are uncovered and relationships are tested. In a world where appearances can be carefully managed, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish honesty from deception. Each new revelation brings the story closer to its resolution, while also challenging what seemed certain before.

Ultimately, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is a story about more than solving a crime. It explores how truth is constructed, how perspective shapes understanding, and how easily we can be led to believe one version of events over another. As Poirot moves toward his final conclusion, the audience is left to consider not only who might be responsible, but how—and why—the truth has been hidden. As with many of Agatha Christie’s mysteries, the journey is just as important as the destination. The story invites careful attention, active thinking, and a willingness to question what is seen and heard—making the final resolution both surprising and deeply satisfying.

Scene-by-Scene Summary

Act I

Scene 1: *Life in King's Abbot*. Dr. James Sheppard introduces the audience to his quiet village and its residents. His sister Caroline shares local gossip, especially about the recent death of Mrs. Ferrars, which many believe was not accidental. Dr. Sheppard meets his new neighbor that has recently started growing vegetables! Miss Russell visits Sheppard's home to pick up medicine, but something more seems to be going on. This sets the stage for a world where secrets are hidden beneath polite conversation.

Scene 2: *Ackroyd's Secret*. At his home, Roger Ackroyd tells Dr. Sheppard that Mrs. Ferrars was being blackmailed. He has received a letter that reveals the blackmailer's identity—but he chooses to read it alone. He goes into his study and asks not to be disturbed.

Scene 3: *A Mysterious Stranger*. On his way home, Sheppard encounters a strange figure on a dark path near Ackroyd's house. The person does not speak and quickly disappears, creating suspicion that an outsider may be involved.

Scene 4: *The Urgent Phone Call*. Later that night, Sheppard receives a phone call from Parker, Ackroyd's butler, saying that Ackroyd has been murdered. Sheppard rushes back to the house.

Scene 5: *The Murder is Discovered*. Sheppard and Parker break into the locked study and find Ackroyd dead, stabbed from behind. The room appears undisturbed, and the letter is missing. The mystery begins: how did the murderer get in and out?

Scene 6: *The Investigation Begins*. Inspector Raglan arrives and begins questioning everyone. Early clues suggest:

- The murder happened around 9:30pm
- A possible intruder entered through a window
- A stranger may have been nearby

However, confusion quickly grows when Parker denies making the phone call that brought Sheppard back to the house.

Scene 7: *Conflicting Stories*. Different characters provide conflicting information:

- Parker claims Ackroyd was alive later than expected
- Flora says she saw her uncle shortly before his death
- Several people had reasons to want something from Ackroyd

Suspicion spreads as more secrets are revealed.

Scene 8: *A Possible Motive*. Sheppard explains that Mrs. Ferrars was being blackmailed and that the missing letter could reveal the criminal. This connects her death to Ackroyd's murder and gives investigators a clear motive.

Scene 9: *A Famous Detective Arrives*. Flora, worried about her fiancé Ralph, asks for help from Hercule Poirot. Though retired, Poirot agrees to investigate and begins examining the case more carefully.

Act II

Scene 10: *Secrets Come to Light*. Poirot interviews the suspects and discovers that many people have been lying, but not always about the murder. For example, Flora admits she lied about seeing Ackroyd alive in order to hide something she took from the room.

Scene 11: *The Timeline Falls Apart*. Poirot begins to question the timeline of events. He realizes that:

- The phone call may have been staged
- The time of death is uncertain
- Some "evidence" may have been misleading

The case becomes less about who had the opportunity and more about who controlled the story.

Scene 12: *The Missing Letter*. Poirot concludes that Ackroyd likely learned the identity of the blackmailer before he died. The murderer must have taken the letter to protect themselves.

Scene 13: *The Final Reveal*. Poirot gathers everyone together and explains what really happened. The murderer is revealed.

Scene 14: *The Conclusion*. Instead of exposing the murderer publicly, Poirot allows them to face the consequences privately. The mystery is solved.

John Rapson, Shereen Ahmed and Erin Noel Grennan. Photo by Mark Smith (WCP)



Glossary of Terms

Accede (as in “accede to your request”) - To agree to or give in to a request.

Alibi - Proof that a person was somewhere else when a crime occurred.

Authorities - Officials responsible for enforcing the law (such as the police).

Billiard room - A room where games like pool (billiards) are played; common in wealthy homes.

Butler (Parker) - Head servant in a wealthy household responsible for managing staff & serving meals.

Calls on my purse - Requests for money; financial demands.

Capital idea - An old-fashioned way of saying “an excellent idea.”

Disturb the body – To alter anything at a crime scene, which could interfere with an investigation.

Drawing room - A formal sitting room used for receiving guests.

Good Lord! - An expression of shock or surprise.

Hoax / Practical joke - A trick meant to deceive or amuse, often at someone else’s expense.

I fancy (as in “I fancy he is...”) - I think or believe.

Motive - A reason someone might commit a crime.

Odds and ends - Small, unimportant tasks or items.

Palpable - So strong that it can almost be felt physically.

Pigheaded - Stubborn; refusing to change one’s mind even when it might be wise to do so.

Prattle on - To talk at length in a trivial or annoying way.

Quarters - Living spaces for staff members within a large home.

Queer (as in “a queer feeling”) - Strange or unsettling. In this context, wrong or suspicious.

Scoundrel - A dishonest or morally bad person; someone who cannot be trusted.

Terrace - An outdoor paved area connected to a house.

Turned in (for the night) - Gone to bed.

Veronal – Barbiturate drug used as a sedative and hypnotic to treat sleep disorders and mental illness.

Notable Clue Language (Important for Understanding the Mystery)

“The letter had been brought in at twenty minutes to nine.”

A very specific time reference—timing is crucial in solving the mystery.

“Heard him... talking to someone”

Suggests another person was present—but may not be what it seems.

“The door was locked from the inside”

A classic “locked room” mystery clue.

“Footprints... shoes with rubber studs”

Physical evidence that may or may not be reliable.

STORY ANALYSIS

Clue Tracking Guide (Reading the Clues)

1. Opening: The “Ordinary Village” Establishment

What the audience notices:

- A calm, orderly English village setting
- Dr. Sheppard as a grounded, observant narrator figure
- Background gossip about Mrs. Ferrars’s death
- Roger Ackroyd as a respected, central figure in the community

What the audience is meant to think:

- This is a traditional, closed-circle murder mystery
- Mrs. Ferrars’s death is likely a tragic but straightforward suicide
- The story will revolve around uncovering external suspects

What is actually important (in hindsight):

- The normalization of selective information (not everything is fully explained or questioned early)

2. Mrs. Ferrars and the Blackmail Thread

What the audience notices:

- Mention of blackmail as a possible cause of Mrs. Ferrars’s distress
- Roger Ackroyd’s emotional reaction and concern
- The introduction of “a secret” that could implicate someone in the village

What the audience is meant to think:

- The mystery revolves around uncovering who blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars
- The blackmailer is likely connected to Ackroyd’s social circle
- This will be the central motive for the coming crime

What is actually important (in hindsight):

- The idea that *information is being withheld deliberately* by multiple characters
- The blackmail plot becomes a structural “decoy engine” for suspicion
- The audience begins assuming linear cause-and-effect (A leads to B leads to murder), which is later disrupted

3. Ackroyd’s Confession Scene (Before the Murder)

What the audience notices:

- Ackroyd receives a letter revealing the blackmailer’s identity
- He chooses not to read it immediately
- He isolates himself in his study

What the audience is meant to think:

- The murder will occur after the identity of the blackmailer is revealed
- The key mystery is *who the blackmailer is*
- The study becomes the “danger zone” where revelation and consequence will meet

What is actually important (in hindsight):

- The importance of *timing and controlled access to information*
- The study becomes a closed narrative space where events cannot be independently verified
- The idea that “what is not seen directly” will matter more than what is seen

4. The Locked Room Discovery

What the audience notices:

- Ackroyd is found dead in a locked room
- The letter is missing
- No clear entry or exit is obvious

What the audience is meant to think:

- Classic locked-room mystery mechanics are at play
- The solution will involve a hidden door, trick entrance, or overlooked physical detail
- The murderer must be someone with physical access and opportunity

What is actually important (in hindsight):

- Attention is pulled toward “how could this happen?” rather than “how is the story being told?”
- The missing letter becomes a symbol of controlled information removal

5. Poirot Begins Investigation

What the audience notices:

- Hercule Poirot interviews suspects
- Multiple characters have plausible motives
- Timelines and alibis begin to feel complicated

What the audience is meant to think:

- Poirot is the objective anchor of truth
- The solution will come from logical deduction of physical evidence
- Every character is a potential suspect

What is actually important (in hindsight):

- The audience is encouraged to treat all testimony as equally valid—even though it isn’t
- The structure trains the viewer to trust procedural investigation over narrative framing

6. Red Herrings and Social Suspicion Phase

What the audience notices:

- Multiple characters acting suspiciously or emotionally
- Hidden relationships and financial tension
- Contradictory statements from witnesses

What the audience is meant to think:

- One of these suspects must be the murderer
- The solution lies in identifying inconsistencies
- The most emotionally unstable or secretive characters are most likely guilty

What is actually important (in hindsight):

- Christie is deliberately distributing suspicion evenly to prevent focus
- Emotional “clues” are often more misleading than factual ones
- The audience is being trained to misallocate attention

7. Timeline Breakthroughs

What the audience notices:

- Poirot questions exact timing of events
- Certain accounts don't fully align
- Small inconsistencies begin to matter more

What the audience is meant to think:

- The solution is hidden in reconstructing the correct timeline
- Someone has lied about where they were
- A technical flaw in the alibi system will reveal the murderer

What is actually important (in hindsight):

- The structure of truth itself is becoming unstable

8. Final Reveal Setup

What the audience notices:

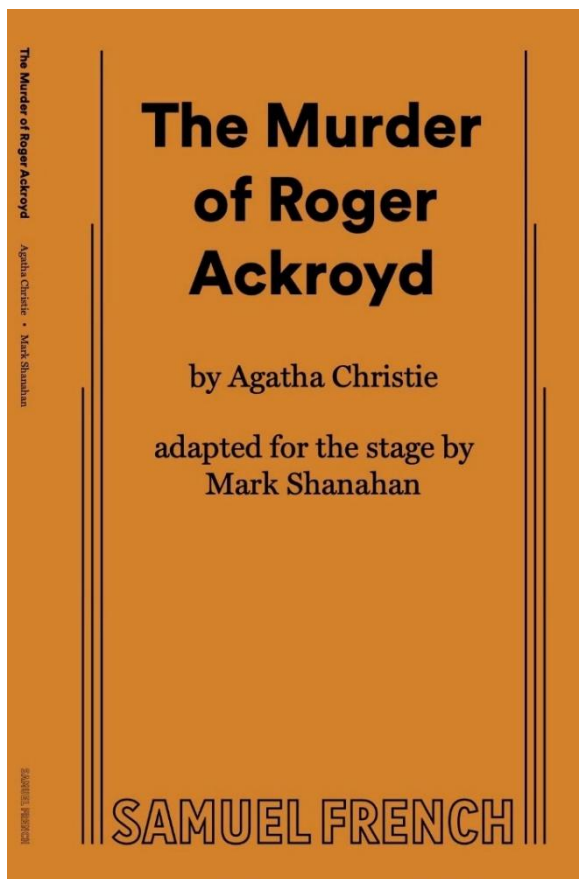
- Poirot gathers everyone for explanation
- He reconstructs events in a precise sequence
- The narrative suddenly feels fully clarified

What the audience is meant to think:

- All confusion will now be resolved logically
- The final suspect will be one of the established characters
- Everything has been fairly laid out for deduction

What is actually important (in hindsight):

- The audience is being guided to re-evaluate everything they believed



WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

Westport Country Playhouse is a nationally recognized, not-for-profit, professional theater under the artistic direction of Mark Shanahan and management leadership of Beth Huisking. The mission of Westport Country Playhouse is to, through the art of theater, bring stories to life that reexamine our own experiences, shine a light on those that have been ignored, and ensure a space for those yet to be told.

Originally built in 1835 as a tannery manufacturing hatters' leathers, it became a steam powered cider mill in 1880, later to be abandoned in the 1920s. Splendidly transformed into a theater in 1931, it initially served as a try-out house for Broadway transfers, evolving into an established stop on the New England straw hat circuit of summer stock theaters through the end of the 20th century. Following a multi-million-dollar renovation completed in 2005, the Playhouse became a state-of-the-art producing theater, preserving its original charm and character.

Today, the not-for-profit Westport Country Playhouse serves as a cultural nexus for patrons, artists and students and is a treasured resource for the State of Connecticut. There are no boundaries to the creative thinking for future seasons or the kinds of audiences and excitement for theater that Westport Country Playhouse can build.

Land Acknowledgement

The Playhouse sits on land once forcibly taken from the Paugussett people.

The Westport Country Playhouse acknowledges the indigenous peoples and nations of the Paugussett that stewarded the land and waterways of Westport, Connecticut. We honor and respect the enduring relationship that exists between these peoples and nations and this land.

It is our goal to do more than just print the words above. We want to understand the history of this land long before the theater opened in 1931, and long before the barn was built as a tannery in 1865.

In September 2020, we began our research into the history and displacement of the indigenous people of Connecticut. We wish to form an ongoing relationship with these peoples and current tribal communities. Our goal is to be able to honor their cultural heritage as well as their present-day stories.

We will be sharing what we learn with the Playhouse family. We welcome all to join us on this path and help us build a stronger community in the future.

If you would like to learn more about the land you sit on as you read this, visit [Native Land Digital](#).

Meet the Cast



Shereen Ahmed (Flora Ackroyd) Broadway/National Tour: Eliza in Lincoln Center Theater's *My Fair Lady* (LA Critics Circle Nomination). Off-Broadway/Regional: Claudia in *Nine* (Kennedy Center), Franca in *The Light in the Piazza* (City Center Encores!), Adele in *A Man of No Importance* (Classic Stage Company), Ellen in *The Age of Innocence* (The Old Globe, Arena Stage). Concerts: Grand Egyptian Museum Opening Ceremony; the White House; Joan in *Strike Up the Band* and *Iolanthe* in *Iolanthe* at Carnegie Hall. TV & Media: *Law & Order: SVU*, *New Amsterdam*, PBS's *Eyes of the World* with the Boston Pops. Inducted into the Hall of Fame of Prominent Egyptian Americans at the U.S. Embassy Cairo. Profiled in *Vogue Arabia* and named one of the "40 Under 40" accomplished Arab Americans in the US. @shereen_ahmed



Anthony Cochrane (Hercule Poirot) Cochrane is delighted to make his Westport Country Playhouse debut. Select credits include BROADWAY: *The Audience*, *War Horse*, *The Coast of Utopia*, *Cymbeline*. OFF-BROADWAY: *Corruption* (LCT). Nikolai and the Others (LCT), PlayOn Shakespeare Festival (CSC), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Aquila Theatre), and 12 years with the Aquila Theatre Company. REGIONAL: Yale Rep / The Old Globe / Papermill Playhouse / George St. Playhouse / Connecticut Rep / Repertory Theatre of St. Louis / Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey / La Jolla Playhouse / The Folger Library / Syracuse Stage / Alabama Shakespeare Festival. UK: *The Broken Heart*, *The Wives' Excuse*, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Ceaser* (Royal Shakespeare Company). In his career, Cochrane has played over 25 Shakespeare roles. TV: *The Good Fight* / *Blue Bloods* / *Pose* / *The Blacklist* / *Law & Order: SVU* / *Taggart* / *Nowhere*. 2025 Lunt-Fontanne Fellow.



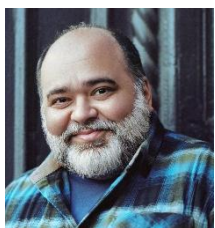
Joe Delafield (Ralph Paton) Westport Country Playhouse: Richard Hannay in *The 39 Steps*, A Sherlock Carol, Valère in *The School for Husbands* and the Script in Hand playreading of *Christmas at Pemberley* and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Joe has been seen on Broadway as Damis in *Tartuffe* (Roundabout) and Off-Broadway in *Fashions for Men* (Mint), *Outward Bound*, *Theophilus North*, and *The Breadwinner* (Keen Company). Regionally, he has performed at the Guthrie, the Alley Theater, Pittsburgh Public, Virginia Stage Company, La Mirada, the Odyssey, the Fountain, Florida Rep, Hudson Stage, the White Heron, and LA's Antaeus Company. TV/Film credits include "The Sopranos," "All My Children," *Filmmic Achievement*, and *Company K*. Joe holds a BA from Columbia University and an MFA from NYU's Graduate Acting Program.



Allen Gilmore (Inspector Raglan) Allen was recently a cover in *PRINCE FAGGOT* at Studio Seaview in New York City and was seen at McCarter Theater as Voltaire in *LEGACY OF LIGHT* by Karen Zacarias. He played the title role of *MALVOLIO* by Betty Shamieh in the world premiere production at Classical Theater of Harlem. And in the previous season at CTH, he was Malvolio in *TWELFTH NIGHT*. Originally from Houston, he is a US Army Infantry veteran, a 3Arts Prize recipient, a Lunt-Fontanne Fellow, and a proud member of Congo Square Theater Ensemble.



Erin Noel Grennan (Caroline Sheppard) was honored with a Connecticut Critics Circle award for her performance as Olga in *Theatre People* at WCP, where she also appeared in the Script in Hand production of *The Outsider*. Regional credits: *The Angel Next Door* (Northlight Theatre), *The Outsider* (Paper Mill, NJ Arts Award); *Reckless*, *Incident at Our Lady of Perpetual Help* (Cincinnati Playhouse); Chicago Shakespeare; *Geva*; *Mercury*; *Boarshead*; *Drury Lane*; eight seasons at Peninsula Players; three seasons at Gaiety Theatre, Ireland. Erin's play, *Beside Myself*, co-written with Paul Slade Smith, premiered last fall at Laguna Playhouse. TV/Film: "The Other Two", "Dr. Death", "Bull", "Law & Order", "L&O: SVU", "Equalizer", "Blue Bloods", "FBI", "Chicago Med", "Chicago Fire", umpteen commercials, and the upcoming film "Run Amok".



Richard Ruiz Henry (Major Hector Blunt) returns to Westport after appearing in Room Service (2013), directed by Mark Lamos and several Script in Hand readings. Off-Broadway: The Two Gentlemen of Verona (The Public Theater), Drift (New World Stages), Streets of New York (Irish Repertory Theatre), Fiorello (Encores!). Regional: Theater People (Nantucket PAC); Oliver! (Goodspeed Musicals); Ragtime, The Pirates of Penzance (Utah Shakespeare Festival); The Two Gentlemen of Verona (Old Globe); Cyrano, The Winter's Tale (Folger Shakespeare); Guys and Dolls, Come From Away (Milwaukee Rep); Twelfth Night (Pig Iron); A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder (Florida Studio Theater); The Music Man (Guthrie); The Tempest (Roundhouse Theater); Disney's The Hunchback of Notre Dame (La Jolla/Papermill/cast recording). National tours: Urinetown, Sweet Charity, Man of La Mancha, and Jesus Christ Superstar. Television: The Other Two, The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel, Younger, Girls5Eva, Search Party, Bupkis, YOU, Law & Order, Adults, and The Chair Company for HBO.



Tom Hewitt (Parker) Tom has appeared in 13 Broadway shows including Hadestown, Chicago, Lion King, Jesus Christ Superstar and The Rocky Horror Show (Tony and Drama Desk nominations). Off Broadway includes Aaron Marks' Another Medea, Heartbreak House, Treasure Island and Jefferly. National tours include Chicago, Finding Neverland, Dirty Rotten Scoundrels and Urinetown. Recent regional credits: Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil (Goodman Theatre world premier) Another Medea (Provincetown), The Sting (Papermill), I Hate Hamlet (Bucks County) My Paris, Travesties and Private Lives (Longwharf). TV and film includes Law and Order, Elementary and Julie Taymors' Fools' Fire



John Rapson (Dr. James Sheppard) is over the moon to be back onstage at his beloved Westport Country Playhouse...and in the glorious company of Mark Shanahan and Dame Agatha Christie! WCP credits include: They Made it a Musical, 3 Script in Hand readings, and a sold-out evening of his one-man show: The Hollow. Broadway: Sweeney Todd (Beadle Bamford), Ragtime (J.P. Morgan), Les Miserables (Grantaire). Off Broadway: The Play That Goes Wrong, Sweeney Todd, Wonderful Town and Between the Lines. John originated the role of the D'Ysquith Family on the first national tour of A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder. Regional credits include Asolo Rep, Goodspeed Musicals, Berkeley Rep, Broadway Sacramento and Amphibian Stage. John is a graduate of the University of Michigan.



Nicole Shalhoub (Helen Russel) Broadway: China Doll. Off Bway: The Play Co., Lincoln Center, The Mint, St. Ann's Warehouse. Regional: Berkeley Rep, The Kirk Douglas CTG, South Coast Rep, Yale Rep, The Goodman, Hartford Stage, Lookingglass, American Repertory Theater, Williamstown Theater Festival, KC Rep. TV/Film: Law & Order: Organized Crime and Evil, FBI, Goosebumps, Tulsa King, Blue Bloods, The Good Fight, The Village, Elementary, Seal Team, Bull, Madame Secretary, The Gaffigan Show, New Girl, The Mentalist, Legends, Scandal, The Good Wife, Sex & The City 2, The International, Wetware. Insta @nicshal



Mark Silence (Roger Ackroyd) Mark was recently seen on the WCP stage as Lane and Merriman in The Importance of Being Earnest. Previous experience at WCP was as a Fight Director and Choreographer, creating violent action in plays such as Dinner With Friends, Sing For Your Shakespeare, Lips Together Teeth Apart, and Happy Days. Mark is an adjunct professor at The University of Hartford and The Norwalk Conservatory of the Arts.



Katy Tang (Ursula Bourne) is beyond thrilled to return to Westport Playhouse, after making her debut as Gwendolyn Fairfax in The Importance of Being Earnest. She has recently been seen as Phoebe in A Gentleman's Guide to Love & Murder (Laguna Playhouse), other regional credits: Don't Dress for Dinner, Pippin, The Cherry Orchard, The Remarkable Mister Holmes (NCRT), Sweeney Todd, She Loves Me (SCR), Marry Me a Little (ICT), Candide (San Bernardino Symphony), A Little Night Music (EWP), and Spring Awakening (Cygnets). Internationally: Le Nozze di Figaro (Italy), Werther, Orphée et Eurydice (France). Tang trained at UCLA and École Normale de Musique, Paris. Big thanks to Mark & all at the Playhouse!

Represented @infin8artists. For Janet.



Karen Ziemba KAREN ZIEMBA received the Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Award for her performance in CONTACT at Lincoln Center Theatre. For some other stage appearances she's been honored with three Tony nominations, the Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk, and Chicago's JEFF Awards. Select Theatre: MASTER CLASS, DOUBT, MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION, BROADWAY BOUND, BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS, MRS. WARREN'S PROFESSION, PRINCE OF BROADWAY, CURTAINS, STEEL PIER, AND THE WORLD GOES 'ROUND, CRAZY FOR YOU, CHICAGO, A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC, SWEENEY TODD, 110 IN THE SHADE, and HELLO DOLLY! TV: The Blacklist, Elementary, Madam Secretary, The Good Wife, Law and Order C.I. & S.V.U., The Kennedy Center Honors, PBS' Great Performances.

 SHEREEN AHMED* IS FLORA ACKROYD	 ANTHONY COCHRANE* IS HERCULE POIROT	 JOE DELAFIELD* IS RALPH PATON	 ALLEN GILMORE* IS INSPECTOR RAGLAN
 ERIN NOEL GRENNAN* IS CAROLINE SHEPPARD	 RICHARD RUIZ HENRY* IS MAJOR HECTOR BLUNT	 TOM HEWITT* IS PARKER	 JOHN RAPSON* IS DR. JAMES SHEPPARD
 NICOLE SHALHOUB* IS HELEN RUSSELL	 MARK SILENCE IS ROGER ACKROYD	 KATY TANG* IS URSULA BOURNE	 KAREN ZIEMBA* IS GERTRUDE ACKROYD

FIND OUT WHODUNNIT.

*MEMBER OF ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION

Meet the Creative Team

Charlie Corcoran (Scenic Design) New York designs include: The Friel Trilogy (Hewes Design Award nomination), Endgame, A Touch of the Poet (Hewes Design Award nomination), The O'Casey Cycle (Henry Hewes Design Award), and The Emperor Jones (Hewes Design Award nomination)-(Irish Rep); Billy and Ray (Vineyard Theatre); The Marriage of Figaro(Juilliard) Regional theatre designs include: A Comedy of Tenors (Outer Critics Circle Award, Cleveland Playhouse); Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike (Goodman Theatre); The Marriage of Figaro (McCarter Theatre); Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (Two River Theater); Without Walls (Center Theatre Group); The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee (Bucks County Playhouse); Doubt (Westport Country Playhouse); Opera designs include: Il Trovatore(Houston Grand Opera); Fidelio (Santa Fe Opera); Così fan tutte (co-production with the Metropolitan Opera and Juilliard); La Calisto (Glimmerglass Opera); Don Giovanni (Juilliard); The Turn of the Screw (Opera Columbus); and The Magic Flute (Santa Barbara). Television designs include: Project Runway, Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, Madam Secretary, The Equalizer, Dead City, The Four Seasons.

John Gromada (Sound Designer) is a composer and sound designer for theater, film, and radio. Composer/designer for 40+ Broadway plays and hundreds of Off-Bway and regional theater productions in Connecticut and around the nation. Gromada is the recipient of three Drama Desk Awards, the Lortel and Obie Awards, and received a Tony nomination for his work on The Trip to Bountiful, which he also scored for Lifetime's subsequent television movie. His work can also be heard also now at Hartford Stage in A Christmas Carol, A Ghost Story of Christmas and in Chazz Palminteri's concert film of A Bronx Tale, which will soon be in theatres and streaming. Since the pandemic, he has also been producing radio drama for theaters and radio stations around the nation, including A Merry Little Christmas Carol for Westport Country Playhouse and the White Heron Radio Ghost Light Series, and several dramas for Audible.com.



Jeni Schaefer (Costume Designer) is the Director of Design and Resident Costume Designer at the Virginia Stage Company in Norfolk Va. Regional credits include: The 39 Steps at the Westport Country Playhouse and White Heron Theatre, A Christmas Story at Arkansas Repertory Theatre, Hound of the Baskervilles at The Hangar, Theatre Squared and White Heron Theatre, Always...Patsy Cline PCPA Theatrefest, World premiere of Tom Jones for Florida Studio Theatre. A few favorite VSC designs include; Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Wait until Dark, Emma, Little Shop of Horrors, A Merry Little Christmas Carol, A Sherlock Carol, The Three Musketeers, Dial M for Murder, The 39 Steps, The Hobbit, Every Brilliant Thing, Sense and Sensibility, Matilda, Fun Home and The Hound of the Baskervilles.

Kevin Jinghong Zhu (Production Stage Manager, he/him) is a New York-based stage manager. His past WCP credits include Dial M for Murder, Kim's Convenience, The Goldsmith, The Pancake Club, and The Shark Is Broken. NYC credits include Broadway: To Kill a Mockingbird. Selected Off-Broadway: Ma-Yi, Classic Stage, Transport Group, NAATCO, Yangtze Rep, Heartbeat Opera, PAC NYC, MTC, Soho Rep, Noor, and Pan Asian. Other selected regional credits include Asolo Rep, Arizona Theatre Company, WCP, the O'Neill, Seattle Rep, McCarter, Yale Rep, Long Wharf, Signature (DC), and WAM. MFA: Yale School of Drama. bit.ly/kevinjzhu

Bruce Warren (Assistant Director) As a professional theatre maker for over 20 years, Bruce's work has been enjoyed on stages across North America. He was last seen Off-Broadway in the world premiere of I Spy a Spy, originating the role of Russia's greatest spy, Cold Borscht. Other Off-Broadway credits include The Road to Qatar! (*Original Cast Album). He recently directed two critically acclaimed productions of The Legend of Georgia McBride by Matthew Lopez. Bruce has taught an assortment of theatre classes, including a few that focus on comedy for the stage. When not working in theatre, Bruce serves on the Fulfillment Operations and Strategy team at DonorsChoose, helping to bridge the equity gaps in public education across America. He proudly holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Ithaca College. www.BruceWarrenOnline.com

Designing this Production



Charlie Corcoran Set Design (above) and Model (below)



Jeni Schaeffer's Costume Renderings



THE CREATIVE TEAM ALSO INCLUDES **JULIE DURO** AS LIGHTING DESIGNER, **CHLOE COBB** AS PROPS SUPERVISOR, **MATTHEW ROHAN** AS ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER, AND **SARAH RACHEL KATZ** AS PRODUCTION ASSISTANT.

DISCUSSION

Discussing this Production

1. What was your overall reaction to the play? Were you surprised by the ending? Why or why not?
2. How did the actors' physicalizing of their characters enhance the interpretation of each character? Give specific examples such as the way the characters walked, chewed food, sat, gestured, etc.
3. Discuss the actor's use of their voices. Did each character have a distinct voice?
4. Who was your favorite character? What was it that the actors playing their roles did to make you feel positively?
5. Do the physical elements of the WCP production (sets, props, costumes) suggest different things about the characters? Discuss the many ways that the set props and costumes serve the director and actors in this production. Consider each element individually.
6. How did the production guide your attention to certain details?
7. Were there moments where lighting, sound, or movement helped build suspense?
8. What did you think about the production? What did you like? Dislike? What worked especially well and why? What would you have changed? How would you have changed it?



Artwork by Tim Luecke

Big Ideas & Themes

Truth vs. Perception

Throughout the play, characters present versions of the truth that are incomplete or misleading. The audience is asked to consider: *Is what we see always the full story?*

Secrecy and Reputation

Many characters are hiding something, even if it is unrelated to the murder. In a small community, reputation matters, and people often lie to protect themselves or others.

Justice vs. Morality

Detective stories often ask difficult questions about justice, responsibility, and fairness. As you watch the play, consider whether legal justice and moral justice are always the same thing.

Character Exploration

Dr. Sheppard

How does he present himself to the audience? What makes him seem trustworthy? How does that affect how we interpret the story?

Hercule Poirot

Hercule Poirot relies on psychology rather than just evidence. What does he notice that others miss?

Flora Ackroyd

What does her decision reveal about fear, pressure, or social expectations?

Other Characters

Many characters hide secrets that are not directly related to the murder. Why might Christie include these distractions?

Detective Work & Mystery Structure

Clues vs. Red Herrings

Some details are important clues, while others are meant to mislead. How can you tell the difference?

The Importance of Timing

The timeline of events is crucial. Pay attention to when things happen—and who controls that information.

Point of View

The audience experiences the story through a particular perspective. How does that shape what we believe?

The Final Reveal

How does the structure of the play build toward the ending? Did you feel surprised, or were there clues you noticed along the way?

Staging & Production Choices

How is Information Revealed?

In a novel, we can read a character's thoughts. On stage, information must be shown through dialogue, movement, and design. How does the production guide your attention?

Use of Space

Consider how different areas (the study, the drawing room, the exterior spaces) are used. What do these locations tell us about the characters and the mystery?

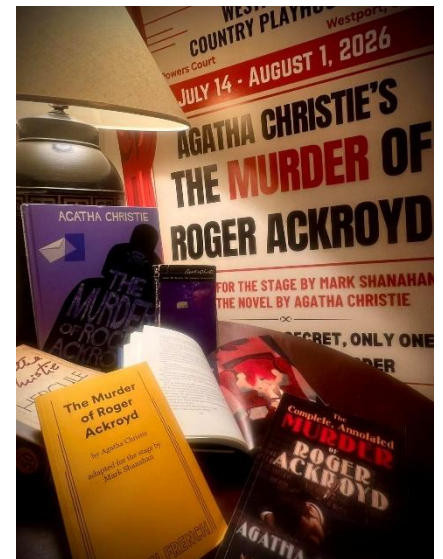
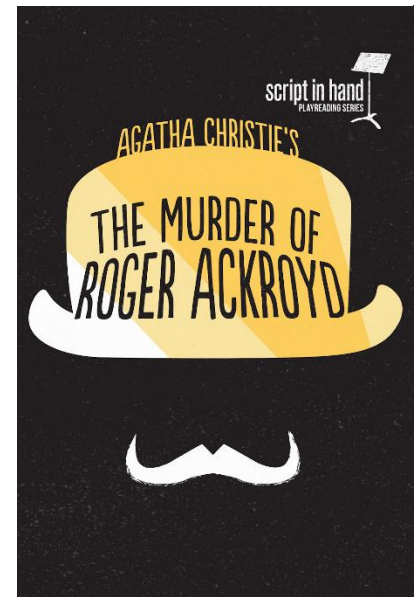
Pacing and Suspense

How does the timing of scenes, pauses, and entrances build tension?

The Role of the Narrator on Stage

How does the actor playing Sheppard influence what the audience believes?

Original Script In Hand Artwork





Brandon Hearnberger as Major Blunt, Chris Salazar as Sheppard, David Rainey as Raglan.

Reflection & Connection

Have you ever believed something that later turned out to be incomplete or misleading? What changed your understanding?

Why do audiences enjoy mysteries and plot twists? What makes a surprise ending satisfying?

Can you think of a movie or TV show that uses a similar storytelling twist? How does it compare to this play?



Shereen Ahmed, Photo by Mark Smith (WCP)



John Rapson, Photo by Mark Smith (WCP)

FURTHER READING

Further Reading

Murder on the Orient Express (1934) One of Christie's most famous mysteries featuring Hercule Poirot. Like *Roger Ackroyd*, it challenges audience expectations and features a surprising resolution.

The ABC Murders (1936) A fast-paced Poirot mystery with a very different structure, focusing on a serial killer and a pattern of crimes.

And Then There Were None (1939) One of Christie's most popular and suspenseful works, exploring guilt, justice, and isolation in a group of strangers trapped together.

John Curran, *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks* A behind-the-scenes look at how Christie developed her plots, characters, and twists.

Further Viewing

All About Agatha Christie. Interview with Mark Shanahan. June 6, 2024.

<https://youtu.be/VPTzYXwcHy4?si=Qx78x4eHh36V86RA>

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