Cognitive-Linguistic Manipulation and Persuasion in Agatha Christie

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Abstract

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This thesis presents some of the many methods which Agatha Christie uses to manipulate readers away from and towards the eventual resolutions of her fiction. It draws on a variety of linguistic, psychological, narratological and stylistic models to describe the specific techniques employed by Christie to manipulate and distract her readers.

The research undertaken employs practical studies in schemata, scenario-dependence, depth of cognitive processing, rhetorical-structural persuasion, unreliable narration, social cognition theories of character attribution, and ideas from the study of mind style to analyse manipulation in some of Christie's most notable works. These works include the novels *Murder on the Orient Express, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, Death in the Clouds, Cards on the Table* and *The ABC Murders,* in addition to lesser-known short stories from *The Thirteen Problems* and *Poirot Investigates*.

More specifically, following the introduction, the analyses in Chapter 2 operate through models of the psychological processing of texts and the way that linguistic indicators are interpreted by readers. 'Red herrings' and 'buried clues' are defined and examined using cognitive theories of schemata (information networks), scenario-dependence and a reader's depth of processing. This is followed by Chapter 3, a rhetorical and structural analysis of persuasive practices within an extract of Christie's fiction, where her detective Hercule Poirot attempts to convince both the assembled characters and the novel's reader of the necessary truth of the solution he is presenting. In this chapter I introduce my own adaptation of Rhetorical Structure Theory designed for analyses of long extracts of a narrative text is also introduced. Chapter 4 looks at narratological and cognitive methods of describing character and narrator unreliability and ambiguity, through studies of an unreliable narrator, the nature of some witnesses' minds within different novels, and the presentation of the ambiguous thoughts of an important suspect using techniques taken from the study of mind style.

The thesis aims primarily to describe and illustrate in a systematic manner a selection of the many different ways in which Christie manipulates readers, and points the way to other techniques of this sort. The breadth of the frameworks employed is intended to emphasise the range of Christie's techniques, and to demonstrate that detective fiction contains many uses of complex manipulation which would bear further study.

Her puzzles endure to delight and surprise readers towards the end of the twentieth century just as much as they did in the twenties because they are not mechanical but concerned with human character. The locked-room mysteries beloved of John Dickson Carr are of no great interest to Agatha Christie, nor are the fiendish devices, the evaporating ice-darts or any of the other paraphernalia used by some of the earlier crime writers. Her tricks are sometimes verbal, sometimes visual. If you listen carefully and watch her all the time, you *may* catch Mrs Christie, but it is highly unlikely that you will. The solution which she has somehow persuaded you quite early in the narrative is *not* the correct one very frequently *is*...

(Osborne 1999:48)

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Questions

In this thesis, I aim to show how a selection from a wide range of linguistic, cognitive and stylistic theories of discourse can add to our understanding of the devices employed to manipulate and distract readers in Agatha Christie's detective fiction.

More specifically, the following analyses look at points of particular plot relevance within this fiction and attempt to describe how Christie misdirects a reader from deciphering her eventual correct solution to the 'puzzles' she presents to the reader and the detective. The use of cognitive, schematic, pragmatic, narratological and rhetorical-structural theories to describe narrative persuasion and manipulation has not systematically been attempted before in studies of this type of fiction. While certain of the models and psychological research drawn upon were employed by stylistics relatively recently (such as scenario-dependence and depth of processing studies), a number of other models employed are long-standing descriptive techniques within the field (for example, Rhetorical Structure Theory and mind style).

The following discussion is divided into three main sections, following this introduction. Chapter 2 operates through models of the psychological processing of texts and the way that linguistic indicators are interpreted by readers to hold multiple scenarios in place in their minds as they read long stretches of text. Chapter 3 is a rhetorical and structural analysis of persuasive practices within an extract of Christie's fiction where a detective attempts to convince the assembled characters (and the reader) of the basic truth of his solution. Finally, Chapter 4 looks at narratological and cognitive methods of describing character and narrator reliability and unreliability, through studies of a famously unreliable narrator, the

nature of some embedded witness minds and the presentation of the thoughts of an important suspect using techniques taken from the study of mind style.

1.2 Detective Fiction

This thesis chooses to analyse the detective (or 'mystery') fiction of Agatha Christie as it is an example of a narrative text where plot is given the highest significance. Literary texts of the sort often studied as literature[1] have further or deeper preoccupations which supervene upon the plot itself – the requirements of aesthetics, emotion, satire, warning, social commentary, pastiche, realism, or even postmodern experiment. Therefore, analyses of reader manipulation in the texts of many other literary authors (say, Nabokov or Balzac or Austen) are vulnerable to the inherent literary ambiguity of the prose's intent – as Peter Brooks (1984:xi) states, 'Plot is so basic to our experience of reading, and indeed to our very articulation of experience in general, that criticism has often passed it over in silence, as too obvious to bear discussion.'

Detective fiction, while not entirely free of this ambiguity, is more overtly pared to serve the needs of the story itself and so could be considered more appropriate for a linguistic-psychological analysis of plot. Christie's mystery narratives, despite revealing a fairly evident ideology and occasionally veering towards the didactic, consist almost solely of prose, characterization and events fully subjugated towards the requirements of a complex, unfolding plot, and are therefore ideal for an analysis of this sort. Brooks later says of mystery novels that they are 'pursued both for the solution of enigmas and their prolongation in suspense, in the pleasure of the text: the best possible case of plot for plot's sake' (1984:170).

[1] That is to say, studied as part of a canon of texts known for its literary merit, as opposed to what is often known as 'genre fiction' (which normally includes romance, science fiction and crime/detective fiction).

1.2.1 Agatha Christie

Agatha Christie is frequently cited as the most read author in the British mystery story genre, and certainly one of the most celebrated. For example, one obituary of hers in the 1970s read:

> The number of printed copies of her books is conservatively put at 300 million. New Guinea cargo cultists have even venerated a paperback cover of her Evil Under the Sun – quite possibly confusing the name Christie with Christ.
> […]
> **Godlike Genius.**
> In a Christie murder mystery, neatness not only counts, it is everything.
> As the genre's undisputed queen of the maze, she laid her tantalizing plots so precisely and dropped her false leads so cunningly that few – if any – readers could guess the identity of the villain.
>
> (*Time* 1976:, bold in original)

And a more modern tally of her sales reads:

> Her books have sold over a billion copies in English and another billion in 100 foreign languages[2]. She is the most widely published author of all time and in any language, outsold only by the Bible and Shakespeare.
>
> (Christie 2003b:i)

Christie's trademark style of mystery involved a murder being committed 'impossibly' – that is, a deliberate murder where it is supposedly impossible for anyone to have entered or left the scene of the crime at the time. Often these take place on or in some sort of sealed area – an island, a watched or locked room, a boat, a train, an aeroplane, a remote part of the desert – with a necessarily short list of possible suspects. Christie's skill lies in providing either a series of many likely suspects or a situation where there is no obvious way in which the murder was committed, then throughout the story manipulating the presented information to reveal who is the killer and how it was done. Generally, one or more earlier pieces of information are shown to be somehow incomplete, mistaken, misleading or planted. All the information the detective uses to work out the solution is supposedly

[2] In fact, the *UNESCO Index Translationum 2006* lists Christie as the second-most translated author in its records after the Walt Disney company, with 6047 translations in all (more than even above Shakespeare or Lenin – http://databases.unesco.org/xtrans/stat/xTransStat.a?VL1=A&top=50&lg=0)

presented *within* the book – and theoretically the solution to any mystery could be worked out by a reader.

Over the many novels and short stories Christie wrote, there is often a similar structure – a murder is committed, the detective is called in (or is frequently already present), the detective analyses the evidence, interviews witnesses and suspects, and then almost always reveals the eventual solution in a dénouement with the interested parties and suspects present. Finally, the murderer often confesses that the detective was correct in front of all the assembled witnesses, giving background information and endorsement to the detective's reasoning – in this sense, the murderer is usually in awe of the detective for working out the 'impossible' solution, as indeed the reader is intended to be.

A key point for this thesis is that Christie, although scrupulous with the placement of such clues, fully intends the reader to be in the dark until the detective points the way, and a lot of the pleasure to be found in reading the stories is derived from this final dénouement. As Palmer says:

> The puzzle-like quality gives the reader the illusion that (s)he has as much chance as the detective of solving the mystery, although in reality (a) the author weights all the chances in the detective's favour; and (b) the narrator, whether first person or third, may be unreliable [...]
>
> (Palmer 1991:131)

As a result, we may describe – at a very abstract level – the detective story in this mould as series of information-sequences with specific linguistic attributes (as all communicative items of information have) and presented with a precise intent. This intent is to mislead in many cases and to aid illumination in some others. That is to say, information presented

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[3] For admirable summaries of the over 100 novels, plays and short story collections Christie saw published, see Charles Osborne's *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie* (Osborne 1999), which is notably scrupulous in not revealing the solution of any of her plots. An excellent illustrated sourcebook for the early novels (before 1942) is Wagstaff and Poole's *Agatha Christie: A Reader's Companion* (2004), while good pointers to further criticism include Hark (1997) and Palmer (1991). Beehler (1988) contains a useful summary of Christie's presentation of 'the illusion of truth', but again only from a pedagogical standpoint.

[4] A more detailed, although unpleasantly dismissive, literary-historical summary of this plot structure is found in Grella (1970).

within the mystery-story construct can either aid ending-perception in a reader or can deceive them as to the actual resolution, and it is by linguistic and psycholinguistic means that this information is conveyed. As the rules of the genre (see 1.2.2 below) state, an author must provide a path to the eventual solution while simultaneously concealing it, I propose that few detective stories create a problem without employing any linguistic or psycholinguistic effects towards these ends in their exposition, as deceiving a reader solely through bare event sequence is inherently difficult. I therefore propose that this form of narrative is a valuable linguistic object of study as a controlled interaction of rhetorical and linguistic persuasion.

1.2.2 Van Dine's Twenty Rules

There are many ways to manipulate a reader; political analysts, psychologists, linguists and rhetoricians have worked on manipulation and persuasion studies in many different ways. To examine such techniques within Christie's fiction, we need first to look at the likely ways in which she would manipulate a reader – that is to say, the methods of manipulation which are allowed by the mystery genre itself.

In the *American Magazine* of September 1928 the mystery writer S. S. Van Dine published a list headed 'Twenty rules for writing detective stories'. These rules are remarkably valid even today for many works in the genre, and many other authors have attempted to formulate such lists. Although all such rules are often only established so that they can be broken, they are nonetheless particular expressions of a view of the genre which was highly valid in the detective fiction 'golden age' of the 1920s and 30s, when Christie was establishing her particular style of mystery. She follows these rules in the main – although not necessarily

[5] The Detection Club, of which Christie was a member and had to defend herself from expulsion for having broken its 'rules' in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (saved only by the casting vote of Dorothy L. Sayers - Wagstaff and Poole 2004:44), had a mock-serious Oath which included the following query: *Do you promise that your detectives shall well and truly detect the crimes presented to them, using those wits which it may please you to bestow upon them and not placing reliance on nor making use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo-Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence or the Act of God?* (Chesterton 1928 [2006]).

Van Dine's particular exposition of them – but is confident enough in flouting them when her plots require it. We may thus establish them as rough norms for the genre of Christie's fiction, and use them to show how readers of that time could be manipulated by challenging the rules of the genre. This is particularly important as many of Christie's innovations – in concert with many introduced by later writers – are so familiar to modern readers through re-use that it is often difficult to recognise the relative freshness of particular techniques.

The following extracts from the list (Van Dine 1928 [2006]) will be used throughout this thesis as examples of such norms. They should be familiar to most readers of the genre (and even those who are only casually acquainted with it):

> 1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.
> 2. No willful [*sic*] tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself.
> […]
> 4. The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit. This is bald trickery, on a par with offering some one a bright penny for a five-dollar gold piece. It's false pretences.
> 5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions — not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession.
> […]
> 10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story — that is, a person with whom the reader is familiar and in whom he takes an interest.
> 11. A servant must not be chosen by the author as the culprit. This is begging a noble question. It is a too easy solution. The culprit must be a decidedly worth-while person — one that wouldn't ordinarily come under suspicion.
> 12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature.
> […]
> 15. The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent — provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it. By this I mean that if the reader, after learning the explanation for the crime, should reread the book, he would see that the solution had, in a sense, been staring him in the face-that all the clues really pointed to the culprit — and that, if he had been as clever as the detective, he could have solved the mystery himself without going on to the final chapter. That the clever reader does often thus solve the problem goes without saying.
> 16. A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no "atmospheric" preoccupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion. To be sure, there must be a sufficient descriptiveness and character delineation to give the novel verisimilitude.

> […]
> 18. A crime in a detective story must never turn out to be an accident or a suicide. To end an odyssey of sleuthing with such an anti-climax is to hoodwink the trusting and kind-hearted reader.

The other rules are equally as valid, yet less appropriate for the needs of this thesis ('There must be no love interest. The business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar' and so on – nonetheless, for the sake of completeness Appendix 1 reproduces all of the rules in full). Note that rule 16 directly supports the assertion above that in Christie's fiction 'prose, characterization and events [are] fully subjugated towards the requirements of a complex, unfolding plot' – providing, of course, that Christie is following this rule.

1.2.3 Red Herrings and Buried Clues

For obvious reasons, a study of manipulation in the detective genre will focus on clues. These are, quite simply, the plot points or linguistic features which theoretically lead a reader towards a solution. While there are many different ways to categorise clues with reference to detective stories, I will here classify them with reference to their presentation as plot-important compared to their actual plot-importance.

In this way, information given to a reader in a mystery or detective story can be characterised on two separate axes – whether it is *presented* as being important to the plot, or whether in retrospect the information was *actually* important in that manner. The intersection of these two characterisations then describes the nature of the clue for the purposes of this thesis. For example, an unremarkable bottle mentioned fleetingly as part of an inventory but later revealed to be full of the murderer's poison is presented as plot-unimportant but is actually important with regards to the eventual solution (a *buried clue*). Similarly, focusing a great deal on the appearance and location of an elaborate hunting knife when the actual murder weapon was a meat cleaver is presented as plot-important and yet is unimportant in retrospect – this is what I term here a *red herring,* and although this term

may at times look informal there is no real alternative which carries the same meaning and is so immediately well-understood.

We may describe this visually:

		Presented as	
		PLOT-IMPORTANT	PLOT-UNIMPORTANT
Actually	PLOT-IMPORTANT	Foreground	Buried Clue
	PLOT-UNIMPORTANT	Red Herring	Background

Table 1 – Types of clue with reference to plot

As may be apparent from the table, to present a clue as plot-important appears in some ways to be the same as what stylisticans and literary theorists term *foregrounding* (just as plot-unimportant is the same as the lesser-used term *backgrounding*). The term *foregrounding* has a wide range of referents. An early use is in the Prague School's definition of 'the use of the devices of the language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon' (Havránek 1964:10) and that 'foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake' (Mukařovský 1964:19). Willie van Peer emphasises that foregrounding devices 'are to be situated on the level of linguistic form' (van Peer 1986:182), and it is because of this linguistic emphasis that I prefer not to use the term *foregrounding* in this thesis, instead preferring the longer term 'presented as plot-important'.

Christie certainly employs foregrounding in the linguistic sense above, but plot importance also encompasses the cognitive attention and emphasis placed on a fact due to its supposed function in the plot itself – a mysterious dagger found in the bedroom of a murdered man may not be linguistically foregrounded, but is rather emphasised by the plot. I retain, however, the spatial metaphor of foreground versus background (in grey on the table above), simply for ease of reference. *Foreground* here is simply information which is both important with reference to the plot and is shown to be important (that is, not buried); a murder has been committed in a hotel room, the room door is locked, Hercule Poirot has

been summoned to the scene, etc. Similarly, *background* is information which is, with retrospect, unimportant to the plot and is not emphasised or drawn attention to in any way (linguistic *or* cognitive); it was a bright sunny day in June, Poirot straightened his napkin before dinner, and so on. (Cognitively, these terms approximate the concepts of *figure* and *ground* – see, for example, Langacker (1987:120ff).)

Backgrounding, while used in the field, does not have quite the same terminological currency as *foregrounding*, and is thus occasionally used here to refer to the process of 'burying' a clue. Background information, by definition, cannot be backgrounded – the process of backgrounding, as it is used here, refers to consciously pushing information into the background from the foreground, which cannot be done to information which is part of the background. Backgrounding is a privative concept; it is distinguished only by *not* being emphasised as plot-important.

To summarise the important definitions of this discussion: a *red herring* is plot-unimportant information with attention deliberately placed on it by the author (but is not displaced afterwards), and a *buried clue* is one which is not emphasised as plot-important but nonetheless is.

1.3 Related Work

This section briefly discusses selected literary studies of Christie herself, before moving on to look at stylistic studies of detective/mystery fiction.

There have, of course, been previous literary studies of detective fiction (some excellent ones include Haycraft 1942; Symons 1962, 1972; Grossvogel 1979; Most and Stowe 1983; Palmer 1991; Pyrhönen 1994 and Rowland 2001, certain of which we shall return to later), but few studies have employed stylistic/linguistic methods of analysis. Stylisticans, unlike a number

of literary scholars, appear more ready to analyse a non-literary author such as Christie. One excellent article about Christie which operates in a stylistics vein is Eliot A. Singer's (1984) study of Christie's 'block elements' through folklore theory, describing how Christie gives too much or too little information to mislead a reader – although Singer uses a very different framework to the current thesis, his conclusions are nonetheless interesting if read in parallel with the compatible discussions below. Another study carried out much more explicitly within stylistics, and which has techniques similar to the current thesis (particularly Chapter 4 below), is Christiana Gregoriou's (2002) use of cognitive stylistics to analyse the consciousness of the criminal mind in detective (and crime) fiction, which concentrates primarily on the particular style of language (such as metaphors and idioms) used in 'portraying the criminal consciousness' (Gregoriou 2002:61) – an idea which we shall return to. In another area, Murray Knowles (2005) again uses conceptual metaphor theory to establish a sense of the individual stylistic use of two crime authors – but like Gregoriou, Knowles does not focus on details of plot or manipulation – and this present thesis does not study metaphor for reasons of space. Clara Calvo (1995), in a less cognitive mould, employs conversation analysis to analyse telephone calls in Raymond Chandler's novels – which is not very dissimilar to the rhetorical analysis undertaken in Chapter 3 below of the speeches made by one of Christie's detectives. There are a few pedagogical studies of the use of Christie's mystery novels in teaching (eg, Hardesty 1983; Kellog 1983; Galbraith-Jones 1987) which touch on stylistic issues, but only in a necessarily shallow manner.

Away from explicit detective narratives, many others have studied plot in fiction, or the relationship of narrative to cognitive theories of memory (one of the most important in this area is van Dijk (eg, van Dijk 2006), although he has not worked on detective fiction). Within the particular field of cognitive stylistics, a very recent and pertinent paper discussing what may be referred to as a 'mystery' novel is Barbara Dancygier's (2006), where conceptual blending, a theory both linguistic and psychological, is used to describe a

reader's comprehension of complex plot structure. She analyses Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*, a novel with two further embedded novels within itself, and discusses meaning construction between the three differing stories to form a single coherent story, with reference to the 'narrative anchors' which make the three novels interweave. The shifts and re-evaluations of plot in the novel with reference to new information would be of relevance to the current analyses in future work, although Dancygier's analysis is, as yet, limited to *The Blind Assassin* and is currently being developed towards a full framework for analysing other texts.

One other example of prior work in cognitive analyses of mystery plots is Emmott (2003), whose chapter is perhaps closest of all previous work in cognitive stylistics to the work undertaken in the present thesis. Emmott's analysis accounts for unexpected plot reversals from within a cognitive-stylistic framework – describing situational contexts in a framework which includes a reader's own cognitive inferences in addition to textually-presented information, leading to an analysis which can explain the cognitive dimension of narrative 'surprise'. Sections 2.2 and 2.5.3 below make reference to this chapter within the context of its high relevance to the current discussion.

Finally, this thesis is situated, as previously stated, within cognitive stylistics and is very much influenced by the work of the Glasgow *Stylistics, Text Analysis and Cognitive Science (STACS) Project*, directed by Catherine Emmott and Anthony J Sanford. This project aims to provide an interdisciplinary understanding of the effects of style and manipulation of a reader's attention in the nature of reading (eg, Emmott *et al.* 2003; Sanford *et al.* 2006 *inter alia*). The debt owed to this project and its findings by this thesis should be very much evident in what follows. In particular, their psychological work on depth of processing and attention-capture (*ibid*) is, in many ways, the complement of what is discussed in Chapter 2 below, and many of the connections between the study of literary narratives and the study of cognitive processing found below were first developed in the work of the *STACS Project*.

1.4 This Thesis

This thesis, in pursuit of the aims above, will require an examination of Christie's plots, and so will necessarily reveal the endings of a number of her works: *Murder on the Orient Express, The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, Death in the Clouds, Cards on the Table, The ABC Murders,* and short stories from *The Thirteen Problems* and *Poirot Investigates*. This is perhaps regrettable for any readers who are not previously familiar with those particular books' endings. Plot summaries and relevant extracts will be provided, but readers may wish to read the relevant novels first so as not to ruin their enjoyment of the stories.

As said above, both psychological and rhetorical-structural theories inform the current discussion. Chapter 2 below focuses on cognitive theories of schemata (information-networks) and attention, Chapter 3 demonstrates classical Rhetorical Structure Theory and its adaptation for use in this thesis, while Chapter 4 discusses issues of the reliability and unreliability of narrators and witnesses within the story itself. Schema theory, scenario-dependence and depth of processing work are all used by cognitive stylisticans to varying degrees to describe and explain textual phenomena, while Rhetorical Structure Theory describes, as the name suggests, rhetorical structure in a less explicitly cognitive manner. Studying reliability and unreliability needs both cognitive theories as well as pragmatic and narratological ones. As Agatha Christie often manipulates readers in many ways, these large theoretical areas, although selective in their actual analysis, are rewarding ways in which to study such manipulation from relatively differing directions, and the appropriateness of their application to Christie's texts should become clear throughout what follows.

[6] Some readers may challenge the use of rhetoric to describe a fictional text. Although this is discussed in more detail below, I follow David Lodge (1993:x) in describing fiction as 'an essentially rhetorical art'.

2 Schemata and Attention

2.1 Schemata

Manipulation and persuasion of readers in a cognitive fashion most obviously occurs through Christie's techniques of managing a reader's knowledge about both the text and the wider world. Psychologically speaking, this occurs through Christie's manipulation of *schemata,* the study and theoretical background of which I will here discuss before turning to her use of them.

Schemata are dynamic psychological structures representing generic knowledge within the mind. First used to explain a speaker's addition or alteration of folktale details during retellings (eg, Bartlett 1932, although Bartlett credits the earlier work of neurologist Sir Henry Head), schemata were later refined within Artificial Intelligence as mental constructs of knowledge derived from an individual's experience and learning, and in this sense are often called 'frames' (eg, Minsky 1975). Psychologists also see schemata as the constructs used by an individual to make sense of events by providing 'default' and background information for the comprehension of events and narratives, in addition to their more basic use as 'the building blocks of cognition' (Rumelhart 1980:33, 47-49).

As we will discuss later, there also exist sub-categories of schemata, such as *scripts* and *scenarios* (R. C. Schank and R. P. Abelson 1977). Scenarios encode situational schemata (that is, contextual knowledge of locations, such as restaurants, bedrooms, shops, universities, etc) while scripts describe event sequences. Schank and Abelson (1977:422), the first to describe such scripts, characterise them as 'a predetermined, stereotyped sequence of actions that define a well-known situation'[7]. These can interact, so that restaurant schemata

[7] Many authors use different terminology than that used here (eg *frames* for *schemata*, *scenario* for *script*, etc). As a result, the hierarchy of schemata, script and scenario described here is by no means universal.

include knowledge of the situational context (and thus the likely existence of food, servers, tables and other expected parts of a generic restaurant) as well as knowledge of the actions normally performed in a restaurant and the order in which they are usually performed (see, for example, the list in Bower *et al.* 1979:182). When Christie sets a scene in a restaurant (for example, in *Lord Edgware Dies*), she does not need to specify that Poirot pays the bill, or that he finishes his food, or that he retrieves his coat from the cloakroom before leaving – a reader's own schematic knowledge 'fills in' the gaps in narration.

Linguists employ schema theory alongside other theories of cognitive knowledge to account for the interpretation of a discourse, as discourses themselves do not provide all the information necessary for them to be processed. Schema theory is therefore often used within stylistics to explain a reader's comprehension of a complex discourse. For example, many narrative texts set in a restaurant do not explicitly state that the protagonists go through the necessary actions required to eat in a restaurant, but a reader can supply these missing details from their own restaurant schema for processing to continue; a significant part of discourse comprehension is thus 'the selection and instantiation of a configuration of schemata that successfully accounts for the input' (Semino 1997:131).

In this way, schemata can be valuable tools for analysing the process of reading and the authorial techniques used to manipulate the reader's processing of a text. For example, much of the process of plot anticipation in detective fiction consists of the evaluation and re-evaluation of schema-encoding stretches of text – various schemata are evoked by an author in the course of a text, and the juxtaposition and priming of each of them are possible sites for authorial management of a reader's expectations (see further Cook (1994), Semino (1997), Stockwell (2002), Steen (2003) and Simpson (2004) *inter alia* for recent applications and descriptions of schema-based literary and stylistic methods).

Schemata are dynamic; they accumulate details and are altered with experience, in addition to being created 'on-demand'. If changing circumstances and new events contradict existing

schemata or make them appear inadequate in a relatively minor way, they can be 'tuned' (Rumelhart 1980:52) to accommodate new generalizations, so for example a person who only encountered male members of the clergy may have to alter their schema of priests when they encounter their first female priest. If events occur with no associated schematic knowledge being evoked, or if existing schemata are found to be insufficient for comprehension, then new schemata can be created through either 'copying an old one with a few modifications' or 'inducing' a new schema from experience alone (Rumelhart 1980:54). From a linguistic and stylistic perspective, therefore, then the text-schema relationship is two-way; as well as schemata influencing the interpretation of a discourse, discourses themselves can tune existing schemata or create entirely new ones (Cook 1994:182ff).

While Christie, as we will see, manipulates a reader through these schemata, she also exploits a reader's *scenarios*.

2.2 Scenario-Dependence

The concept of scenario-dependence is one which originates with Anthony J Sanford, Simon Garrod and Anne Anderson (Sanford and Garrod 1981:145ff; 1998:168; Anderson *et al.* 1983), and describes a character whose existence in a narrative depends solely on their being part of a scenario. This section discusses and defines what it means for a character to be dependent on a scenario, for Christie relies on scenario-dependence in certain cases to manipulate a reader – as we shall see.

Just as there exist scenarios within schemata, there are of course further entities which exist within a scenario itself. The existence of food, servers, tables and so on within a restaurant

[8] Although not made explicit, this particular sense of *scenario* differs from the AI sense in section 2.1 above.

schema was mentioned earlier; these mental objects are generally subdivided into *props* or *characters* (or occasionally *actors*) depending on their animacy (Zwaan and Radvansky 1998:162). So in the brief example of Poirot's restaurant experience in the previous section, the knife he holds and glass he drinks from are props, whereas the other diners he manoeuvres around are characters, as one might expect. Each of these, as well as the events and characters making up the narrative proper (such as diners nearby he eavesdrops on), are held in memory by the reader for comprehension and later recall. Sanford and Garrod (1981:159; 1998:162) partition memory in two different ways in order to describe the processing of language. On one dimension there is a *dynamic* or *relatively static* category depending on how easily the knowledge in memory changes as the text unfolds, and the other dimension is a *text-based* or *knowledge-based* division depending on the origin of the information being brought to bear on the text. These two divisions result in four partitions, and are used in what is now known as the scenario-mapping and focus (SMF) model of discourse comprehension. This model provides a useful tool for categorising the types of entities found within narrative texts.

	Text-Based	Knowledge-Based
Dynamic	Explicit Focus	Implicit Focus
Relatively Static	Memory for the Discourse	World-Knowledge & Scenarios

Table 2 – The four aspects of memory in the SMF model (from Sanford and Garrod 1998:162)

Examples of information in *Explicit Focus* would include entities explicitly mentioned in the text under current consideration, and this partition has a limited capacity (Sanford and Garrod 1981:134ff). *Implicit Focus* includes scenario-based knowledge which is related to what is held in Explicit Focus, that is to say, only the currently-relevant schemata evoked by the text. *World-Knowledge & Scenarios* incorporates what was previously called long-term semantic memory, and is in essence the reader's schematic knowledge-base. *Memory for the*

Discourse was previously known as long-term text memory and holds the episodic memory related to the text – specific, non-schematic knowledge which refers to the previously encountered parts of the discourse.

While Sanford and Garrod construct a model of discourse comprehension based on the interplay of the four aspects of memory in this model, for our purposes their elaboration of the Explicit/Implicit Focus memory distinction is the most important. Within a particular scenario (for example, a restaurant) there exist various 'role slots' (Sanford and Garrod 1998:167) which are filled by characters who belong to that scenario – such as a waiter – and these slots are part of Implicit Focus as their existence is scenario-based and not wholly derived from the text. Furthermore, roles are assigned to characters regardless of an explicit statement of that role; as soon as a possible scenario is activated a reader attempts to place characters in likely role-slots very early in their comprehension of the text, often without much knowledge of the character (Sanford and Garrod 1981:160ff; 1998:167-168).

Therefore, there exist characters whose reason for existence is to fill a required or accustomed role-slot as part of a scenario. This phenomenon is *scenario-dependence* (Sanford and Garrod 1981:145ff; Anderson *et al.* 1983:430; Sanford and Garrod 1998:168), as we described above. Scenario-dependent characters exist within a textual world in much the same way as a door exists within a house schema; they do not attract high amounts of a reader's attention, and are generally dismissed from Implicit Focus when a change of scene (a 'scenario shift') takes place. The essential point here for analysis of Christie is that such characters in Implicit Focus are therefore cognitively backgrounded, and writers can use this fact to manipulate a reader; the backgrounding of scenario-dependent characters in texts is discussed in Emmott (2003:153, see further discussion in section 2.5.3 below).

2.3 Depth of Processing

Related to all these models is the idea of the mind *processing* a text as it reads. The mind, however, does not process all information on the same level, but rather does so at differing levels – 'during reading and listening, language input is not always fully or deeply processed… [and] language may only be processed as extensively as is necessary for the communicative situation at hand' (Sanford *et al.* 2006:110). Prominence (whether psychological or linguistic, although the borderline here is by no means clear) and processing are closely related (Sanford and Sturt 2002), and so the avoidance of psychological salience on plot-relevant points (here called *backgrounding;* see further section 1.2.3 above) is a way of downgrading the attention a reader pays to it cognitively. Similarly, the depth of processing of a text affects recall of its features and thus affects the placing of information within Explicit or Implicit Focus. It is thus clear that linguistic manipulation through schemata can result in a reader being misled, fooled or in other ways persuaded and influenced.

There is one more cognitive point to be made about the effect of these theories of cognitive processing on linguistic persuasion, and that is that the wider discourse has an immediate effect on processing at a sentence- and word-based level. For a number of years it was thought that:

> …people initially compute some sort of local, context-independent meaning of the sentence at hand before relating it to the prior discourse of which it is a part […and] that discourse-associated processing should occur relatively 'late' (on some relevant time scale), an idea that we will refer to as the late discourse hypothesis. One variant of this hypothesis, which can be traced back to early sentence processing models [...] is that incoming sentence input is related to the wider discourse only at the ends of major constituents.
>
> (van Berkum *et al.* 2003:701-702)

[9] It should be noted here, as Sanford and Graesser explain (2006:100-101), that the term *depth of processing* and related ones such as *shallow processing* are used here to describe the reader's processing of a text, and should not be confused with the same term in other areas, such as in Craik and Lockhart's significant paper on 'levels of processing' in verbal memory (1972).

This would imply that the theory I have been advancing – that of the possibility of subtle manipulation based on rapid processing of scenarios, schemata and other information stored within Sanford and Garrod's SMF model in Table 2 above – would rely on wider information regarding the past discourse and various scenarios and schemata (ie, everything other than that stored in Explicit Focus) only at certain points in the discourse (say, sentence by sentence). Plot-relevant points, then, would be processed first as part of their constituent sentence before becoming significant within the discourse as a whole, meaning that discoursal and schematic interpretations of these points would be a secondary interpretation. It would be difficult to draw a conclusion about the expected referent (say) of a referring expression using schema theory rather than sentence-level lexicogrammar and semantics.

However, there now exists emerging psycholinguistic evidence based on functional neuroimaging and electroencephalography (EEG) measurements that 'information about the wider linguistic and nonlinguistic context, such as about the wider discourse and its genre, the communicative situation, and the speaker's identity, is immediately brought to bear on the comprehension of an unfolding sentence' (van Berkum 2005), as there are 'effects of discourse-level information within a mere 200–250ms after word onset, regardless of whether the word at hand was in the middle or at the end of a sentence' (van Berkum *et al.* 2003:702). This shows that, contrary to the theory above, a reader:

> evaluates the incoming words relative to the widest interpretive domain available [...] the process at hand also does not appear to depend much on whether the incoming word is a written one presented instantaneously or a spoken one taking half a second or more to unfold.
> (van Berkum *et al.* 2003:716)

I therefore claim that, as readers process scenario and schematic information extraordinarily quickly during the process of reading, we can therefore use schemata and processing-related theories as a primary means of interpreting linguistic phenomena with reference to Christie's manipulation of a reader.

2.4 Schemata of Genre

Finally in this section, I would like to discuss briefly the concept of schemata of genre. That is to say, I would assert that for most readers there exist schemata which encode genre information about texts and an awareness of genre when reading a narrative, which is not a controversial assumption and is derived from the field of genre analysis (see, for example, Swales 1990:10, 83, 89ff, 213ff). To describe schemata of genre with reference to Agatha Christie is similar to claiming that there exists a mystery-story or detective-story or murder-mystery schema which is common to most educated readers of English, no matter how coarse or finely-grained each individual's is. In actual fact, however, the granularity of these schemata varies widely. Fans of detective fiction would have a fine-grained mystery-story schema, consisting of discrete information networks which can be considered schemata in their own right – so members of the Agatha Christie Society, for example, could have a fully-fledged Miss Marple schema while others may only have an imprecise schema based on occasional viewing of television crime dramas. As Yang *et al.* briefly say, a reader may even have 'mental models for specific stories from the Poirot or Miss Marple series' (2004:86). The probability of any given reader having each schema decreases (in some cases rapidly) with how far down this scale of genre we go, and conversely the amount of detail each level possesses increases with each sub-schema, so that those with a Miss Marple schema are likely to have a more detailed 'parent' Agatha Christie schema than those with only an Agatha Christie schema alone (this is, of course, a generalisation).

In addition to the existence of these genre schemata of whatever detail, any reader in the real world will identify a genre for a narrative long before they encounter the main text (Segal 1995:75 briefly discusses this 'context and cues' approach to marking the boundaries of a narrative text). These are part of the 'liminal devices' outwith the text itself which Genette

terms *paratexts* (Genette 1997). In our example, such factors as what section in the bookshop the book was placed, the interests of the friend who loaned/recommended it to the reader and advance reviews in newspapers and magazines, would sit alongside paratextual information such as the cover art, the general knowledge associated with the name of Agatha Christie, the back cover blurb (particularly headings like *The Queen Of Crime*), and so on will all give an indication as to the genre within which the narrative should be placed. There are surprisingly few real-world situations in which no context would be supplied to a narrative.

We can therefore state, relatively uncontroversially, that a reader of an Agatha Christie text can draw upon some sort of knowledge of the genre within which she operates; they may be familiar with the standard structure of a Christie story (somewhat akin to that outlined above), or may have knowledge about the characters which are likely to become involved, or may, as we shall see below, be on the lookout early on for possible motives for murder. Regardless of this genre-based theory of schemata, genre analysis proper (Swales 1990; see further Corbett 2006) is regrettably not drawn on to any great extent in the present work, although future research could aim to develop the genre aspect of the analyses herein.

2.5 *The Tuesday Night Club*

A good example of cognitive/schematic and attention-based manipulation is found in Christie's *The Tuesday Night Club*, a short story from the collection *The Thirteen Problems* (Christie 1997:3-16) and the first appearance in print of Miss Marple, her most famous detective heroine. The story is not a locked-room mystery of the type which made Christie most famous (and the type discussed in later chapters), but is instead typical of a 'village murder'. Such murders, often convoluted and carried out between friends, lovers or family,

are very often misdirected rather than impossible; they are presented by the murderer as natural occurrences, accidents or suicides rather than overt murders with no suspects.

All of *The Thirteen Problems* are mystery stories told by those who know the solution to their friends (who form the eponymous Tuesday Night Club). The story in question is a domestic murder mystery told by Sir Henry Clithering of Scotland Yard, and the relevant extract, without frame story, is reproduced as Appendix 2. Readers unfamiliar with the story should read this extract before the following discussion.

The plot itself is a fairly straightforward one; a Mr Jones is accused of murdering his wife for financial gain, although there is no obvious means of him having done so. The symptoms of his wife's death are from food poisoning, although after Jones is accused of murder an exhumation revealed poisoning from arsenic. Two significant facts arise: the discovery of an incomplete letter written by Jones whose short extracts seem to implicate him in the murder of his wife, and the fact that on the night of the death all three persons eating (Jones, Mrs Jones and Mrs Jones' companion, Mrs Clark) were said to eat the same food – lobster and trifle, prepared by a maid – and neither Jones nor Mrs Clark displayed any symptoms of poisoning. The later suspicion is mentioned that Jones poisoned something else intended for Mrs Jones that night (a bowl of cornflour), but in fact it transpires that this was eaten not by Mrs Jones but by Mrs Clark. Therefore, there appears to be no way in which Jones could poison Mrs Jones, despite the suspicions generated by the letter and Jones' financial gain from his wife's death.

Miss Marple arrives at the correct solution, whereby Jones persuaded the maid to poison Mrs Jones by means of hundreds and thousands (the small sweets which go on top of a trifle) – we later find that Mrs Clark ate no trifle and Jones himself avoided eating the topping.

There are therefore three referents of interest with regards to schemata: the hundreds and thousands on the trifle (the means of murder), the maid (the murderer), and the lobster (the initial suspect for Mrs Jones' death). Following the schema in 1.2.3 above, we can describe the lobster as a *red herring*, whereas the other two pieces of information are *buried clues*.

2.5.1 The Hundreds and Thousands

Looking at each of these points from a linguistic-schematic viewpoint in turn and beginning with the buried clue of the hundreds and thousands, we find the following incomplete quote from a letter written by Jones[10]:

> *Entirely dependent on my wife... when she is dead I will... hundreds and thousands...*
> (Christie 1997:8, ellipses in original)

Although structurally establishing a plot point, this use of *hundreds and thousands* is deliberately schematically ambiguous. While those who are aware of the ending of the story know this refers to the small sugar strands atop the trifle, there are other interpretations a reader may jump to. Schemata are highly personal and individualised – it is thus very difficult to anticipate the schematic evocations of any one individual, although I will argue it is reasonable to claim here that a natural assumption, although by no means universal, is that 'hundreds and thousands' here refers to money.

Genre schemata, as outlined in 2.4 above, are likely to affect the linguistic interpretation of any given phrase. In an overt murder story, the extract *'my wife... when she is dead I will... hundreds and thousands...'* is signalled as a clue by the prior introductory phrase 'the beginning of the troubles arose in a very curious way' as well as its obvious content. Schemata of genre thus signal that the *hundreds and thousands* are a significant clue, and the possible semantic interpretations are either phrasal ('very small comfits', *hundred* sense 7 in

[10] The quotes are actually recovered by a hotel chambermaid from indentations on a blotting pad where Jones was writing the original letter. The ellipses in the quote therefore are used by Christie to represent indecipherable words rather than actual ellipses.

the OED) or quantificational (literally *hundreds* and *thousands*, parsed separately and conjoined). A search of the BNC results in 26 uses of *hundreds and thousands*, of which only 4 refer to the phrasal use of small sugar strands (two of which are from the same text, *Colin the Clown's Party Book*) while the other 22 refer to money, so the monetary use is statistically more likely (although this sample is perhaps too small to be overly significant). The sugar-strand use is also generally found collocated with trifle, ice-cream or food (no-one generally eats sugar strands on their own), and so is a more contextualised meaning than the money example[11]. A reader would expect the context to be specified if they are required to make a less-likely interpretation of the ambiguous phrase.

The sugar-strands interpretation does not fit well with the genre or the clue expectation, whereas the monetary interpretation fits with the genre expectation of murder for passion or gain. Although readers often maintain multiple alternate mental representations to switch to as the plot progresses, a single favoured explanation is often cognitively foregrounded or primed above alternatives. Furthermore, readers – and particularly less-skilled readers – 'tend to trade local processing of details for more extensive processing of global or thematic discourse information' (Hannon and Daneman 2004:202); that is to say, they will often not comprehensively process the semantic details of an expression but rather will take the interpretation which fits with the discourse as a whole. In this way, Christie 'backgrounds' the sugar-strands interpretation through exploiting the expectations of the genre schema previously established.

The next occurrence of *hundreds of thousands*, expressed by the tale's narrator Sir Henry but from the unreliable perspective of the hotel chambermaid (see further Chapter 4 below), reinforces the tentative money-interpretation above, and misleads whatever readers would instinctively interpret it as meaning sugar-strands:

[11] I owe this observation to Catherine Emmott.

> Mr Jones had planned to do away with his wife and inherit hundreds of thousands of pounds!
>
> (Christie 1997:8)

Afterwards, Sir Henry summarises the results for Jones from his wife's death:

> He benefited by his wife's death. Not to the extent of the hundreds of thousands romantically imagined by the hotel chambermaid, but to the very solid amount of £8000.
>
> (Christie 1997:9)

Here the monetary interpretation is presupposed, and linguistically buried within the clause – phrases are 'particularly difficult to challenge, and therefore is particularly effective as manipulation, when it is not the main point of the clause' (Hunston and Thompson 1999:8), and more generally, psychologists have found readers detect falsehoods in main clauses more easily than in subordinate clauses (Baker and Wagner 1987; Cooreman and Sanford 1996).

Later, Sir Henry (in the framing narrative) reports Jones' explanation of the letter found by the chambermaid in free indirect speech (Leech and Short 1981:325):

> He [Jones] regretted his inability to help but pointed out that there were hundreds and thousands of people in the world in the same unfortunate plight.[12]
>
> (Christie 1997:12)

An alternative interpretation is given in this quote, understandably biased and almost certainly suspect, but it is nonetheless a possible referent of *hundreds and thousands*. As the number of alternative explicit interpretations increase, the conscious attention given to implied alternatives (particularly, here, those of the comfits) naturally decreases as the reader's attention is misdirected.

Much later, Miss Marple summarises her thoughts on the likely murderer after Sir Henry has challenged his hearers to find the correct solution:

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[12] This refers, of course, to the chambermaid's discovery of the incomplete sections of the letter sent by Jones. He is presumably therefore quoting his version of the 'hundreds and thousands' part of the letter, which is why I term this free indirect speech.

> It seems so clear to me. The hundreds and thousands – and the trifle – I mean, one cannot miss it.
>
> (Christie 1997:15)

The alternative interpretation of *hundreds and thousands*, for the first time collocated with *trifle* to move it semantically into the cookery domain, is emphasised at a crucial point in the narrative. This emphasis, aided by its unusual parenthetical expression, primes the solution of poison in the hundreds and thousands on the trifle, and begins to background the numerical interpretation. It is thus the culinary collocation at this precise point which marks the beginning of the plot resolution. Marple goes on to explain:

> 'Cooks nearly always put hundreds and thousands on trifle, dear,'
> […]
> That is where the arsenic was – in the hundreds and thousands.
> […]
> He doctored the hundreds and thousands and gave them to her with instructions how to use them.
>
> (Christie 1997:15-16)

These final three uses of the term confirm the trifle-interpretation of *hundreds and thousands* (without any technical explanation of what they are in case any reader was unfamiliar with trifle toppings, which would admittedly be unlikely when the story was first written), and reverse the linguistic manipulation of schematic expectations shown above.

2.5.2 The Lobster

The hundreds and thousands constituted a buried clue – that is, a significant fact described in such a way as to distract a reader from the solution. The opposite of this is the lobster; a red herring used and described with all the outward appearance of a clue but leading nowhere. The lobster is repeatedly referred to and often blamed for causing the food poisoning which likely led to the death of the murdered woman, although of course it is not the actual culprit.

Returning to the very beginning of the story, Sir Henry sets the scene:

> Three people sat down to a supper consisting, amongst other things, of tinned lobster.
>
> (Christie 1997:7)

Importantly, here, only the lobster itself is specified. The *amongst other things* is parenthesised and placed before the lobster itself, which takes its place at the very end of the sentence. The addition of the adjective *tinned* means that the lobster is overtly described – as we will see when it comes to the maid, a description can deliberately elevate an entity from what we will refer to as scenario-dependence.

A later part of Sir Henry's summary reads:

> Death was considered to be due to ptomaine poisoning, a certificate was given to that effect, and the victim was duly buried.
>
> (Christie 1997:7-8)

Although there is no mention of the lobster here, the present author's schema of seafood certainly contains the risk of food poisoning (for which ptomaine poisoning was an early term; this may very well cause some unforeseen confusion to a modern reader), and which itself has a possible consequence of death. The lobster, the most likely cause of food poisoning when placed alongside salad and trifle, is implied here as being the cause of death.

And a later part of Sir Henry's more detailed second summary reads (this time from the point of view of the newspaper):

> A few days later there was a report in the papers of the death of Mrs Jones as the result of eating tinned lobster and the chambermaid then imparted to her fellow servants the words that she had deciphered on the blotting pad.
>
> (Christie 1997:8)

The lobster's apparent role is here made explicit, although it is phrased as part of a situation and thus linguistically buried within the embedded sub-clause (see Baker and Wagner (1987), referred to above).

In yet more detail, Sir Henry reports:

> He [the doctor] was convinced that her death was due to a form of botulism. Supper that night had consisted of tinned lobster and salad, trifle and bread and cheese. Unfortunately

> none of the lobster remained – it had all been eaten and the tin thrown away. He had interrogated the young maid, Gladys Linch. She was terribly upset, very tearful and agitated, and he found it hard to get her to keep to the point, but she declared again and again that the tin had not been distended in any way and that the lobster had appeared to her in a perfectly good condition.
>
> (Christie 1997:10)

This paragraph, which we shall look at again in Section 2.5.3 with regards to the maid, also explicitly repeats *lobster* three times as the main focus of investigation, with the trifle hidden in the middle of a list, all of which have a very small chance of causing food poisoning (particularly when compared to seafood). Trifle is not mentioned again until Marple speaks at the end of the story.

Sir Henry also reports a conversation between the murdered woman and her companion:

> "'I am not feeling a bit well, Milly," she said. "Serves me right, I suppose, for touching lobster at night. I asked Albert to get me a bowl of cornflour, but now that I have got it I don't seem to fancy it."
>
> (Christie 1997:11)

Here the idea that the lobster was possibly the cause of death is reinforced and foreshadowed. Again and again the lobster-as-culprit idea is signalled, with the result of distracting heavily from the trifle. We may note, here, that Marple herself does not mention the lobster at any point – all of the above examples are from the perspective of Sir Henry's summary (and once in a report of direct speech).

2.5.3 The Maid

The other piece of information to analyse is the schematic manipulation around the partially scenario-dependent maid, Gladys Linch. This is not a red herring, of course, but is instead a major clue – in fact, the identity of the murderer – cognitively and linguistically buried and backgrounded by Christie. Linch will later be contrasted with Catherine Emmott's (2003:153) discussion of scenario-dependence with regards to another fictional maid (in a Roald Dahl short story) whose role also goes unnoticed until the dénouement.

The first appearance of Christie's maid is relatively late in the story, during Sir Henry's second, more detailed, summary:

> Unfortunately none of the lobster remained – it had all been eaten and the tin thrown away. He had interrogated the young maid, Gladys Linch. She was terribly upset, very tearful and agitated, and he found it hard to get her to keep to the point, but she declared again and again that the tin had not been distended in any way and that the lobster had appeared to her in a perfectly good condition.
>
> (Christie 1997:10)

The maid's behaviour is here consistent with a young woman of the time being interrogated for possibly killing her employer. The fact she is young is mentioned, but this can be interpreted as Christie demonstrating the character's inexperience (the lobster may have been off) or giving an explanation for her agitation (thus burying somewhat the slightly strange extent of her upset). This information, relatively insignificant in any case, is both schematically and linguistically backgrounded, as an overt act of description by an author can remove attributes of scenario-dependence from a character. Finally, the fact that her name is explicitly given is significant and shall be returned to later.

Later, describing a new fact which came to light late in the case, Sir Henry says:

> After supper on that evening Mr Jones had gone down to the kitchen and had demanded a bowl of cornflour for his wife who had complained of not feeling well. He had waited in the kitchen until Gladys Linch prepared it, and then carried it up to his wife's room himself. That, I admit, seemed to clinch the case.
>
> (Christie 1997:11)

Again, here there is no information given about Linch herself, although she here has contact with Jones, and again her full name is used.

While the other examples above were from Sir Henry's summary, the maid's next appearance is during Sir Henry's report of direct speech from Mrs Jones:

> Gladys is really quite a nice cook. Very few girls nowadays seem to be able to make a bowl of cornflour nicely.
>
> (Christie 1997:12)

This is also the final mention of the maid before Marple reveals the solution, and Linch is here backgrounded by being made scenario-dependent in what we may refer to as the 'pre-war middle-class home' scenario. Although Linch is named, she is otherwise similar to Emmott's maid, who 'performs predictable actions (e.g. serving food) and her actions are subordinated to the main action (e.g. early in the story, she hesitates to collect the guest's plate, but the main emphasis is on the fact that the guest has not finished his first course, rather than on her)' (Emmott 2003:153). Returning to Christie, we find that in the above three extracts Linch is associated with predictable actions (cooking lobster, preparing a bowl of cornflour) and is thoroughly subordinated (the emphasis in the extracts above is on the lobster, the cornflour and, arguably, the positive attributes of the cornflour). She is backgrounded – to an extent, and I shall return to this point shortly – through her place in the schema and the structure of the sentences where she appears.

The next three times Linch appears are as follows:

> 'Well, Aunt Jane, this is one up to you. I can't think how on earth you managed to hit upon the truth. I should never have thought of the little maid in the kitchen being connected with the case.'
> […]
> A man of that Jones's type – coarse and jovial. As soon as I heard there was a pretty young girl in the house I felt sure that he would not have left her alone.
> […]
> Jones had got Gladys Linch into trouble, as the saying goes. She was nearly desperate. He wanted his wife out of the way and promised to marry Gladys when his wife was dead. He doctored the hundreds and thousands and gave them to her with instructions how to use them. Gladys Linch died a week ago. Her child died at birth and Jones had deserted her for another woman. When she was dying she confessed the truth.
>
> (Christie 1997:16)

A reader may rightfully here object to Marple's statement that she 'heard there was a pretty young girl in the house' because there has so far been no mention of the maid being pretty. Rightfully so, because the addition of a description to a scenario-dependent character would have the effect of raising the character either out of scenario-dependence (Sanford and Garrod 1981:171). Scenario-dependence is thus used to background the eventual murderer. However, we may now wish to consider that in the last paragraph of the extract above

Linch's name appears three times in the space of fifty words, which helps emphasise her name to a reader.

Regarding the maid's name, it is curious that Christie actually aids the reader in the *Tuesday Night Club* example by not fully exploiting the scenario-dependence of a character – that is, by naming the maid. When Sir Henry was talking about the names of the other protagonists, he said:

> And now I must describe the actors in this little drama. I will call the husband and wife Mr and Mrs Jones, and the wife's companion Miss Clark.
>
> (Christie 1997:8)

All of which are deliberately nondescript names. Christie makes a show of naming, making clear the names are false by saying 'I will call' and drawing attention to the practice of naming itself (it would have been perfectly possible to say something like 'the husband, Mr Jones' and introduce the names in a more subtle fashion). Linch herself, as well as having a slightly less generic name than the other characters, is the only one with a full name and has the name repeated many times. She is rarely referred to as 'the maid', and if she is her name follows the occupation (only once is she referred to and her name does not appear, when in the framing story Raymond says he would never have suspected 'the little maid'). By contrast, the others are frequently called 'the husband', 'the wife', 'the companion', 'her employer' or are referred to by pronouns. Proper names have been found in psychological experiments to increase the likelihood of remembering a scenario-dependent character and associating them with a pronoun (Sanford *et al.* 1988), and so explicit naming often increases the chance of a reader noticing a scenario-dependent character. So although the standard presence of a maid, and the fact their presence is relatively unremarkable, often means a reader does not give them much thought, Christie here linguistically signals Linch is not fully scenario-dependent (see also Gordon *et al.* 1993). This contrasts with Emmott's study of the maid in the Roald Dahl story, who is *always* a maid and is never 'promoted' to the status of a person.

Although the reader is not intended to solve the mystery themselves but is rather meant to follow Marple's unfolding of the solution in the dénouement, perhaps fully exploiting scenario-dependence would open Christie to accusations of not 'playing fair' with the readers; making a fully scenario-dependent character a main character (and murderer) in retrospect would probably be too much concealment for Christie to be able to point at the clarity of the solution in retrospect. This could be seen as a way of avoiding condemnation through avoiding breaking Van Dine's (1928 [2006]) 11th rule (*A servant must not be chosen by the author as the culprit*) by invoking the 10th (*The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story — that is, a person with whom the reader is familiar*).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the most significant parts of schema theory, scenario-dependence and depth-of-processing research which are relevant to the extracts from Christie's fiction discussed in section 2.5. Christie's use of a maid-character (one of the commonest type of scenario-dependent characters found in her social settings) as a murderer in this particular story certainly indicates that she was aware of the possibilities that manipulation of this type could bring. The choice of one story to analyse by no means implies she only exploited scenario-dependence once (an excellent 'trick' in a similar vein, and one we shall return to, is found in *The ABC Murders*), and although at the time she was writing her early fiction psychology could not cognitively describe such concepts as scenario-dependence, her use of them shows that a lack of awareness of the *reasons* particular manipulative techniques work does not mean the technique itself was unknown to her.

We move after this heavily cognitive chapter to a discussion of a different kind in Chapter 3, which focuses on the rhetorical structure of parts of Christie's work.

3 Rhetorical Structure

The second direction from which this piece of work approaches Christie's techniques of persuasion is through the structuring of text in a rhetorical manner. As stated previously, the term *rhetoric* is often used to mean persuasive techniques found in non-literary texts. Although the most obvious uses of rhetoric are within the fields of politics or oratory or even education, it is nonetheless also frequently found within literature. Cockcroft and Cockcroft (2005:5) describe 'the techniques by which prose writers, dramatists and poets seek to convince or persuade us of the imaginative truth… of their discourse'. With particular reference to detective fiction, the linguistic choices made seek to persuade a reader of not only the truth of what happened, but also the likelihood of various occurrences and of the guilt of possible suspects, deceptively or not. Rhetoric, therefore, is 'a *persuasive* dialogue and as such can be described as a *controlled* interaction' (*ibid* 5, italics in original), and is thus an interesting model with which to study detective fiction with major manipulative properties.

The examples we shall analyse later in this chapter are persuasive monologues; they are ones in which Christie's famous detective Hercule Poirot attempts to persuade both the characters present and (more importantly) the story's reader of the *correctness* of his solution. The defining aspect of detective fiction in the Christie mould, so to speak, has always been that the detective uses their intellect (Poirot's 'little grey cells') to arrive at a solution, rather than finding compelling proof and building a case on it (such as a 'smoking gun'). Usually, Christie bypasses this by either having the suspect break down completely and confess their guilt as the coda to the dénouement, or by having a *deus ex machina* or another investigator provide vital 'smoking gun' confirmation during the dénouement itself, after the detective has already explained his or her reasoning. Therefore her detectives, and Poirot in particular, find themselves attempting to convince a reader and the other characters present of the truth of an often complex and sometimes outlandish solution. They need to convince, and

convince well, through the sheer force of their argument, and therefore these stories are ideal examples of texts to be analysed through a study of rhetorical structure.

3.1 Rhetorical Structure Theory

When analysing the rhetorical structure of a stretch of text, it is generally valuable to separate each 'move' within it. Each stretch of text with a particular intent can be given a label depending on its function within the overall rhetorical text. These moves can perhaps be described as independent steps leading to an overall technique of persuasion, as distinguished from Swales' (1990) 'generic' moves; Anna Mauranen (1993) was one of the first to suggest a distinction between such generic moves and 'rhetorical' moves, which are less to do with compulsory parts of a text which is attempting to fit into a genre and more to do with the strategy of a writer when constructing arguments. To describe the rhetorical moves of detective fiction, we can use Rhetorical Structure Theory (hereafter RST), which provides a flexible set of descriptive terms with which to label various parts of a discourse based on their organisation and rhetorical intent. The definitive work on RST remains Mann and Thompson (1987). A more recent summary (Taboada and Mann 2006:425) explains:

> RST addresses text organization by means of relations that hold between parts of a text. It explains coherence by postulating a hierarchical, connected structure of texts, in which every part of a text has a role, a function to play, with respect to other parts in the text.

Mystery stories, whose texts perform the dual function above of both deceiving the reader about the correct solution and helping them perceive it, have an interesting and complex rhetorical structure. But the text itself, at a solely linguistic level, also performs a rhetorical function outwith that of structure.

RST operates by 'describing how each individual component of a text contributes to the communicative goals of the text as a whole' (Bateman and Delin 2006:588). Originally intended to be a natural-language generation tool, RST breaks down a discourse into 'units' (usually numbered) and then concerns itself mainly with the establishment and description of RST relations between such units. For example, take the following from *And Then There Were None*:

> 'They know, therefore, that one of the ten people on the island was not a murderer in any sense of the word, and it follows, paradoxically, that that person must logically be *the* murderer.'
>
> (Christie 2003a:315)

The first unit (*They know, therefore… any sense of the word*) is related to the second unit (*and it follows… be* the *murderer*) by means of an 'evidence' tie between the first unit and second unit. That is to say, the first unit functions as the evidence for the second unit. The relations, units and direction of effect are all decided by the analyst. Each relation has a series of definitional 'applicability conditions' which dictate what each unit in the tie must consist of in addition to the what the combination must consist of and the effect achieved on the hearer/reader (Bateman and Delin 2006:590).

Furthermore, in RST, moves can be considered as hierarchical – parts of the discourse can be subordinated to other stretches to show complex relations, although this can result in the hierarchy imposing an artificial structure on the description (Taboada and Mann 2006:431). When all of the spans have had their relationships to the rest of the text defined, then the full text can be diagrammed, as in figures 1 and 2 below.

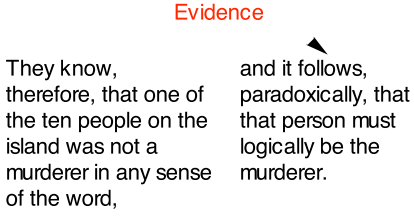

Figure 1 – An RST example from Christie 2003:315

This means that RST can be used 'to capture the underlying structure of texts' (Taboada and Mann 2006:429), and when employed, it 'can be a significant aid toward understanding how the text achieves the effects that it does' (Bateman and Delin 2006:588). Further points from Classic RST will be expounded when contrasting it with this thesis' version of RST below[13].

3.1.1 An Adaptation of RST

As previously stated, the current work employs an adaptation of RST which, although using many of RST's basic principles, differs in its diagrammatic conventions. It is a modification of the system employed in my undergraduate dissertation (Alexander 2004) which used a similar convention for representing rhetorical moves – and although necessarily few theoretical justifications were given in that work for the changes to the theory used, the discussion below intends to show these reasons for this particular thesis. 'Classical RST' (as it is called in, amongst others, Taboada and Mann 2006:426) has a unique method of diagramming a text and the rhetorical moves within that text, and relies on labels being attached to 'ties' between moves. That is to say, the move itself has no rhetorical function, but instead is only given a function *with respect to another part of the text*. Each tie therefore has a label, not each move. An example of Classical RST's tie and label system is shown below:

[13] For more details of Classic RST, the most comprehensive works are Mann and Thompson (1988) and Taboada and Mann (2006), while Bateman and Delin (2006) offers a concise and accurate summary.

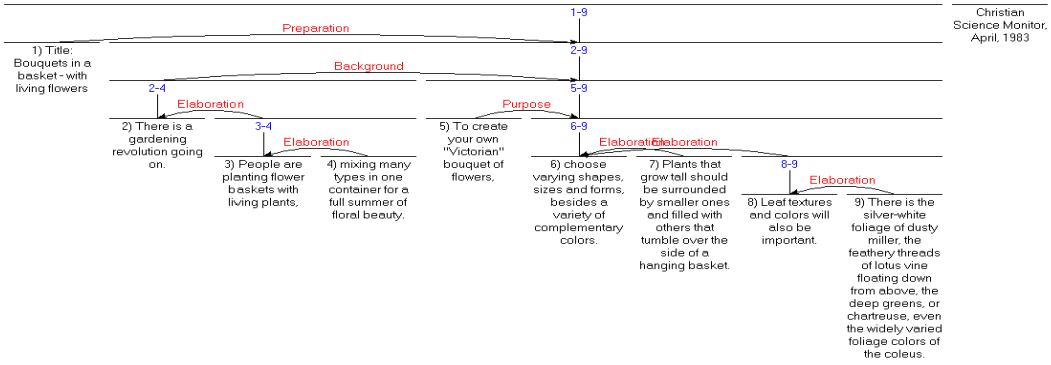

Figure 2 – A larger example RST diagram ('Bouquets') from http://www.sfu.ca/rst/images/bouquets.gif [14]

As we will discuss, there are a number of features of this analysis type and this style of display which advise some modification for its use in this thesis. Firstly, long stretches of text become highly unwieldy when presented in a left-to right manner. The eighteen rhetorical moves analysed as part of section 3.2.3 would, if presented in this form, take five to six pages of A4 paper side-by-side to view at a readable resolution. Secondly, it becomes very difficult in long analyses to see relations between the most important parts of text (which are usually surrounded by secondary or follow-up rhetorical moves). Relations between these major moves require long ties which do not easily show the location of such major moves alongside the nesting of subordinates. Thirdly, RST was originally developed as a theory for use in computational linguistics, and so it necessarily restricted itself to a relatively small closed hierarchical set of relations – between 24 (Mann and Thompson 1988) and 30 (Taboada and Mann 2006). While such a restricted set is desirable and highly useful in computational terms, for stylistic analyses it can result in simplification where none is necessary (for example, a later analysis in section 3.2.3 uses the *ad hoc* move label 'Task' to describe what Classical RST would call a preparation move, although preparation is not an adequate description of the move from a persuasive/manipulative standpoint).

[14] The print quality of this diagram is from the original, unfortunately intended more for viewing on the web than in print. Available RST packages (such as the one used to produce Figure 1 above) tend to have the same problem.

Similarly, while having a hierarchical series of relations is valuable for the purposes of text generation and computer analysis, the current analyses allow the rhetorical moves of the discourse itself to dictate the hierarchical structure of the text. RST generally assumes each 'move' is constituted by an independent clause, which is a rule not followed in this thesis, and RST theorists do admit this rule 'misses the fine detail' of texts and can result, alongside the hierarchical rule, in 'questionable combinations' (Taboada and Mann 2006:429-431).

Finally, RST also incorporates theories of coherence into its model of text structure. Taboada and Mann (2006:431) state that the 'RST definition of coherence of text involves finding an intended role in the text for every unit. Negatively, coherence is the absence of non-sequiturs.' While this is likely to be appropriate, say, for political rhetoric (where a reasonable assumption may be made that, due to limited space and limited attention span, every statement must carry its own rhetorical thrust and must serve a persuasive function), fictional rhetoric does not necessarily fit these conditions. As just one example, despite it being argued above that Christie subordinates her narratives to the plot, there are within many narratives some element of background colour which serves no formal 'role' but instead contributes to the reader's *experience* of a text. Also, professional writers, those who write towards a certain length of novel or short story for a living, often have few disincentives to provide information with no rhetorical role. As such, in literary and other narrative analyses of rhetorical structure of the type undertaken here (which does not concern itself with discourse coherence), we may abandon the requirement for no non-sequiturs.

These alterations do not, by any means, cover all of RST. Its major features – nuclearity, hierarchy, discourse 'moves' and so on are all here followed, and the relations used in the later analyses are all loosely based on RST move types. The most obvious difference employed remains in the diagrammatic representation of the texts analysed. There have, in fact, been a number of differing representations of RST proposed over the years, and

William Mann, one of the creators of RST, has stated that there is 'no theoretical reason to assume that trees are the only possible representation of discourse structure and of coherence relations' (Taboada and Mann 2006:435).

Alexander (2004:16) used a simplification of RST diagrams for the purposes of detailed analyses of the rhetorical move structure of certain texts. For the reasons above, particularly the unwieldy length of an RST tree diagram of a relatively long stretch of text, rhetorical moves were described in a table with one column showing the move content and the other showing the move structure of the text, with indentations indicating the subordination of various moves to one another. I add in this work the typographical assistance of showing moves either with a large initial capital letter (for main moves, or *nuclei* in RST terminology, eg Task) or with no large initial capital and leading full stops indicating the level of subordination (for subordinate moves, eg ..question). Overall, the major difference between this and classical RST diagramming is the assignment of a particular label to discourse moves independently of their ties to other parts of the text.

RST's requirement of giving discourse moves a label only with respect to another part of the text is useful mainly at a less-detailed level than the analyses required here. RST proposes to give an analysis of a whole short text, whereas the current work aims only to give analyses of various rhetorical *stretches* of a much longer text (and so there exists extra discourse to which ties will, of course, lead). A tabular system is fully appropriate because such stretches often contain between one and five main moves (that is, one to five main rhetorical thrusts) and therefore a system of subordination firstly shows the relationship of any move to its rhetorical parent in a clear manner without the need for repeated ties, and secondly the labels themselves clearly describe the 'direction' of the rhetorical move (so a *preparation* move must prepare a move after itself, and an *elaboration* move must elaborate a move before itself, for example). The need for the start and end points of relations to be explicitly stated is thus removed; a move subordinated (and thus indented in the table) has a relation

to its antecedent, while moves at the same level of subordination (despite any nested subordinates below them) have relations to one another and their antecedent shown by the labels used in the description. The advantages of showing rhetorical moves in a table are thus obvious; they can be diagrammed in an easier fashion to read as well as more easily showing the relations between main moves (called *nuclei* in RST).

3.2 *Murder on the Orient Express*

Turning again to structural and rhetorical techniques of persuasion, this section analyses a text which is neither a short story nor a Marple narrative. The text chosen, *Murder on the Orient Express* (Christie 2001, 2004b), is considered one of Christie's best and most famous works (not in the least due to its cinematic adaptation, but also due to the brazen ingenuity of the plot). Twelve passengers, all close to a recent tragedy where a child was kidnapped, ransomed and murdered, converge on a train where the Ratchett, the murderer of the child, is travelling. Planned thoroughly and executed in the manner of a jury, they drug and kill him for what he has done. Pretending throughout not to know one another, the passengers all provide alibis for one another and attempt to present an alternative solution (involving a stranger entering the train) to the famous detective Hercule Poirot – coincidentally travelling on the same train and asked by the train owners to investigate the murder while the train is later stalled in a snowdrift.

This plot both violates and is in accord with Van Dine's twelfth rule – it violates the requirement that *There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed*, but cleverly is in accord with the condition that *the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature*, as at the end of the novel Poirot and the train company let the 'jury' of murderers go free; it is Ratchett, a child kidnapper and murderer who the reader is invited to condemn.

Having every suspect be an equal murderer is by no means obvious to most readers, and the dénouement of the novel, wherein Poirot reviews the evidence and explains that 'they were *all* in it' to a conference of the assembled passengers and train staff, must persuade both the fictional characters that the solution is correct and also demonstrate to the reader the truth of the sequence of events Poirot describes. It is therefore ideal for an analysis of the structural and rhetorical techniques employed by Christie, and again readers unfamiliar with the closing section of the work in question should read the extract in Appendix 3 before proceeding to its analysis.

3.2.1 The Household

Here, again, we must take extracts from the longer extract in order to analyse it in a less unwieldy fashion. The early section of the extract below – where Poirot claims his fellow passengers must have once been in America, and worked in the Armstrong household (that is, the household of the child who was kidnapped and murdered) – is likely to be a surprising one to a reader. Why, they may ask, should a collection of strangers coincidentally travelling together have also all been together many years previously? Although throughout the novel Poirot has discovered that most of the passengers had Armstrong connections, this claim that they composed a household is so unlikely it takes the form of a rhetorical pattern:

…the company assembled was interesting because it was so varied	Claim 1
representing as it did all classes and nationalities.	.evidence
I agreed with him,	.evaluation
but when this particular point came into my mind I tried to imagine whether such an assembly were ever likely to be collected under any other conditions.	Theory
And the answer I made to myself was - only in America.	Claim 2
In America there might be a household composed of just such varied nationalities –	.evidence
an Italian chauffeur,	..concrete example
an English governess,	..concrete example
a Swedish nurse,	..concrete example

a French lady's-maid	..CONCRETE EXAMPLE
and so on.	...SERIES EXAMPLE
That led me to my scheme of "guessing" –	TASK
that is, casting each person for a certain part in the Armstrong drama	.EXPLANATION
much as a producer casts a play.	..SIMILE
Well, that gave me an extremely interesting and satisfactory result.	TASK EVALUATION

Table 3 – Rhetorical structure of the Armstrong household claim

The above table shows Poirot's claim that the passengers must have been part of the Armstrong household. The terminology describing each rhetorical 'move' has been chosen with the intent of being self-evident. There are five main 'moves', each signalled by a large initial capital letter and a black border (as opposed to the small capitals and grey borders of sub-moves). These are the claim of passenger variety (Claim 1), the Theory that the passengers could previously have been connected, the claim of American employment as the only place such diverse people could assemble (Claim 2), the Task of fitting the passengers into the Armstrong household, and the Task Evaluation – and these moves, although not overtly signalled as what are here termed 'main moves', form the rhetorical thrust of the argument. The only missing link is an implied one from earlier – that they were involved in the Armstrong case, and that if they were in *any* household together it would be that particular Armstrong household.

Three of the five main moves have supporting sub-moves, again signalled by initial full stops, no large capitals and grey borders. Firstly, the claim of the unusual variety of the passengers, originating from someone who is not the current speaker, is evidenced and is then evaluated positively by Poirot (who is considered an authority within the novel, and probably also to the reader) to give the effect that the claim is accepted. The second claim is more unusual and states that disparate passengers could have been employed in an American household. This is followed by exemplification of the wildly differing backgrounds and nationalities of the suspects. Here there is rhetorical force in the combination of listing and parallelism (what classical rhetoric terms *isocolon* and

synathroesmus) in the concrete example moves – and by implying continuation by what I term a series example (terms like *and so on*, *etc, and others*).The penultimate main move has been labelled a 'Task', that is, a procedure carried out to provide evidence or, as in this case, to lead to a conclusion. It is considered a main move as it is not subordinate to any of the previous moves – it supports the implicit claim that the passengers worked in the Armstrong household, but fitting them into the household itself is a major part of the top-level argument and it is not evidence as it highlights an obstacle to be overcome rather than results. The technique of presenting the task but not presenting the results means the reader is invited to fill in the evidence gap. As problem-solution patterns occur frequently in a discourse – see Hoey (2001) *inter alia* – readers expect a problem to be followed by a solution. They will therefore attempt to provide the solution themselves if it is relatively easy for them to do so.

3.2.2 The Sleeping Draught

The next extract regards the sleeping draught Ratchett supposedly took on the night he was murdered.

Then the valet.	SITUATION
He said his master was in the habit of taking a sleeping draught when travelling by train.	EVIDENCE
That might be true,	.APPARENT ACCEPTANCE
but *would Ratchett have taken one last night*?	.ACCEPTANCE QUERY
The automatic under his pillow gave the lie to that statement.	.REFUTATION FROM EVIDENCE
Ratchett intended to be on the alert last night.	.CONCLUSION FROM REFUTATION
Whatever narcotic was administered to him must have been done so without his knowledge.	CLAIM (FROM PREVIOUS)
By whom?	RHETORICAL QUERY
Obviously by MacQueen or the valet.	.CLAIM

Table 4 – Refutation of the sleeping draught claim

Here there are four main moves (again shown by large initial capitals and black borders): one establishing the situation, one discussing evidence, one making a claim and another

making a claim through an answer to a rhetorical question. The evidence discussion follows an interesting pattern – there is an apparent acceptance of the valet's claim immediately followed by a questioning of the acceptance in this particular instance. The query is refuted by an evidence-move and a conclusion is reached from the refutation. This embedded conclusion is used as the evidence for a following claim at the top-level argument, which is followed by a rhetorical question setting up a final claim. The overall effect is to provide a clear structure from the refutation of previous evidence to a new claim and finally to another significant claim, and this final claim is emphasised by a rhetorical query.

3.2.3 The Time

The final extract used to discuss structure is the following lengthy discussion of the murder's timing.

And here let me say just a word or two about *times*.	Situation
To my mind, the really interesting point about the dented watch was the place where it was found – in Ratchett's pyjama pocket,	Circumstance
a singularly uncomfortable and unlikely place to keep one's watch,	.elaboration
especially as there is a watch "hook" provided just by the head of the bed.	..support
I felt sure, therefore, that the watch had been deliberately placed in the pocket and faked.	.claim
The crime, then, was not committed at a quarter-past one.	..conclusion
Was it, then, committed earlier? To be exact, at twenty-three minutes to one?	Rhetorical query
My friend M. Bouc advanced as an argument in favour of it the loud cry which awoke me from sleep.	.support
But if Ratchett were heavily drugged *he could not have cried out.*	..claim
If he had been capable of crying out	...conditional 1
he would have been capable of making some kind of a struggle to defend himself,	....conditional 2
and there were no signs of any such struggle.	.....evidence
I remembered that MacQueen had called attention, not once but twice (and the second time in a very blatant manner), to the fact that Ratchett could speak no French.	..evidence
I came to the conclusion that the whole business at twenty-three minutes to one was a comedy played for my benefit!	...conclusion
Anyone might see through the watch business –	Claim
it is a common enough device in detective stories.	.evidence

	They assumed that I should see through it and that, pluming myself on my own cleverness, I would go on to assume that since Ratchett spoke no French the voice I heard at twenty-three minutes to one could not be his, and that Ratchett must be already dead.	..claim
	But I am convinced that at twenty-three minutes to one Ratchett was still lying in his drugged sleep.	...RADICAL CONCLUSION

Table 5 – The discussion of the time of the murder

Despite this extract's length there are only four top-level moves – the introduction to the topic of time (Situation), the Circumstance of the placement of the watch (which leads to Poirot concluding the watch's evidence was faked), the Rhetorical Query regarding the claim a loud cry showed the time of death (followed by a thorough and interestingly-structured refutation) and a final Claim summarising the previous evidence. The second main move with its associated sub-moves forms a circumstance-elaboration-support-claim-conclusion pattern, and is fairly straightforward. The circumstance of the watch's location is presented (as circumstance rather than evidence, as there is no claim preceding it) and followed by an elaboration (that it is not just an unusual place, but an uncomfortable one), support of the embedded claim in the elaboration that the pocket is an uncomfortable place to keep a watch (as there is an alternative), a claim that the watch evidence was faked, based on the elaboration, and a conclusion (which presupposes the claim is accurate).

The persuasive structure of the remainder of this extract has a particularly interesting rhetorical structure. Firstly, the rhetorical device Poirot uses earlier (and throughout many of his appearances in print) returns, emphasising the alternate possibility once the thin evidence of the watch has been discarded. The rhetorical question here is used to reinforce 'an opinion already formed or forming' (Cockcroft and Cockcroft 2005:236). This is followed by what I term *support* – and not *evaluation*, as it does not arise from authority – and this lack of evaluation foreshadows the claim that the evidence provided in the preceding support move is wrong. A conditional structure – if *x* then *y*, and not *y* thus not *x* – rhetorically presents evidence in a more varied manner than the simpler refutation structure above and, again, by omitting the final conclusion (that Ratchett had not cried

out) Christie invites the reader to complete it themselves and so become more involved in the reasoning process, and more inclined to trust it as it is based on their own reasoning. We then return to more evidence at the same level as the earlier claim, being subordinate to the support move as it follows from the circumstance of the loud cry which awoke Poirot from sleep. This unusual structure means two pieces of evidence are presented together, lending heavier support to the final conclusion that the cry was also a fake. Poirot then reinforces both conclusions by summarising: he places them in a causality structure, where the first claim (that the 'watch business' is transparently false) is followed by charmingly self-referential evidence ('a common enough device in detective stories'), which in turn leads to a claim that states once the watch evidence was rejected the loud cry evidence would also be taken to be false. This is all completed by what I term a 'radical conclusion', that is to say, a conclusion which does not follow from the previous evidence as it refutes a refutation. This rhetorical structure – reversing expectations after a carefully constructed argument – is a clear technique used to add a measure of confusion (although not too much, as it is neatly-planned) and provoke more interest.

3.3 Rhetorical Structure and Schematic Manipulation

The fact that rhetorical structure and manipulation by schemata are treated separately in this thesis is by no means intended to imply they are wholly separate approaches. For example, rhetorical structure is a means of presenting an argument to a reader, which of course entails presentation to a reader's mind. Similarly, cognitive manipulation is occasionally enhanced or even carried out by means of the structure of linguistic expressions. The two are frequently found together.

As an example taken entirely at random, the Christie short story *The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb* has as the victim a man named Rupert, and the story contains the following:

> Rupert had plunged once more into his life of dissipation in New York and then, without warning, he had committed suicide leaving behind him a letter which contained some curious phrases. It seemed written in a sudden fit of remorse. He referred to himself as a leper and an outcast and the letter ended by declaring that such as he were better dead.
>
> (Christie 2006 [1924])

The 'revelation' at the conclusion of the story is that Rupert committed suicide not because he was a leper in the sense of being an 'outcast' socially (which the context here implies), but rather because he was told by a crooked doctor (the villain of the piece) that what was actually a minor skin complaint was leprosy – he believed himself literally, rather than metaphorically, a leper.

In the quote above, there are thus two clear types of manipulation in the manners described in this chapter and Chapter 2 above. Firstly, the schematic backgrounding of leprosy through its metaphorical use is reinforced by a collocation with *outcast* and the reader's schema knowledge of the unlikelihood of contracting leprosy in 1920s New York. This manipulation sits alongside the embedding of *leprosy* in the early part of a sentence (as well as other factors, such as the psychological priming of a suicide schemata by the presupposition of suicide, the collocation of *remorse* and priming the likely use of metaphorical language through describing the letter as containing *some curious phrases*) are clear cognitive manipulation techniques. Secondly, the following rhetorical moves occur:

	Report	*Indirect Speech*
It seemed written in a sudden fit of remorse.	CLAIM	
He referred to himself as a leper and an outcast	.SUPPORT	EVIDENCE
and the letter ended by declaring that such as he were better dead.		CONCLUSION

Table 6 – Suicide and the Egyptian Tomb

As this example contains a rhetorical use of indirect speech (Leech and Short 1981:324), there are two entwined rhetorical structures – that of the reporting and that of the indirect speech embedded within it. Not splitting this into Report and Indirect Speech columns would, of course, ignore the evidence-conclusion relation.

In this example, then, the claim-support relation subordinates the support section (containing *leprosy*) by placing the claim first and making the support move function as evidence. If a reader were to consider the 'leper and an outcast' statement they would be likely to consider it as an evidence move, rather than a claim in its own right, because of this subordination. Similarly, the Evidence-Conclusion relation naturally prioritises the conclusion move – a reader questioning this relation is more likely to challenge the strength of the conclusion rather than the nature of the evidence.

The key point here is that the cognitive backgrounding of the plot-significant word *leprosy* is required for its structural subordination, and its structural subordination as evidence/support is key to giving the outcast-interpretation weight for the cognitive backgrounding to function. Although the schema analysis here is perhaps the strongest, neither analyses are wholly convincing on their own, and the line begins to blur between cognitive backgrounding (through placement in the early part of a complex sentence and collocation with other terms) and the rhetorical structuring of expressions.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has hopefully shown that while Chapter 2 argued Christie was a skilful manipulator of readers on an explicitly cognitive level, she also operated in a more 'traditional' way by exploiting tricks and tools of rhetoric (which, of course, date back to Classical times, although the analysis here was relatively modern). The act of convincing a reader of the logical and necessary truth of the intellectual revelations of Hercule Poirot is not very much different from convincing a reader to look the other way when a concealed murderer enters the narrative; by referring to the analyses here as 'less' cognitive, I do not mean in any way to imply that the act of persuasion is not always a cognitive one regardless of technique. Indeed, Poirot's exposition here relies on what I would informally term 'tricks'

of presenting information best to a sceptical mind, or a mind which already has its own pet theory how the murder was committed.

Regardless, the above extracts have shown Christie's skill in rhetorical manipulation in addition to Chapter 2's emphasis on more heavily cognitive issues. Chapter 4 below now turns to take the perspective of characters within the narrative, and most particularly Christie's use of those characters' reliability (or lack thereof).

4 (Un)reliability and Ambiguity

Just as a person can be reliable or unreliable, a created fictional character can have attributes of reliability or unreliability assigned to them by an author. Similarly, just as what a person can say can be ambiguous, what characters say or think can be made *deliberately* ambiguous by an author. The natural tendency for people to vary in their dependability and clarity can thus be exploited by an author like Christie to manipulate a reader into once more being blinded to the eventual solution to whatever crime is being discussed – and this is the subject of the present chapter.

The discussion below focuses on unreliable narration in section 4.1, briefly touches on the reliability or unreliability of witnesses in section 4.2, and discusses the manipulation of a reader through the ambiguity of a character's reported thoughts and actions in 4.3.

4.1 Unreliable Narrators

Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (published in 1926) contains one of the earliest detective fiction examples of the manipulation of a reader through narration which is unreliable. The plot is relatively simple; Roger Ackroyd is murdered, as the title suggests, and his heavily-in-debt stepson is the initial likely suspect. The narrator, a Dr Sheppard, is a friend of the late Ackroyd and was with him on the night of the murder. Sheppard's neighbour happens to be Poirot, a newcomer to the village who investigates the murder at the behest of the stepson's fiancée. Sheppard assists with his investigations and narrates the case much as Captain Arthur Hastings does in other Poirot novels – or as Dr Watson narrates for Sherlock Holmes. Poirot conducts a thorough investigation and, in the dénouement, reveals the murderer can be no other than the narrator, Sheppard. The novel ends with an 'Apologia' from Sheppard in the form of a full confession prior to his suicide.

Sheppard, then, is the epitome of an 'unreliable narrator'. This term was coined by Wayne Booth in his seminal *The Rhetoric of Fiction* to denote a dramatised narrator who does not act 'in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms)' (Booth 1961:158). By this, Booth means the ends of the narrator are at odds with the ends of the 'implied author' – and this implied author is not necessarily the person who actually wrote the narrative, but a reader's reconstruction of the author through a reading of the narrative (Booth 1961:71-73)[15]. We can identify Christie's aims with Van Dine's twenty rules above. Sheppard, who omits the very salient fact that he murdered Ackroyd in the early stages of the book, could be said to violate Van Dine's fourth rule – 'The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit' (Van Dine 1928 [2006]). The question of this turns on an interpretation of 'official' which really does not concern us here.

However, more relevantly for our purposes, Christie actually dramatises Van Dine's second rule: 'No willful [*sic*] tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself' (*ibid*). This is an example of Christie's trickery (and could be seen as over-zealousness towards the rules of the genre); the detective has at no point any means to see into the mind of a suspect. When following rule one ('The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery') then the reader may not know what the detective does not; that is, the reader cannot be told what the narrator knows but the detective does not. If Sheppard confessed in the first chapter rather than the last, then there would be no 'mystery' in the mystery novel (and would instead be an inverted detective procedural novel much like the *Columbo* television

[15] I retain Booth's term in spite of C. Ruth Sabol's claim that 'Booth clearly asserts that the mark of an unreliable narrator is neither the potential for deception, nor the use of difficult irony, nor the instances of lying. An unreliable narrator is either mistaken or pretending by speaking as if he had certain qualities which the implied author denies him.' (Sabol 1989:209). In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, there is no pretence that the narrator is mistaken, but it is rather the case that he is covering his own guilt. Similarly, as we will see, the narrator does not lie *per se*. The term *unreliable narrator* is too useful to be limited in this way, and it is unlikely Booth meant to exclude such narrators as Sheppard.

series). Sheppard cannot be allowed to tell the reader his guilt; this would create an imbalance between Poirot's conception of the murder and the reader's.

In fact, it could be said that the reader still has an advantage over Poirot; for Sheppard does not lie to the reader at all. He conceals the truth, but does not lie to do so. As Lowe says:

> Actual misrepresentation is not, under the normal conventions of the narrative transaction, an option, except in those special cases where the narrative situation itself is opened up to interrogation by establishing the narrator as 'unreliable' - as lying, or deluded, or incompetently inarticulate. But it is possible, particularly at the viewpoint level, for significant narrative information to be *left out*, and the holes filled unobtrusively in (the *Roger Ackroyd* solution); or for information to be misleadingly *flagged* with a narrative function other than, or additional to, the one it actually serves; or for fallacious lines of *reasoning* to appear in the internal plot models of characters with whom the reader is encouraged to agree.
>
> (Lowe 2000:73, italics and parenthetical reference to Ackroyd in the original)

Genette describes this as Christie's 'trick' of 'ensuring paralipsis' (Genette 1988:67,74). The unreliable narrator, then, is not solely unreliable in terms of narration but is also what O'Neill calls an 'unreliable focalizer' (O'Neill 1996:97).

How, then, does this relate to manipulation? I would argue that a reader would tend to treat Sheppard as an exception to the list of suspects, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, as all characters *should* be suspected as a possible murderer, the probability of each individual in a large cast is thus relatively small. Constantly mentally tracking the likely guilt, clues and various attributes of every suspect becomes difficult and onerous for the reader (there are eleven main characters in the novel, excluding Poirot and Roger Ackroyd himself) – excluding certain characters then becomes a 'short-cut'. Indeed, the experience of reading a mystery novel usually incorporates some aspect of ignoring the likely guilt of certain characters – the most likely suspect, for example, is frequently discounted as being too obvious, and for Christie at least her own series detectives (Poirot and Marple, among others) were to be above suspicion[16]. Those who assist the detective, then, have an air of

[16] This is not entirely true; in one novel, Poirot *is* the murderer, but this a deliberate shock and part of Christie's 'bluff to end them all' (Wagstaff and Poole 2004:220), as well as an example of Christie's persistent violation of Van Dine's rules of the genre. Regardless, *Ackroyd*, as the fourth of thirty-nine Poirot novels, is not likely to have Poirot turning to murder if he was to remain a viable detective hero in the 1920s.

innocence by association – they are presumably trusted by the detective (whose judgement and intellect we are intended to ourselves trust), and they have a long list of fictional forebears, from Captain Hastings to Dr Watson. While it is not unknown for main characters – or even detectives – to become suspects themselves (it has even become an occasional gimmick in mystery fiction – 'the detective must fight to clear their name' cliché) it is, however, almost always employed to add tension, not to cast actual doubt on the detective's innocence.

We may also note here that, at least at the time of publication, an unreliable narrator was not a common occurrence for the crime and detective fiction of the time. Hark (1997:113) claims that:

> The outcry concerning unfairness when the book first appeared in 1926 showed that the reading conventions for consumers of detective fiction excluded the unreliable narrator, who was becoming quite conventional himself in the "high" literature of the time.

So Christie would not have anticipated the objection that a reader may suspect a narrator as being unreliable. Although unreliable narration has become more common in literature, film, and television, it is still by no means a default position.

Furthermore, an important aspect of Sheppard's narration is that he narrates in the first person. This makes him a character who is closer to the reader than all others; his actions are fully described, and everything the reader sees or hears is only what Sheppard himself could see or hear. He is probably too *ubiquitous* a character to be suspected by a reader. He is in a different category from the other suspects purely by being an 'I' rather than a 'he' or 'she' – although the fact he is a suspect is technically present, the way that he exists at all points in the narrative makes him not explicitly part of that external parade of suspects. In fact, manipulating a reader's response through using first or third person narration is somewhat under-researched, but some evidence suggests 'that some of these shifts in perspective will alter the types of causal structures readers construct' (Gerrig 1993:57-64)

and Bortolussi and Dixon suggest that readers 'identify' with a first-person narrator (2003:85ff).

Regardless of a reader's suspicions of him, Sheppard still conceals his guilt, and does so through ellipsis; he simply omits information where it points to him as the murderer:

> I am rather pleased with myself as a writer. What could be neater, for instance, than the following:
> *'The letters were brought in at twenty minutes to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone.'*
> All true, you see.
>
> (Christie 2004b:203, italics from the original)

It was, of course, within those ten minutes before Sheppard's departure that he killed Ackroyd. Sheppard does not lie except by omission; every part of the book is the 'truth' within the story world. Pragmatically, however, he lies greatly. Grice's maxim of quantity (1975), one of the famous codifications of speaker/listener presumptions, requires a contribution to be 'as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange'. Sheppard most distinctly does not follow this, and this is the most interesting aspect of the reader manipulation employed within *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

In fact, this manipulation involves Christie concealing the murderer in two different ways; firstly through 'disguising' the murderer as the narrator, as we have seen, and secondly by distracting attention away from Sheppard and towards other, more immediately plausible, suspects and events.

We may now proceed to see how this manipulation operates in the story itself.

4.1.1 *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

The novel, with its thorough concealment of Sheppard's guilt and its revelation of the same in the closing stages, invites a re-reading. The best way to approach it with the ending in mind, therefore, is in reverse order – with reference to the evidence presented in the

dénouement. Appendix 4 contains the final short chapters of the novel, beginning immediately after Poirot accused Sheppard. The accusation itself summarises the evidence:

> 'Let us recapitulate—now that all is clear. A person who was at the Three Boars earlier that day, a person who knew Ackroyd well enough to know that he had purchased a dictaphone, a person who was of a mechanical turn of mind, who had the opportunity to take the dagger from the silver table before Miss Flora arrived, who had with him a receptacle suitable for hiding the dictaphone—such as a black bag, and who had the study to himself for a few minutes after the crime was discovered while Parker was telephoning for the police. In fact—*Dr. Sheppard*!'
>
> (Christie 2004b:199, italics from the original)

Here it will be necessary to describe the plot in slightly more detail – and in particular, the places where Sheppard manipulates the reader into believing his innocence, consciously or unconsciously. In short, the novel opens with the suicide of Mrs Ferrars, a local middle-aged widow. Sheppard, the later dénouement reveals, had been blackmailing Ferrars because she poisoned her husband, and had pushed too hard for more money. It is her suicide that triggers the plot of the novel, as Sheppard immediately suspects that Ferrars would have told Ackroyd about the blackmail. A few days later, Sheppard goes to Ackroyd's house for dinner and discovers that Ferrars told Ackroyd she was being blackmailed, but not by whom. Ackroyd reveals to Sheppard that he has an unread letter from Ferrars revealing the name of her blackmailer, and before Ackroyd reads it Sheppard stabs him and leaves the house, implying Ackroyd does not wish to be disturbed. Needless to say, many others present in Ackroyd's house on that night have a motive for murder, and as Sheppard attests Ackroyd was alive as Sheppard left, suspicion falls on several of the other house residents. The detective Hercule Poirot, living nearby, works out that Sheppard must have been the murderer. There are far more details and twists in the novel than this, of course, but these are all the details which are relevant to the extracts under examination.

4.1.2 Motive and Blackmail

The opening chapter of the book has Sheppard returning from Mrs Ferrars' house after discovering her suicide:

> To tell the truth, I was considerably upset and worried. I am not going to pretend that at that moment I foresaw the events of the next few weeks. I emphatically did not do so.
> But my instinct told me that there were stirring times ahead.
>
> (Christie 2004b:5)

Emphatically, Sheppard states he does not like or admire Ferrars, so his being upset at her suicide is unusual. However, the foreshadowing effect of *the events of the next few weeks*, with its warning of upsetting events to come, goes some way towards drawing attention away from Sheppard's worry. The final sentence then confirms this attention towards the future – *there were stirring times ahead*. At no point does Sheppard state why he was upset and worried at that time about the death of Ferrars, but instead draws attention to what is to come. The reason the times would be stirring is a dual one; the events can upset Sheppard as either an observer whose friend has been murdered, or as a murderer caught up within an investigation.

He continues:

> Mrs. Ferrars' husband died just over a year ago, and Caroline has constantly asserted, without the least foundation for the assertion, that his wife poisoned him.
> She scorns my invariable rejoinder that Mr. Ferrars died of acute gastritis, helped on by habitual overindulgence in alcoholic beverages. The symptoms of gastritis and arsenical poisoning are not, I agree, unlike, but Caroline bases her accusation on quite different lines.
>
> (Christie 2004b:6)

Sheppard here performs some quite clever verbal sleight-of-hand. Caroline is his sister, and the embedded *without the least foundation for the assertion* evaluates the groundlessness of *Caroline's* assertion, and not the assertion itself. In fact, Sheppard knows the poisoning to be true. Similarly, Sheppard's reply is a *rejoinder*, not an objection or denial. The structure of the third sentence is just as manipulative; not only does Sheppard subtly and dismissively mention his own correct evidence for Ferrars being the murderer, but he goes as far as to mention that Caroline's reasoning, being different, is incorrect. (This has a rhetorical move structure of concession and claim where the concession, being based on a hypothetical reason not explicitly mentioned, is backgrounded when compared to the claim – which is then elaborated but not here quoted.)

In this next extract, the first speaker is Ackroyd, speaking on the night he died about Ferrars confessing to him about the murder of her husband, and the second speaker is Sheppard:

> 'Yes,' he went on, in a low, monotonous voice, 'she confessed everything. It seems that there is one person who has known all along—who has been blackmailing her for huge sums. It was the strain of that that drove her nearly mad.'
> 'Who was the man?'
> Suddenly before my eyes there arose the picture of Ralph Paton and Mrs. Ferrars side by side. Their heads so close together. I felt a momentary throb of anxiety. Supposing – oh! but surely that was impossible. I remembered the frankness of Ralph's greeting that very afternoon. Absurd!
> 'She wouldn't tell me his name,' said Ackroyd slowly. 'As a matter of fact, she didn't actually say that it was a man. But of course—'
>
> (Christie 2004b:32)

The important part here is the concealment of Sheppard's true anxiety in the third paragraph. The immediate assumption is that Ralph Paton is the blackmailer – this is a fairly standard pragmatic implicature which, by means of appearing to violate Grice's (1975) maxim of relevance, leads a reader to find an alternate meaning (and the most obvious of these, given that Paton's name arises in the context of an unknown blackmailer, is that Paton *was* that blackmailer). The alternate explanation in light of Sheppard's confession is clearly that Sheppard was wondering if Ferrars had also told Paton about Sheppard blackmailing her.

This has another interesting structure – the *frankness of Ralph's greeting* sentence is also one with a dual meaning, and also is enough of an apparent non sequiteur to rely on conversational implicature. One possible meaning is that Sheppard believes one who would greet him frankly is incapable of murder, while the other is that he thinks no-one who knew him to be a blackmailer would greet him frankly. The first explanation is rather implausible, although it fits better with the earlier implicature when Paton's name is mentioned. In this case, Paton's guilt is primed with the first implicature and is necessary to make sense – however implausible – of the second implicature, while the whole thing makes much more sense after Sheppard's guilt is known. This whole paragraph is, of course, a clue to that guilt, but only a clue in retrospect (what I above term a *buried clue*).

4.1.3 The Murder

> 'Good evening, doctor. Coming to dine? Or is this a professional call?'
> The last was in allusion to my black bag which I had laid down on the oak chest.
> I explained that I expected a summons to a confinement case at any moment, and so had come out prepared for an emergency call.
>
> (Christie 2004b:24)

This extract is from the night of the murder, and Sheppard needs the bag for various reasons related to his murderous intent. Therefore this last is a lie – but a lie to the butler who is speaking in the first paragraph, not to the reader. Sheppard as the narrator is faithfully reporting what was said; Sheppard as the character is the one who lies. The use of the device of indirect speech (Leech and Short 1981:318) allows Sheppard to use the reporting verb *explained* (although any speech verb would do) and so maintain the truthfulness-as-narrator gambit Christie required.

There is a similar speech trick here, just after Ackroyd has received a letter in Sheppard's company which contains the name of the blackmailer:

> 'I beg your pardon,' I said, reddening. 'I do not mean read it aloud to me. But read it through whilst I am still here.'
> Ackroyd shook his head. 'No, I'd rather wait.'
> But for some reason, obscure to myself, I continued to urge him.
> 'At least, read the name of the man,' I said.
> Now Ackroyd is essentially pig-headed. The more you urge him to do a thing, the more determined he is not to do it. All my arguments were in vain.
> The letter had been brought in at twenty minutes to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread.
>
> (Christie 2004b:35)

The end of the fifth paragraph (*All my arguments were in vain*) contains a narrative report of a speech act (Leech and Short 1981:323-324, but without topic; cf Semino and Short 2004:52) is here used cunningly to cover up the distance in time between the letters coming in and Sheppard leaving. For a reader unaware of Sheppard's guilt, it is not implausible that Ackroyd and Sheppard spoke for a while; the narrative report means they could easily have discussed reading the letters for ten minutes – while, in actual fact, they likely discussed it only for a brief while before Sheppard stabbed Ackroyd.

And later the same night:

> Ten minutes later I was at home once more. Caroline was full of curiosity to know why I had returned so early. I had to make up a slightly fictitious account of the evening in order to satisfy her, and I had an uneasy feeling that she saw through the transparent device.
>
> (Christie 2004b:36)

This is another dual-interpretation device, where Sheppard is simultaneously lying because he is concerned that Caroline does not need to know Ackroyd's private affairs, and because he has just committed murder. Yet, again, the first implicature (particularly given the many mentions of Caroline's gossipy character) is wholly natural while being ambiguous enough for later re-interpretation. It is still remarkable that Christie has Sheppard reveal he had to lie about what he did earlier while actually revealing nothing about the book's solution.

Later still that night:

> I ran down the stairs and took up the receiver.
> 'What?' I said. 'What? Certainly, I'll come at once.'
> I ran upstairs, caught up my bag, and stuffed a few extra dressings into it.
> 'Parker telephoning,' I shouted to Caroline, 'from Fernly. They've just found Roger Ackroyd murdered.'
> I got out the car in next to no time, and drove rapidly to Fernly. Jumping out, I pulled the bell impatiently. There was some delay in answering, and I rang again.
> Then I heard the rattle of the chain and Parker, his impassivity of countenance quite unmoved, stood in the open doorway.
> I pushed past him into the hall.
> 'Where is he?' I demanded sharply.
> 'I beg your pardon, sir?'
> 'Your master. Mr. Ackroyd. Don't stand there staring at me, man. Have you notified the police?'
> 'The police, sir? Did you say the police?' Parker stared at me as though I were a ghost.
> 'What's the matter with you, Parker? If, as you say, your master has been murdered—'
> A gasp broke from Parker.
> 'The master? Murdered? Impossible, sir!'
> It was my turn to stare.
> 'Didn't you telephone to me, not five minutes ago, and tell me that Mr. Ackroyd had been found murdered?'
> 'I, sir? Oh! no indeed, sir. I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing.'
> 'Do you mean to say it's all a hoax? That there's nothing the matter with Mr. Ackroyd?'
> 'Excuse me, sir, did the person telephoning use my name?'
> 'I'll give you the exact words I heard. "Is that Dr. Sheppard? Parker, the butler at Fernly, speaking. Will you please come at once, sir. Mr. Ackroyd has been murdered."'
> Parker and I stared at each other blankly.
>
> (Christie 2004b:36-37)

Poirot's re-interpretation of this particular event is reproduced as part of Appendix 4 (the novel's final chapters). In summary, Sheppard got someone else to call at that time on an unrelated matter, pretended it was Parker, the butler, and went to Ackroyd's home, Fernly. He had to go there to retrieve a dictaphone which he had stolen from Ackroyd and fitted with a time-activated device (to make it sound as though Ackroyd was still alive and speaking after the murder, and thus give Sheppard an apparent alibi to the other members of the household). This extract amalgamates a number of Sheppard's principles of truthfulness – the omission of what was said on the other side of the telephone conversation, mostly reporting only speech in the conversation with Parker, the omission of any internal monologue or personal reactions. All of these, of course, are perfectly valid ways of showing urgency in a narrative, and it is Christie's skill that means she both uses them in this way while also using them to manipulate a reader into not noticing the clues to Sheppard's guilt she has to place throughout the text.

Our final extract is only slightly later, when Sheppard and the butler break down the door to check on Ackroyd:

> Ackroyd was sitting as I had left him in the armchair before the fire. His head had fallen sideways, and clearly visible, just below the collar of his coat, was a shining piece of twisted metalwork.
> […]
> Parker hurried away, still wiping his perspiring brow.
> I did what little had to be done. I was careful not to disturb the position of the body, and not to handle the dagger at all. No object was to be attained by moving it. Ackroyd had clearly been dead some little time.
>
> (Christie 2004b:39)

Two parts of this bear brief examination. Firstly, Sheppard's very exact use of *Ackroyd was sitting as I had left him* is cleverly polysemous; an unaware reader could see it as meaning 'in the same place' while another reader could see it meaning 'dead'. Secondly, *I did what little had to be done* is also an dual-edged comment, vague enough to mean both the normal actions of a doctor with a dead body or to remove the dictaphone evidence, as is *No object*

was to be attained, which could have as the referent of object either information about the death or deliberate concealment of the murderer.

There is little left to be said about Christie's manipulation here – she manages to deflect a reader's suspicion away from Sheppard while still providing a number of clues and hints that he did in fact commit murder. As Carroll says in passing regarding *Ackroyd*, 'being surprised is consistent with there being causally necessary conditions in the narrative that are, so to speak, stylistically recessive' (Carroll 2001:40).

4.2 (Un)reliable Witnesses

It is not necessary for a narrator to be unreliable for information in a narrative to be unreliable itself. Mystery novels often rely on witness unreliability for dramatic effect or exposition – a created character can be incorrect, mistaken, or confused. In the same way as a narrator can mislead a reader directly through omission or concealment, a character can do the same indirectly, and with more overt suspicion. This technique is perhaps one of the most common in mystery novels, and is one we shall examine only briefly.

For all the reasons above why Sheppard was likely *not* to be suspected, most non-narrating characters with reason to be involved in a murder are likely to at some point fall under suspicion – with the exception, of course, of the detective. Characters can tell the truth, lie, or tell the truth *as they see it*. That is to say, characters can:

> …omit relevant information about characters, events, atmosphere, ideas, etc., and they can distort, misinterpret or misrepresent them. […] speakers are limited to the reality of the fictive world, and their statements about it can typically be verified by checking them against other statements in the same work which refer to this 'internal field of reference'
>
> (Tamir-Ghez 1979:69)

This is particularly true of witness characters in a mystery novel. As Genette points out, although such works as *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* blatantly conceal through omission by their choice of narrator (or focalizer), all 'classical' detective stories hide facts, discoveries

and inductions from the reader (Genette 1980:196), and as these facts are so often revealed through witness testimony, those witnesses must naturally be suspect as a method of manipulating the reader.

Such manipulation is generally achieved through changes in perspective. That is to say, an event appears to occur in different ways to different witnesses – either through physical perspective (what Toolan (2001:63) refers to as 'spatiotemporal focalization') or through reported motives and preoccupations (where there are two explanations for the events a witness sees, but the witness only describes one motivation). This idea of a witness' psychological perspective on events is one which Christie returns to again and again – it is mentioned in *Ackroyd* (Christie 2004b:63):

> To each man his own knowledge. You could tell me the details of the patient's appearance—nothing there would escape you. If I wanted information about the papers on that desk, Mr. Raymond would have noticed anything there was to see. To find out about the fire, I must ask the man whose business it is to observe such things.

This also plays a major part in another Christie novel, *Cards on the Table* (Christie 2005:1-175). Notable in this work is that the witness is not *un*reliable, but in fact the plot itself hangs on their reliability, or at least their psychological predictability – as we shall discuss in 4.2.2 below.

In this way, the mental state, occupation and character of a witness affects how and what they see, as well as the physical facts of what they observe. Short examples shall suffice for a demonstration of both; *Death in the Clouds* manipulates a reader through characters being mistaken regarding the physical actions taken, while *Cards on the Table* provides a demonstration of the effect of the psychological mind-set of a witness on their evidence.

4.2.1 *Death in the Clouds*

Published in 1935, *Death in the Clouds* (Christie 2003b:375-552) is an excellent example of one of Christie's 'locked-room' mysteries. In this case, the locked room is actually a small

aeroplane, on board which an old lady (later revealed to be a blackmailer) is murdered. All the passengers are automatic suspects (including Poirot, who happens to be present), and yet no-one can remember seeing the woman Giselle die or anyone go near her – it is only when the plane lands that she is discovered to be dead. Death is from a small wound in the neck, hypothesised to either be a wasp sting or the prick from a poisoned dart – the dart theory becomes much more likely when a poisoned dart is found nearby, as is a blowpipe.

In combination with a rather complex motive, a man named Norman Gale is revealed as the murderer:

> 'That is what you did. When coffee was served and the stewards had gone to the other compartment you went to the toilet, put on your linen coat, padded your cheeks with cottonwool rolls, came out, seized a coffee spoon from the box in the pantry opposite, hurried down the gangway with the steward's quick run, spoon in hand, to Giselle's table. You thrust the thorn into her neck, opened the match-box and let the wasp escape, hurried back into the toilet, changed your coat and emerged leisurely to return to your table. The whole thing took only a couple of minutes.
> '*Nobody notices a steward particularly.*
>
> (Christie 2003b:548-549, italics from the original)

Both Gale the murderer and Christie the author add some perspective-based manipulation. Here, the schematic backgrounding of servants to scenario-dependent characters – or in this case, air stewards – is emphasised, although not employed by the omniscient third-person narrator as in *The Tuesday Night Club*, but rather through the first-person testimony of the various characters within the narrative. Witnesses are unreliable in that their own minds are not to be trusted; much the same way that the reader's perceptions in Chapter 2 above were not always to be trusted if they were deceived by authorial manipulation.

We may now wish to ask in what way the witnesses are unreliable. If the murderer is also a witness (as is often the case in Christie), then he or she will be wholly unreliable as a witness in the sense that they will lie to conceal the truth. If the witness is innocent of all guilt then they may still be unreliable, as a fully reliable witness (who saw *everything*) would be inconveniently knowledgeable for the purposes of the plot.

The inquest evidence given by James Ryder is of this character. Ryder was sitting in the seat immediately before Giselle, the murdered blackmailer, and his evidence was crucial at the early stage in the investigation:

> 'Did any of the people in front of you move from their seats?'
> 'Well, the man two seats ahead of me got up and went to the toilet compartment.'
> 'That was in a direction away from you and from the deceased?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'Did he come down the car towards you at all?'
> 'No, he went straight back to his seat.'
> 'Was he carrying anything in his hand?'
> 'Nothing at all.'
> 'You're sure of that?'
> 'Quite.'
>
> (Christie 2003b:410)

The man 'two seats ahead' was Norman Gale, the murderer – as a reader could tell only by cross-referencing the seat diagram near the beginning of the novel with the passenger manifest. Ryder's evidence, then, is misleading – Gale, as Poirot describes, did come back down the car towards Giselle, concealing the poisoned dart. Ryder's evidence exonerates Gale through the slip (understandable to anyone who was fooled by the maid in the *Tuesday Night Club*) of ignoring servants and scenario-dependent characters.

Ryder's evidence is supposedly definitive; he would have seen any person who went towards Giselle's seat (and did, in the case of another character who went past Giselle, but long before she was dead), and so if it was accepted by a reader, it leads to the conclusion that a blowpipe must have been used to administer the venom. This blowpipe is an important red herring in the entire plot, and the efforts of the police investigator to see the positions within the plane that each suspect would have had to take to blow a dart across a full carriage occupies a great deal of time. Ryder's unreliability then turns a relatively minor red herring into a much larger one.

4.2.2 *Cards on the Table*

Christie's foreword to *Cards on the Table* (published in 1936) reads:

> …there should be, I think, an equal interest attached to four persons, each of whom has committed murder and is capable of committing further murders. They are four widely divergent types; the motive that drives each one of them to crime is peculiar to that person, and each one would employ a different method. The deduction must, therefore, be entirely psychological, but it is none the less interesting for that…
>
> (Christie 2005:2)

And this is an admirable summary of the plot in the abstract. Briefly, the murder victim here is a Mr Shaitana, who was stabbed by one of four suspects during a bridge game where Shaitana was sitting nearby. Each suspect got up at some point during the game, and each had a motive and the will to murder Shaitana – this is Christie's point in the quote above.

The significance of the 'psychology' of each suspect is revealed in the dénouement, where a Dr Roberts is revealed as the murderer – and the second paragraph of the quote below is key:

> 'I next made a second test. I got every one in turn to tell me just what they remembered of the room. From that I got some very valuable information. First of all, by far the most likely person to have noticed the dagger was Dr. Roberts. He was a natural observer of trifles of all kinds – what is called an observant man. Of the bridge hands, however, he remembered practically nothing at all. I did not expect him to remember much, but his complete forgetfulness looked as though he had had something else on his mind all the evening. Again, you see, Dr. Roberts was indicated.
>
> 'Mrs. Lorrimer I found to have a marvellous card memory, and I could well imagine that with any one of her powers of concentration a murder could easily be committed close at hand and she would never notice anything. She gave me a valuable piece of information. The grand slam was bid by Dr. Roberts (quite unjustifiably) – and he bid it in her suit, not his own, so that she necessarily played the hand.
>
> (Christie 2005:170-171)

Here some major characteristics of the suspects' psychology (Mrs Lorrimer's sharp eye for bridge and both Roberts' normal attention to detail and his distraction from important details at what would be a crucial moment) are used as reliable hints to their likelihood of having committed a murder or been able to notice the act of murder nearby. In other words, and in keeping with the theme of this chapter, Christie implies that there are certain *reliable* characteristics of her characters which can be used as clues to the reader. I would argue, however, that this is not the case in this novel.

Believing Poirot's assertion of suspicion in *Cards on the Table* relies on the reader assigning certain characteristics to Roberts through descriptions of his earlier behaviour. The best model with which to study this attribution is described in Jonathan Culpeper's detailed study of the methods of creating a 'particular impression of a character in the reader's head' (2001:1). Culpeper takes theories of social cognition and applies them to texts (particularly drama) to investigate how a reader decides 'to attend to some behaviours, be they linguistic or non-linguistic, but not others in forming an impression of a character' (2001:113). With regards to *Cards on the Table*, we may use Culpeper's model to describe how Christie attributes the characteristics of high memory recall to Dr Roberts in an attempt to again subtly present significant information to the reader.

Culpeper establishes that a 'person attribution' – that is, a reader's extrapolation from a character's behaviour to their characteristics – requires, among others, 'low distinctness, high consistency and low consensus' (2001:126ff). By this, it is meant that when observing the character when he or she interacts with a stimulus, a reader would attribute a certain characteristic to the character themselves and not the situation if the character would have a consistently low likelihood of reacting differently to a similar stimulus, and that such a reaction would not be wholly consistent with that of others'. This summary is complex in the abstract, but Culpeper's example is that a person who laughs at many different types of films, consistently laughs (on different occasions) at the film they are being observed watching, and who finds it funny while others watching do not, will likely be thought of as a 'jovial' person (Culpeper 2001:127-128). The further requirements in Culpeper's integrated model (*ibid*) are that the character is free from external pressures in acting that way, their behaviour is unambiguous and it is unusual (that is, it departs from a perceiver's expectations).

How, then, does this relate to *Cards on the Table*? To recap the plot, Dr Roberts, during a game of bridge where he was 'dummy' (that is, doing nothing at that part of the game), got

up from the table on the pretence of fetching a drink and stabbed Shaitana with a nearby knife. In the course of his investigation, Poirot asks all four suspects to describe the room in which they were playing (and where the murder took place), and Dr Roberts' evidence to Poirot regarding this is detailed to the point of parody:

> He began facetiously after the manner of an auctioneer.
> 'One large settee upholstered in ivory brocade – one ditto in green ditto – four or five large chairs. Eight or nine Persian rugs – a set of twelve small gilt Empire chairs. William and Mary bureau. (I feel just like an auctioneer's clerk.) Very beautiful Chinese cabinet. Grand piano. There was other furniture but I'm afraid I didn't notice it. Six first-class Japanese prints. Two Chinese pictures on looking-glass. Five or six very beautiful snuff-boxes. Some Japanese ivory netsuke figures on a table by themselves. Some old silver – Charles I tazzas, I think. One or two pieces of Battersea enamel –'
> 'Bravo, bravo!' Poirot applauded.
> 'A couple of old English slipware birds – and, I think, a Ralph Wood figure. Then there was some Eastern stuff – intricate silver work. Some jewellery, I don't know much about that. Some Chelsea birds, I remember. Oh, and some miniatures in a case – pretty good ones, I fancy. That's not all by a long way – but it's all I can think of for the minute.'
>
> (Christie 2005:62)

And this contrasts greatly with his earlier recollection of the bridge scores during the same interview but only a page or so previously:

> 'You're joking, M. Poirot. How can I possibly remember?'
> [...]
> 'Let me see – that was the first hand. Yes, I think they went out in spades.'
> 'And the next hand?'
> 'I suppose one or other of us went down fifty – but I can't remember which or what it was in. Really, M. Poirot, you can hardly expect me to do so.'
> 'Can't you remember any of the calling or the hands?'
> 'I got a grand slam – I remember that. It was doubled too. And I also remember going down a nasty smack – playing three no trumps, I think it was – went down a packet. But that was later on.'
> 'Do you remember with whom you were playing?'
> 'Mrs. Lorrimer. She looked a bit grim, I remember. Didn't like my overcalling, I expect.'
> 'And you can't remember any other of the hands or the calling?'
> Roberts laughed.
> 'My dear M. Poirot, did you really expect I could. [*sic*]
>
> (Christie 2005:60)

We are lead to believe that Poirot, with this information alone, characterised Roberts as 'what is called an observant man' (Christie 2005:170) and realised the contradiction inherent in that characterisation, leading to the assumption he didn't remember the bridge

game as he was 'distracted' during it – and was therefore likely to have committed the murder.

Culpeper's model, however, suggests otherwise. For one, it was established that a personal attribution would require low distinctness, high consistency and low consensus; adapting the film example above, we may say that to be attributed with high memory recall requires a person who remembers many different types of detail, consistently remembers details (on different occasions) of the same stimulus, and remembers details that others do not. Put simply, Roberts demonstrates high visual recall *only of the setting of the murder*, not of many different settings and times – he cannot be described as having low distinctness as it is not established that his recall of the room is distinctive. Furthermore, there is no establishment of consistency in that Roberts is only asked to remember this particular setting once. Indeed, Roberts could have happened to remember these details purely because of the circumstance – he sat in the room observing it throughout four long games of bridge – or through other factors (such as an interest in antiques – if that was communicated to the reader they could then have what Culpeper (2001:121) calls category-based expectations and not assign any personal characteristics of high memory to Roberts at all). Although Poirot suggests that Roberts should be reliably thought of as someone with high visual recall, and Christie establishes this as a clue the reader should be able to pick up on, there is no evidence from social cognition to support this.

Culpeper's overarching theory is one of 'deviation from expectations' (2001:154) and Christie once more manipulates the reader by reversing their expectations of Roberts. Poirot first asks him about bridge scores and then about the room. If Christie even did intend to establish Roberts as detail-retentive, she regardless continues to bury this information by the order of presentation. She presents the poorest memory first, so that Roberts' poor recollection does not clash with his better one, but rather that his better recollection is only odd in light of his earlier poor memory. In this way Christie further buries Roberts'

supposed characteristics of high visual recall by only attributing it to him *after* the crucial plot point where he is vague.

Here one of Christie's characters is *neither* unreliable nor reliable. Roberts is not intentionally misleading the reader like Dr Sheppard, nor is he mistaken like James Ryder, but instead he has *ambiguous* characteristics of reliability. He may either have an unreliable memory for details or a reliable one, and that ambiguity is the method in which Christie conceals her conclusion (and Poirot's opinion supposedly resolves this ambiguity). The reader is being manipulated into ignoring what is both a very subtle clue and also a clue only in retrospect. The mind of Roberts' is not a noticeable one other than in its detail (and a number of writers have lazily used a character to exposit information, without much comment), and yet it is here Christie claims the conclusion of the novel is revealed to a supposedly observant reader.

4.3 Ambiguity and Mind Style

Finally, I would like to discuss reader manipulation through the ambiguity of Christie's representation of a character's thoughts. More specifically, I argue that in the examples below from *The ABC Murders*, Christie is deliberately ambiguous when presenting the thoughts and actions of a particular character to 'trick' the reader into believing this character is the murderer (when in fact he is not). That is to say, there are two or more possible interpretations of this character's thoughts and actions and Christie attempts to make the misleading interpretation a natural one for the reader.

While a reader can infer conclusions about the suspect's character – and his guilt – based simply on his actions and what he says, the more subtle process of inferring character from

[17] She presents this in what Simpson would call a B(R)+ve mode (1993:69ff).

the style in which thoughts and events from his perspective are presented requires a framework such as that used in the study of *mind style* in fiction. Fowler (1977:76), who originated the term, defines it as the use of 'consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world to one pattern or another, [and giving] rise to an impression of a world-view', which is also the definition quoted by Leech and Short (1981:188). It is frequently, and fruitfully, employed in stylistics to study how a character or narrator perceives the world – the classic example is Halliday's (1971) analysis of a narrative from the point of view of a Neanderthal character and that character's misunderstanding of cause and effect relationships. Most mind style analyses, in fact, concentrate on characters of far greater interest, consistency and complexity than *The ABC Murders* example below (see, for example, the useful summaries in Semino 2006), and they are concerned with the *customary* aspects of a character's style – those aspects of their linguistic patterns which are characteristic of them.

For *The ABC Murders*, there is no opportunity to study the general cognitive characteristics of the (innocent) murder suspect as Christie only presents his thoughts briefly and sporadically at key points in the narrative – which are also points of high stress for him. When she does do so, however, we see particular linguistic features and actions which hint at his mental state. Those features in turn are ambiguous enough to be interpreted in differing ways (partly because a reader simply does not know what the character's standard mind style is). Although this suspect is actually innocent, he begins to *believe* himself guilty, and so the character himself can become a red herring if his thoughts and actions are interpreted in the way Christie intends.

Because this thesis arguably cannot study the 'characteristic cognitive habits, abilities and limitations' (Semino 2002:96) of this character, it instead simply draws on techniques from the study of mind style to examine the ambiguity of this suspect's mental state. Mind style approaches often employ analyses of linguistic factors such as transitivity and syntactic

patterns (eg, Fowler 1977) or cognitive and stylistic factors such as metaphor usage (eg, Semino and Swindlehurst 1996; Gregoriou 2002; Semino 2002). I attempt to employ such concepts in this thesis as few other stylistic approaches take into account such factors of character minds – as discussed by Alan Palmer in his magisterial account of fictional minds, where he requires 'a functional and teleological perspective that considers the purposive nature of characters' thought in terms of their motives, intentions, and resulting behavior and action' (Palmer 2004:12).

This section is thus concerned with the manipulation of a reader through the essential ambiguity of certain actions and what Bockting calls 'the construction and expression in language of the conceptualisation of reality in a particular mind' (1994:159). For this latter, I tentatively attempt to steer clear of the term 'mind style' at points where it is unclear if it is appropriate to use it for this type of analysis.

4.3.1 *The ABC Murders*

As mentioned above, the Christie text we will examine with reference to this ambiguity of a character's mind is *The ABC Murders*. In this novel, a frequent favourite amongst Christie fans, a single premeditated murder for financial gain is buried within a larger series of serial killings structured around the alphabet, while Poirot (and the reader) is manipulated into thinking that each individual murder is simply a part of the series. So the actual murderer wishes to get rid of a Sir Carmichael Clarke, who lives in Churston, and ingeniously does so by inventing a serial killer (called A B C) and first murdering Alice Ascher of Andover, then Betty Barnard of Bexhill, then the intended victim Carmichael Clarke of Churston, then attempting to murder another victim using the same pattern with the letter D, all the time sending letters to Poirot claiming to be a serial murderer and revealing only the town and date where the murder is to take place. In this way, the actual murderer 'buries' the murder he intended in a series, and then contrived the murders so they coincided with the visits to

those towns of a timid, epileptic salesman called Alexander Bonaparte Cust. As Poirot explains:

> 'And now, my friends, let us consider the matter from the point of view of the false A B C—from the point of view of Mr Cust.
> 'The Andover crime means nothing to him. He is shocked and surprised by the Bexhill crime—why, he himself was there about the time! Then comes the Churston crime and the headlines in the newspapers. An A B C crime at Andover when he was there, an A B C crime at Bexhill, and now another close by…Three crimes and he has been at the scene of each of them. Persons suffering from epilepsy often have blanks when they cannot remember what they have done…Remember that Cust was a nervous, highly neurotic subject and extremely suggestible.
> 'Then he receives the order to go to Doncaster. [from the murderer, pretending to be his employer]
> 'Doncaster! And the next A B C crime is to be in Doncaster. He must have felt as though it was fate. He loses his nerve, fancies his landlady is looking at him suspiciously, and tells her he is going to Cheltenham.
> 'He goes to Doncaster because it is his duty. In the afternoon he goes to a cinema. Possibly he dozes off for a minute or two.
> 'Imagine his feelings when on his return to his inn he discovers that there is blood on his coat sleeve and a blood-stained knife in his pocket. All his vague forebodings leap into certainty.
> 'He—he himself—is the killer! He remembers his headaches—his lapses of memory. He is quite sure of the truth—he, Alexander Bonaparte Cust, is a homicidal lunatic.
> 'His conduct after that is the conduct of a hunted animal. He gets back to his lodgings in London. He is safe there—known. They think he has been in Cheltenham. He has the knife with him still—a thoroughly stupid thing to do, of course. He hides it behind the hall stand.
>
> (Christie 2004a:365-366, ellipses in the original)

In this novel, then, not only do we find clues being buried but also the crucial murder itself. What is particularly interesting, though, is that Christie includes extracts within the novel from the perspective of Cust, the confused epileptic who is manipulated into believing he is the killer. Poirot mentions Cust's 'headaches' and 'lapses of memory' – these are properly termed '*petit-mal* absence seizures' and certain seizures 'are often accompanied by an automatism [which is] a period of altered behaviour for which the person is subsequently amnesic and during which he appears to have only limited awareness of his environment, if any at all' (Crown 2001:142)[18]. As a result of this and the actions of the real murderer in

[18] It is worth bearing in mind here that epilepsy was only beginning to be understood around the time of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (*The ABC Murders* was first published in 1936). For many years before this, epileptics were often placed in insane asylums and otherwise stigmatised (for further details on epilepsy, see Oxbury 1987). The following discussion, therefore, talks about Cust being 'mentally disturbed' solely with reference to the received wisdom of Christie's likely contemporary readers – and only contemporary writers; Christie did not write for posterity in these early years and assumed even in the late 30s that her novels would not be reprinted (see Osborne 1999:142).

implicating Cust, it is understandable that Cust believes himself to be a killer. (Needless to say, Poirot is not fooled.)

When considering the reader of the novel, certain parts of the narrative – which are not presented from Cust's perspective – also imply he is the killer (for example through simple implicature – such as in Chapter 2 of the novel, a short scene where a man identified as Alexander Bonaparte Cust consults a railway guide to Andover just after Chapter 1, where Poirot is presented with a note from A B C saying there is to be a murder at Andover). Christie has the reader already suspecting Cust before she describes any events from his perspective, and so needs only to present his thoughts in such a way as to *reinforce* a reader's prior suspicion while also being ambiguous in retrospect – she does this by showing him as stressed and disturbed (whether this is related to his epilepsy or not), which Cust certainly is by this point in the novel and which Poirot initially suspects the serial killer must be. A reader is likely to consider Cust as an unusual character anyway, and as we shall see the reader is very early on encouraged to suspect Cust of being a serial killer without any real proof. As always with Christie, once the eventual solution is known to the reader Cust (as a red herring) can also be seen as nothing more than an easily-manipulated man with neurotic tendencies.

Three examples should suffice (they are all reproduced with slightly more context in Appendix 5) to demonstrate how Christie achieves this. Firstly, relatively late in the novel (Chapter 25 of 35) Cust comes home from the cinema where the 'D' murder has just been committed without Cust noticing – the murderer had also surreptiously slipped the murder weapon into Cust's pocket:

> As he entered the room his smile faded suddenly. There was a stain on his sleeve near the cuff. He touched it tentatively—wet and red—blood…
> His hand dipped into his pocket and brought out something—a long slender knife. The blade of that, too, was sticky and red…
> Mr Cust sat there a long time.
> Once his eyes shot round the room like those of a hunted animal.
> His tongue passed feverishly over his lips…

'It isn't my fault,' said Mr Cust.
He sounded as though he were arguing with somebody—a schoolboy pleading to his headmaster.
He passed his tongue over his lips again…
Again, tentatively, he felt his coat sleeve.
A minute later he was pouring out water from the old-fashioned jug into the basin. Removing his coat, he rinsed the sleeve, carefully squeezing it out…
Ugh! The water was red now…
A tap on the door.
He stood there frozen into immobility—staring.
The door opened. A plump young woman—jug in hand.
'Oh, excuse me, sir. Your hot water, sir.'
He managed to speak then.
'Thank you…I've washed in cold…'
Why had he said that? Immediately her eyes went to the basin.
He said frenziedly: 'I—I've cut my hand…'
There was a pause—yes, surely a very long pause—before she said: 'Yes, sir.'
She went out, shutting the door.
Mr Cust stood as though turned to stone.
He listened.
It had come—at last…
Were there voices—exclamations—feet mounting the stairs?
He could hear nothing but the beating of his own heart…

(Christie 2004a:319)

This extract shows certain aspects of Cust's confused mental state which, I argue, are ambiguous but also hint to a suspicious reader that he is guilty. Although naturally anyone would be upset at finding a bloody knife in their pocket, Cust's nervousness being like a 'hunted animal' is not a typical reaction. The sequence of events – he notices a bloodstain and then reaches for his pocket, where the knife is to be found – implies he knows the knife is there (although this is presumably in fact coincidental). A reader is clearly meant to be suspicious of Cust, if they do not already believe he is the murderer.

Turning to the limited amount of style of thought revealed in this extract (not as detailed in its portrayal of his mind as later extracts can be), we find that Cust is portrayed as disturbed, certainly, but not in the way a innocent or neurotypical (ie, non-epileptic) person would be. Firstly, the description of the stain on his sleeve as 'wet and red – blood…' implies Cust's gradual discovery of the stain by underspecifying the initial description (using a restricted lexis for the features) before his conclusion that the stain is *blood*. This is also found in the knife ('something – a long slender knife') and its blade ('sticky and red…'), and although it

could hint at a disturbed mind (particularly to the suspicious) or even the narrator building suspense (and thus not from Cust's perspective at all, as is possible), it is also a successful technique which demonstrates the gradual nature of a shocking discovery[19].

These first two paragraphs also begin the later pattern of ellipses which give the extract a disjointed feel, particularly when taken in conjunction with the very short paragraphs and the repetition of terms and actions (three instances of *red*, Cust licking his lips twice and feeling his sleeve twice, the two uses of 'again'). This could be taken as Cust the shy neurotic being in shock or Cust the disturbed murderer acting unusually, depending on whether the reader has already decided Cust is a murderer or not.

Later parts of the extract – when he talks to the maid – are even less from Cust's perspective, but nonetheless reinforce a reader's impression of his confused state while cleverly combining ambiguous hints of nervousness or guilt. They include the descriptions of him as a 'hunted animal' and 'a schoolboy pleading to his headmaster', the adverb 'frenziedly', Cust's stutter, his paranoia ('Were there voices – exclamations – feet mounting the stairs?') and the curious and unexplained fragment 'It had come – at last….'.

Most significantly in this extract, and our final point, is that Cust is distressed but at no point described as being curious. An innocent person would certainly be upset at finding a bloody knife in their pocket – but a major emotion at the time would also be wonder at how the knife got in their pocket, what it had been used for, and why had *their* pocket been singled out for the presence of what is presumably a murder weapon. Cust does not wonder this; from a reader's perspective this implies guilt (either Cust knew he committed the murder, as a first-time reader would assume, or he was beginning to suspect that he was a murderer, as a re-reader would realise).

The end of Chapter 28 reads:

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[19] I owe this point, and its neat expression, to Catherine Emmott.

But how did she [Lily, Cust's landlady's daughter] know the inspector was coming?
And her voice—she'd disguised her voice from her mother…
It looked—it looked—as though she knew …
But surely if she knew, she wouldn't…
She might, though. Women were very queer. Unexpectedly cruel and unexpectedly kind. He'd seen Lily once letting a mouse out of a mouse-trap.
A kind girl…
A kind, pretty girl…
He paused by the hall stand with its load of umbrellas and coats.
Should he…?
A slight noise from the kitchen decided him…
No, there wasn't time…
Mrs Marbury might come out…
He opened the front door, passed through and closed it behind him…
Where…?

(Christie 2004a:334)

This extract, again from Cust's perspective, continues the characteristics found above of Christie's attempt to show Cust's distress and hint at his guilt – short, fragmentary sentences, high repetition, excessive ellipsis, slightly limited lexis (which is here perhaps a reflection of repetition rather than a characteristic in its own right) and the curious overspecification of the process of leaving the house ('He opened the front door, passed through and closed it behind him…'). Overt ambiguity is present in the fragment 'Should he…?'.

Finally, the end of Chapter 30 and the final example of third-person narration from the perspective of Cust is as follows (the poster is one for a newspaper discussing the murders):

He walked on again.
It wouldn't do to stand staring at that poster…
He thought:
'I can't go on much longer…'
Foot in front of foot…what an odd thing walking was…
Foot in front of foot—ridiculous.
Highly ridiculous…
But man was a ridiculous animal anyway…
And he, Alexander Bonaparte Cust, was particularly ridiculous.
He had always been…
People had always laughed at him…
He couldn't blame them…
Where was he going? He didn't know. He'd come to the end. He no longer looked anywhere but at his feet.
Foot in front of foot.
He looked up. Lights in front of him. And letters…
Police Station.
'That's funny,' said Mr Cust. He gave a little giggle.
Then he stepped inside. Suddenly, as he did so, he swayed and fell forward.

(Christie 2004a:338)

There are no new characteristics of Cust's mental distress here, however the almost-continuous ellipses, fragments (even to the extent of making direct thought take a new paragraph after its reporting verb), overspecification ('Foot in front of foot…') and repetition are familiar enough from earlier chapters to characterise Cust's mental state at this point in time. Returning to mind style, which has informed this current discussion, we may even consider that these characteristics are stable enough to meet the criterion of consistency outlined in both Fowler (1977:76) and Semino (2002:97) to be considered Cust's mind style when in this distressed state. Claiming that linguistic features constitute a mind style requires those features to be 'distinctive and systematic' in addition to being able to be interpreted 'as the reflection of the characteristic, often idiosyncratic, workings of an individual's mind' (Semino 2006:143). The characteristics described in the three extracts above (restricted lexis, excessive ellipses, short sentences and paragraphs, high repetition and overspecification) are certainly distinctive and systematic in the sections of the novel which are from Cust's perspective. Regardless of whether or not they constitute a mind style (and bearing in mind they are all representative of Cust's perspective only at points of extreme stress), the interaction of all characteristics specified here show Cust's ambiguous distress and guilt.

In the end, though, all this only *hints* towards an unusual and distressed mind, and gives no emphatic proof of guilt; the ambiguity referred to above is very much in place. A reader will probably consider Cust to be a mentally-disturbed character, and view this as a likelihood of guilt when combined with other clues which imply he is the serial killer of the novel, but in retrospect Cust can also be seen from the other perspective of a shy, harmless epileptic which Christie reveals in the dénouement.

In keeping with the theme of this chapter, Christie manipulates a reader not through making Cust himself in any way unreliable (although he is certainly disturbed), but by

making him so consistently and so ambiguously distressed that a reader is led to suspect him early enough that the linguistic representations of Cust's distress act as subtle false clues, reinforcing a previous assumption she also engendered.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to show further examples of Christie's subtle methods of reader manipulation. In addition to Chapter 2's cognitive theories and Chapter 3's rhetorical theories, her use of narratological, cognitive and stylistic concepts here with reference to the cognition and unreliability of her characters are another facet of her manipulative 'toolbox'.

Extracts from *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, occasionally referred to by narratologists as an example of an unreliable narrator in 'genre fiction', were analysed in depth for the first time within this field. The *Death in the Clouds* section showed how a manipulative technique used with reference to the reader's mind in Chapter 2 can also be 'nested' within the text with a character falling victim to it (and also showing that Christie was more than aware of what she was doing with regards to scenario-dependence). *Cards on the Table* demonstrated that a character could be ambiguously reliable or unreliable, and that in this uncertainty Christie could manipulate her readers, just as *The ABC Murders* showed that such ambiguity could be used with reference to the characteristics of their own minds.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary

Agatha Christie, certainly one of the greatest of crime writers, is also one of the greatest manipulators of a reader. The puzzle-like quality of her plots invite a reader's engagement and scrutiny, and it is with such engagement that she still persuades a reader to follow a wrong path while pretending at the conclusion of a story that the correct path was always the best-illuminated. She carries out this manipulation in many different ways, and the scale and scope of this thesis has necessarily meant a limited number of her techniques could be studied – there is clearly scope for further exploration.

Chapter 2 attempted to show how theories of cognition and the mind's processing of text and narrative can describe one aspect of Christie's management of a reader's perceptions away from the eventual solution, in her description of both red herrings and buried clues. Chapter 3 demonstrated her structural use of persuasive language, manipulating a reader in a different way from the analyses in Chapters 2 and 4 – this time, towards the *correct* solution – and how this was also employed in conjunction with schematic manipulation in some cases. Finally, Chapter 4 took a large topic – the mind of characters and the status of first-person narrators – and attempted to use analyses of both to show how these techniques were also well within Christie's grasp.

Away from Christie in particular and towards the general, this thesis has also attempted to use a mixture of new, emerging and long-standing theories and approaches within stylistics and cognitive approaches to literature. All of them are of great value, but it seems to be *together* that they can best hope to describe in detail such a wide range of techniques used to a single purpose by a single author. It is hoped that the range of descriptive theories here employed can give an idea of the nature of reader manipulation and the necessity of

multiple theoretical approaches in order to describe it fully. The main aim of this thesis has always been that of giving an overview of the wide field of a prolific author's manipulative techniques, in ways which have not been previously carried out.

5.2 Further Directions

Naturally, the further directions which could be taken after a thesis of so wide a scope as this one involve the taking of studies to a further level of detail than herein. An analysis of the same techniques above but with further examples could lead to a comprehensive 'guide' to the ways in which Christie deceived a reader –her influence on the genre, her ability to take a 'trick' from another writer and improve on it, and the way most modern detective plots in the puzzle style tend to lean on her work could mean that this guide would be easily expanded into a stylistic handbook to the genre itself.

The interaction of schematic and rhetorical manipulation above in section 3.3 was singled out for particular emphasis as an example. In this area, further study could include analysis of the change in nature of both types of manipulation when occurring in a mixed format (or whether either can occur at all in a wholly non-mixed format), the balance between cognitive and structural manipulation (and whether one compensates for weakness in the other) and the contribution of either and both to the interpretation of plot-significant terms with ambiguous referents.

Perhaps the natural next direction which could be taken is a reader-response elicitation[20] of the actual reaction a reader has to these manipulations, and if they were indeed persuaded or deceived by Christie's techniques. The discussion above remained in the abstract (ie with speculation about reader response based on general principles) and so could not include such work, but a protocol analysis could be of great value. For example, at the beginning of a number of books (*Death in the Clouds* amongst them), Christie presents the thoughts of

[20] I owe this suggestion to John Corbett.

characters which later become suspects (using a mix of free direct and free indirect thought; Leech and Short 1981:336ff). These thoughts are always phrased so as to show some sort of inner turmoil and to suggest that each character is contemplating murder, but also (if looked at in another way) is completely innocent. This style of perspective-based reader manipulation appears particularly ripe for reader-response analysis.

Also, Christie was a prolific playwright; the plays which she wrote naturally have no authorial elements of description to manipulate readers through, and therefore include distractive devices either as part of stage directions or from the point of view of the speaking characters themselves. Manipulation of a reader to a false solution is therefore either part of the plot itself, or is carried out by linguistic means as described in this thesis but mediated through the perspective and mind style of a character. So, for example, in these plays there can be no unreliable narrator or narrative focalizer who is omniscient yet selective. A study of Christie's characterisation along the lines of Jonathan Culpeper's *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts* (2001) would be rewarding in this area, particularly when combined with a comparative study of manipulation in both the play and the original story or novel on which it may have been based (and perhaps contrasted with a perspective/focalization analysis such as that outlined in Herman 2002:301ff).

Finally, I would also suggest that the adaptation of RST employed in Chapter 3 could be refined for various purposes. The analysis above used 'ad hoc' move labels to best suit the particular text style being analysed, and as RST is a valuable tool for analysing this sort of persuasion then creating a set of rhetorical move labels ideally suited to fictional persuasive monologue (and dialogue) would make it more easily applicable to these text types. The adaptation described here was also designed for analysing text extracts as opposed to self-contained texts in its own right (which is necessary for the selective analysis of lengthy narratives), and could be developed to describe ties to moves and significant related information located outwith the extract under consideration. Finally, aspects of the

adaptation herein could be integrated more tightly with what is known as 'Classical' RST, so as to make it a more useful tool for applications outwith this thesis.

5.3 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, a reader who remembers Van Dine's rules from the Introduction and their use throughout this thesis could also note that even the examples quoted herein have broken eight of the ten rules reproduced in Chapter 1. Christie has a wide range of techniques, as should be clear by now, but these techniques can require violating the 'rules' of the genre. I would propose a single rule of Christie's fiction which would override all of Van Dine's, and which this thesis has hopefully demonstrated the habits she kept to throughout in her fiction: 'Keep the reader from finding those clues which are important, provoke their interest in those clues which are not, and always keep a reader guessing until they are persuaded of the detective's truth.'

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Appendix 1: Van Dine's Twenty Rules

SS Van Dine's article titled 'Twenty rules for writing detective stories'. From the Gaslight Archives at http://gaslight.mtroyal.ab.ca/vandine.htm, originally published in the *American Magazine* (September 1928). Spelling as in the Gaslight Archives page.

> The detective story is a kind of intellectual game. It is more — it is a sporting event. And for the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws — unwritten, perhaps, but none the less binding; and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them. Herewith, then, is a sort Credo, based partly on the practice of all the great writers of detective stories, and partly on the promptings of the honest author's inner conscience. To wit:
>
> 1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.
> 2. No willful tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself.
> 3. There must be no love interest. The business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar.
> 4. The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit. This is bald trickery, on a par with offering some one a bright penny for a five-dollar gold piece. It's false pretenses.
> 5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions — not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession. To solve a criminal problem in this latter fashion is like sending the reader on a deliberate wild-goose chase, and then telling him, after he has failed, that you had the object of his search up your sleeve all the time. Such an author is no better than a practical joker.
> 6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that will eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter; and if the detective does not reach his conclusions through an analysis of those clues, he has no more solved his problem than the schoolboy who gets his answer out of the back of the arithmetic.
> 7. There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice. Three hundred pages is far too much pother for a crime other than murder. After all, the reader's trouble and expenditure of energy must be rewarded.
> 8. The problem of the crime must he solved by strictly naturalistic means. Such methods for learning the truth as slate-writing, ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic se'ances, crystal-gazing, and the like, are taboo. A reader has a chance when matching his wits with a rationalistic detective, but if he must compete with the world of spirits and go chasing about the fourth dimension of metaphysics, he is defeated *ab initio*.
> 9. There must be but one detective — that is, but one protagonist of deduction — one *deus ex machina*. To bring the minds of three or four, or sometimes a gang of detectives to bear on a problem, is not only to disperse the interest and break the direct thread of logic, but to take an unfair advantage of the reader. If there is more than one detective the reader doesn't know who his codeductor is. It's like making the reader run a race with a relay team.
> 10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story — that is, a person with whom the reader is familiar and in whom he takes an interest.
> 11. A servant must not be chosen by the author as the culprit. This is begging a noble question. It is a too easy solution. The culprit must be a decidedly worth-while person — one that wouldn't ordinarily come under suspicion.

12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature.

13. Secret societies, camorras, mafias, *et al.*, have no place in a detective story. A fascinating and truly beautiful murder is irremediably spoiled by any such wholesale culpability. To be sure, the murderer in a detective novel should be given a sporting chance; but it is going too far to grant him a secret society to fall back on. No high-class, self-respecting murderer would want such odds.

14. The method of murder, and the means of detecting it, must be rational and scientific. That is to say, pseudo-science and purely imaginative and speculative devices are not to be tolerated in the *roman policier*. Once an author soars into the realm of fantasy, in the Jules Verne manner, he is outside the bounds of detective fiction, cavorting in the uncharted reaches of adventure.

15. The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent — provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it. By this I mean that if the reader, after learning the explanation for the crime, should reread the book, he would see that the solution had, in a sense, been staring him in the face-that all the clues really pointed to the culprit — and that, if he had been as clever as the detective, he could have solved the mystery himself without going on to the final chapter. That the clever reader does often thus solve the problem goes without saying.

16. A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no "atmospheric" preoccupations. such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion. To be sure, there must be a sufficient descriptiveness and character delineation to give the novel verisimilitude.

17. A professional criminal must never be shouldered with the guilt of a crime in a detective story. Crimes by housebreakers and bandits are the province of the police departments — not of authors and brilliant amateur detectives. A really fascinating crime is one committed by a pillar of a church, or a spinster noted for her charities.

18. A crime in a detective story must never turn out to be an accident or a suicide. To end an odyssey of sleuthing with such an anti-climax is to hoodwink the trusting and kind-hearted reader.

19. The motives for all crimes in detective stories should be personal. International plottings and war politics belong in a different category of fiction — in secret-service tales, for instance. But a murder story must be kept *gemütlich*, so to speak. It must reflect the reader's everyday experiences, and give him a certain outlet for his own repressed desires and emotions.

20. And (to give my Credo an even score of items) I herewith list a few of the devices which no self-respecting detective story writer will now avail himself of. They have been employed too often, and are familiar to all true lovers of literary crime. To use them is a confession of the author's ineptitude and lack of originality. (a) Determining the identity of the culprit by comparing the butt of a cigarette left at the scene of the crime with the brand smoked by a suspect. (b) The bogus spiritualistic se'ance to frighten the culprit into giving himself away. (c) Forged fingerprints. (d) The dummy-figure alibi. (e) The dog that does not bark and thereby reveals the fact that the intruder is familiar. (f)The final pinning of the crime on a twin, or a relative who looks exactly like the suspected, but innocent, person. (g) The hypodermic syringe and the knockout drops. (h) The commission of the murder in a locked room after the police have actually broken in. (i) The word association test for guilt. (j) The cipher, or code letter, which is eventually unraveled by the sleuth.

Appendix 2: *The Tuesday Night Club*

Extracts from Agatha Christie's *The Tuesday Night Club*, from the collection *The Thirteen Problems* (Christie 1997:7-16). All italics from the original.

'The facts are very simple. Three people sat down to a supper consisting, amongst other things, of tinned lobster. Later in the night, all three were taken ill, and a doctor was hastily summoned. Two of the people recovered, the third one died.'

'Ah!' said Raymond approvingly.

'As I say, the facts as such were very simple. Death was considered to be due to ptomaine poisoning, a certificate was given to that effect, and the victim was duly buried. But things did not rest at that.'

Miss Marple nodded her head.

'There was talk, I suppose,' she said, 'there usually is.'

'And now I must describe the actors in this little drama. I will call the husband and wife Mr and Mrs Jones, and the wife's companion Miss Clark. Mr Jones was a traveller for a firm of manufacturing chemists. He was a good-looking man in a kind of coarse, florid way, aged about fifty. His wife was a rather commonplace woman, of about forty-five. The companion, Miss Clark, was a woman of sixty, a stout cheery woman with a beaming rubicund face. None of them, you might say, very interesting.

'Now the beginning of the troubles arose in a very curious way. Mr Jones had been staying the previous night at a small commercial hotel in Birmingham. It happened that the blotting paper in the blotting book had been put in fresh that day, and the chambermaid, having apparently nothing better to do, amused herself by studying the blotter in the mirror just after Mr Jones had been writing a letter there. A few days later there was a report in the papers of the death of Mrs Jones as the result of eating tinned lobster, and the chambermaid then imparted to her fellow servants the words that she had deciphered on the blotting pad. They were as follows: *Entirely dependent on my wife... when she is dead I will... hundreds and thousands...*

'You may remember that there had recently been a case of a wife being poisoned by her husband. It needed very little to fire the imagination of these maids. Mr Jones had planned to do away with his wife and inherit hundreds of thousands of pounds! As it happened one of the maids had relations living in the small market town where the Joneses resided. She wrote to them, and they in return wrote to her. Mr Jones, it seemed, had been very attentive to the local doctor's daughter, a good-looking young woman of thirty-three. Scandal began to hum. The Home Secretary was petitioned. Numerous anonymous letters poured into Scotland Yard all accusing Mr Jones of having murdered his wife. Now I may say that not for one moment did we think there was anything in it except idle village talk and gossip. Nevertheless, to quiet public opinion an exhumation order was granted. It was one of these cases of popular superstition based on nothing solid whatever, which proved to be so surprisingly justified. As a result of the autopsy sufficient arsenic was found to make it quite clear that the deceased lady had died of arsenical poisoning. It was for Scotland Yard working with the local authorities to prove how that arsenic had been administered, and by whom.'

'Ah!' said Joyce. 'I like this. This is the real stuff.'

'Suspicion naturally fell on the husband. He benefited by his wife's death. Not to the extent of the hundreds of thousands romantically imagined by the hotel chambermaid, but to the very solid amount of £8000. He had no money of his own apart from what he earned, and he was a man of somewhat extravagant habits with a partiality for the society of women. We investigated as delicately as possible the rumour of his attachment to the doctor's daughter; but while it seemed clear that there had been a strong friendship between them at one time, there had been a most abrupt break two months previously, and they did not appear to have seen each other since. The doctor himself, an elderly man of a straightforward and unsuspicious type, was dumbfounded at the result of the autopsy. He had been called in about

midnight to find all three people suffering. He had realized immediately the serious condition of Mrs Jones, and had sent back to his dispensary for some opium pills, to allay the pain. In spite of all his efforts, however, she succumbed, but not for a moment did he suspect that anything was amiss. He was convinced that her death was due to a form of botulism. Supper that night had consisted of tinned lobster and salad, trifle and bread and cheese. Unfortunately none of the lobster remained – it had all been eaten and the tin thrown away. He had interrogated the young maid, Gladys Linch. She was terribly upset, very tearful and agitated, and he found it hard to get her to keep to the point, but she declared again and again that the tin had not been distended in any way and that the lobster had appeared to her in a perfectly good condition.

'Such were the facts we had to go upon. If Jones had feloniously administered arsenic to his wife, it seemed clear that it could not have been done in any of the things eaten at supper, as all three persons had partaken of the meal. Also – another point – Jones himself had returned from Birmingham just as supper was being brought in to table, so that he would have had no opportunity of doctoring any of the food beforehand.'

'What about the companion?' asked Joyce–'the stout woman with the good-humoured face.'

Sir Henry nodded.

'We did not neglect Miss Clark, I can assure you. But it seemed doubtful what motive she could have had for the crime. Mrs Jones left her no legacy of any kind and the net result of her employer's death was that she had to seek for another situation.'

'That seems to leave her out of it,' said Joyce thoughtfully.

'Now one of my inspectors soon discovered a significant fact,' went on Sir Henry. 'After supper on that evening Mr Jones had gone down to the kitchen and had demanded a bowl of cornflour for his wife who had complained of not feeling well. He had waited in the kitchen until Gladys Linch prepared it, and then carried it up to his wife's room himself. That, I admit, seemed to clinch the case.'

The lawyer nodded.

'Motive,' he said, ticking the points off on his fingers. 'Opportunity. As a traveller for a firm of druggists, easy access to the poison.'

'And a man of weak moral fibre,' said the clergyman.

Raymond West was staring at Sir Henry.

'There is a catch in this somewhere,' he said. 'Why did you not arrest him?'

Sir Henry smiled rather wryly.

'That is the unfortunate part of the case. So far all had gone swimmingly, but now we come to the snags. Jones was not arrested because on interrogating Miss Clark she told us that the whole of the bowl of cornflour was drunk not by Mrs Jones but by her.

'Yes, it seems that she went to Mrs Jones's room as was her custom. Mrs Jones was sitting up in bed and the bowl of cornflour was beside her.

'"I am not feeling a bit well, Milly," she said. "Serves me right, I suppose, for touching lobster at night. I asked Albert to get me a bowl of cornflour, but now that I have got it I don't seem to fancy it."

'"A pity," commented Miss Clark–"it is nicely made too, no lumps. Gladys is really quite a nice cook. Very few girls nowadays seem to be able to make a bowl of cornflour nicely. I declare I quite fancy it myself, I am that hungry."

'"I should think you were with your foolish ways," said Mrs Jones.

'I must explain,' broke off Sir Henry, 'that Miss Clark, alarmed at her increasing stoutness, was doing a course of what is popularly known as "banting".

'"It is not good for you, Milly, it really isn't," urged Mrs Jones. "If the Lord made you stout he meant you to be stout. You drink up that bowl of cornflour. It will do you all the good in the world."

'And straight away Miss Clark set to and did in actual fact finish the bowl. So, you see, that knocked our case against the husband to pieces. Asked for an explanation of the words on the blotting book Jones gave one readily enough. The letter, he explained, was in answer to one written from his brother in Australia who had applied to him for money. He had written,

pointing out that he was entirely dependent on his wife. When his wife was dead he would have control of money and would assist his brother if possible. He regretted his inability to help but pointed out that there were hundreds and thousands of people in the world in the same unfortunate plight.'

'And so the case fell to pieces?' said Dr Pender.

'And so the case fell to pieces,' said Sir Henry gravely. 'We could not take the risk of arresting Jones with nothing to go upon.'

[…]

'One moment,' said Sir Henry. 'Miss Marple has not yet spoken.'

Miss Marple was shaking her head sadly.

'Dear, dear,' she said. 'I have dropped another stitch. I have been so interested in the story. A sad case, a very sad case. It reminds me of old Mr Hargraves who lived up at the Mount. His wife never had the least suspicion – until he died, leaving all his money to a woman he had been living with and by whom he had five children. She had at one time been their housemaid. Such a nice girl, Mrs Hargraves always said – thoroughly to be relied upon to turn the mattresses every day – except Fridays, of course. And there was old Hargraves keeping this woman in a house in the neighbouring town and continuing to be a Churchwarden and to hand round the plate every Sunday.'

'My dear Aunt Jane,' said Raymond with some impatience. 'What has dead and gone Hargraves got to do with the case?'

'This story made me think of him at once,' said Miss Marple. 'The facts are so very alike, aren't they? I suppose the poor girl has confessed now and that is how you know, Sir Henry.'

'What girl?' said Raymond. 'My dear Aunt, what are you talking about?'

'That poor girl, Gladys Linch, of course – the one who was so terribly agitated when the doctor spoke to her – and well she might be, poor thing. I hope that wicked Jones is hanged, I am sure, making that poor girl a murderess. I suppose they will hang her too, poor thing.'

'I think, Miss Marple, that you are under a slight misapprehension,' began Mr Petherick.

But Miss Marple shook her head obstinately and looked across at Sir Henry.

'I am right, am I not? It seems so clear to me. The hundreds and thousands – and the trifle – I mean, one cannot miss it.'

'What about the trifle and the hundreds and thousands?' cried Raymond.

His aunt turned to him.

'Cooks nearly always put hundreds and thousands on trifle, dear,' she said. 'Those little pink and white sugar things. Of course when I heard that they had trifle for supper and that the husband had been writing to someone about hundreds and thousands, I naturally connected the two things together. That is where the arsenic was – in the hundreds and thousands. He left it with the girl and told her to put it on the trifle.'

'But that is impossible,' said Joyce quickly. 'They all ate the trifle.'

'Oh, no,' said Miss Marple. 'The companion was banting, you remember. You never eat anything like trifle if you are banting; and I expect Jones just scraped the hundreds and thousands off his share and left them at the side of his plate. It was a clever idea, but a very wicked one.'

The eyes of the others were all fixed upon Sir Henry.

'It is a very curious thing,' he said slowly, 'but Miss Marple happens to have hit upon the truth. Jones had got Gladys Linch into trouble, as the saying goes. She was nearly desperate. He wanted his wife out of the way and promised to marry Gladys when his wife was dead. He doctored the hundreds and thousands and gave them to her with instructions how to use them. Gladys Linch died a week ago. Her child died at birth and Jones had deserted her for another woman. When she was dying she confessed the truth.'

There was a few moments' silence and then Raymond said:

'Well, Aunt Jane, this is one up to you. I can't think how on earth you managed to hit upon the truth. I should never have thought of the little maid in the kitchen being connected with the case.'

'No, dear,' said Miss Marple, 'but you don't know as much of life as I do. A man of that Jones's type – coarse and jovial. As soon as I heard there was a pretty young girl in the house I felt sure that he would not have left her alone. It is all very distressing and painful, and not a very nice thing to talk about. I can't tell you the shock it was to Mrs Hargraves, and a nine days' wonder in the village.'

Appendix 3: *Murder on the Orient Express*

Extract from Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (Christie, 2004b:378-381). All italics from the original.

'When I had heard all the evidence, I leaned back and shut my eyes and began to *think*. Certain points presented themselves to me as worthy of attention. I enumerated these points to my two colleagues. Some I have already elucidated - such as a grease-spot on a passport, etc. I will run over the points that remain. The first and most important is a remark made to me by M. Bouc in the restaurant-car at lunch on the first day after leaving Stamboul - to the effect that the company assembled was interesting because it was so varied - representing as it did all classes and nationalities.

'I agreed with him, but when this particular point came into my mind, I tried to imagine whether such an assembly were ever likely to be collected under any other conditions. And the answer I made to myself was - only in America. In America there might be a household composed of just such varied nationalities - an Italian chauffeur, and English governess, a Swedish nurse, a French lady's-maid and so on. That led me to my scheme of "guessing" - that is, casting each person for a certain part in the Armstrong drama much as a producer casts a play. Well, that gave me an extremely interesting and satisfactory result.

'I had also examined in my own mind each separate person's evidence with some curious results. Take first the evidence of Mr MacQueen. My first interview with him was entirely satisfactory. But in my second he made rather a curious remark. I had described to him the finding of a note mentioning the Armstrong case. He said, "But surely -" and then paused and went on, "I mean - that was rather careless of the old man."

'Now I could feel that that was not what he had started out to say. *Supposing what he had meant to say was, "But surely that was burnt*!" In which case, *MacQueen knew of the note and of its destruction* - in other words, he was either the murderer or an accomplice of the murderer. Very good.

'Then the valet. He said his master was in the habit of taking a sleeping draught when travelling by train. That might be true, but *would Ratchett have taken one last night*? The automatic under his pillow gave the lie to that statement. Ratchett intended to be on the alert last night. Whatever narcotic was administered to him must have been done so without his knowledge. By whom? Obviously by MacQueen or the valet.

'Now we come to the evidence of Mr Hardman. I believed all that he told me about his own identity, but when it came to the actual methods he had employed to guard Mr Ratchett, his story was neither more nor less than absurd. The only way effectively to have protected Ratchett was to have passed the night actually in his compartment or in some spot where he could watch the door. The only thing that his evidence *did* show plainly was that no one *in any other part of the train could possibly have murdered Ratchett*. It drew a clear circle round the Stamboul-Calais carriage. That seemed to me a rather curious and inexplicable fact, and I put it aside to think over.

'You probably have all heard by now of the few words I overheard between Miss Debenham and Colonel Arbuthnot. The interesting thing to my mind was the fact that Colonel Arbuthnot called her *Mary* and was clearly on terms of intimacy with her. But the Colonel was only supposed to have met her a few days previously - and I know Englishmen of the Colonel's type. Even if lie had fallen in love with the young lady at first sight, he would have advanced slowly and with decorum - not rushing things. Therefore I concluded that Colonel Arbuthnot and Miss Debenham were in reality well acquainted, and were for some reason pretending to be strangers. Another small point was Miss Debenham's easy familiarity with the term "long distance" for a telephone call. Yet Miss Debenham had told me that she had never been in the States.

'To pass to another witness. Mrs Hubbard had told us that lying in bed she was unable to see whether the communicating door was bolted or not, and so asked Miss Ohlsson to see for her. Now, though her statement would have been perfectly true if she had been occupying

compartments Nos. 2, 4, 12, or any *even* number - where the bolt is directly under the handle of the door - in the *uneven* numbers, such as compartment No. 3, the bolt is well *above* the handle and could not therefore be masked by the sponge-bag in the least. I was forced to the conclusion that Mrs Hubbard was inventing an incident that had never occurred.

'And here let me say just a word or two about *times*. To my mind, the really interesting point about the dented watch was the place where it was found - in Ratchett's pyjama pocket, a singularly uncomfortable and unlikely place to keep one's watch, especially as there is a watch "hook" provided just by the head of the bed. I felt sure, therefore, that the watch had been deliberately placed in the pocket and faked. The crime, then, was not committed at a quarter-past one.

'Was it, then, committed earlier? To be exact, at twenty-three minutes to one? My friend M. Bouc advanced as an argument in favour of it the loud cry which awoke me from sleep. But if Ratchett were heavily drugged *he could not have cried out*. If he had been capable of crying out he would have been capable of making some kind of a struggle to defend himself, and there were no signs of any such struggle.

'I remembered that MacQueen had called attention, not once but twice (and the second time in a very blatant manner), to the fact that Ratchett could speak no French. I came to the conclusion that the whole business at twenty-three minutes to one was a comedy played for my benefit! Anyone might see through the watch business - it is a common enough device in detective stories. They assumed that I should see through it and that, pluming myself on my own cleverness, I would go on to assume that since Ratchett spoke no French the voice I heard at twenty-three minutes to one could not be his, and that Ratchett must be already dead. But I am convinced that at twenty-three minutes to one Ratchett was still lying in his drugged sleep.

'But the device has succeeded! I have opened my door and looked out. I have actually heard the French phrase used. If I am so unbelievably dense as not to realize the significance of that phrase, it must be brought to my attention. If necessary MacQueen can come right out in the open. He can say, "Excuse me, M. Poirot, that can't have been Mr Ratchett speaking. He can't speak French."

'Now when was the real time of the crime? And who killed him?

'In my opinion, and this is only an opinion, Ratchett was killed at some time very close upon two o'clock, the latest hour the doctor gives us as possible.

'As to who killed him - '

He paused, looking at his audience. He could not complain of any lack of attention. Every eye was fixed upon him. In the stillness you could have heard a pin drop.

He went on slowly:

'I was particularly struck by the extraordinary difficulty of proving a case against any one person on the train and on the rather curious coincidence that in each case the testimony giving an alibi came from what I might describe as an "unlikely" person. Thus Mr MacQueen and Colonel Arbuthnot provided alibis lot each other - two persons between whom it seemed most unlikely there should be any prior acquaintanceship. The same thing happened with the English valet and the Italian, with the Swedish lady and the English girl. I said to myself, "This is extraordinary - they cannot *all* be in it!"

'And then, Messieurs, I saw light. They were *all* in it.

Appendix 4: *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

Extract from Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (Christie 2004b:199-204) with chapter headings reproduced. All italics from the original.

Chapter 26: And Nothing But The Truth

There was a dead silence for a minute and a half. Then I laughed.

'You're mad,' I said.

'No,' said Poirot placidly. 'I am not mad. It was the little discrepancy in time that first drew my attention to you—right at the beginning.'

'Discrepancy in time?' I queried, puzzled.

'But yes. You will remember that everyone agreed—you yourself included—that it took five minutes to walk from the lodge to the house—less if you took the shortcut to the terrace. But you left the house at ten minutes to nine—both by your own statement and that of Parker, and yet it was nine o'clock when you passed through the lodge gates. It was a chilly night—not an evening a man would be inclined to dawdle; why had you taken ten minutes to do a five minutes' walk? All along I realized that we had only your statement for it that the study window was ever fastened. Ackroyd asked you if you had done so—he never looked to see. Supposing, then, that the study window was unfastened? Would there be time in that ten minutes for you to run round the outside of the house, change your shoes, climb in through the window, kill Ackroyd, and get to the gate by nine o'clock? I decided against that theory since in all probability a man as nervous as Ackroyd was that night would hear you climbing in, and then there would have been a struggle. But supposing that you killed Ackroyd before you left—as you were standing beside his chair? Then you go out of the front door, run round to the summerhouse, take Ralph Paton's shoes out of the bag you brought up with you that night, slip them on, walk through the mud in them, and leave prints on the window ledge, you climb in, lock the study door on the inside, run back to the summerhouse, change back into your own shoes, and race down to the gate. (I went through similar actions the other day, when you were with Mrs. Ackroyd—it took ten minutes exactly.) Then home—and an alibi—since you had timed the dictaphone for half-past nine.'

'My dear Poirot,' I said in a voice that sounded strange and forced to my own ears, 'you've been brooding over this case too long. What on earth had I to gain by murdering Ackroyd?'

'Safety. It was you who blackmailed Mrs. Ferrars. Who could have had a better knowledge of what killed Mr. Ferrars than the doctor who was attending him? When you spoke to me that first day in the garden, you mentioned a legacy received about a year ago. I have been unable to discover any trace of a legacy. You had to invent some way of accounting for Mrs. Ferrars's twenty thousand pounds. It has not done you much good. You lost most of it in speculation—then you put the screw on too hard, and Mrs. Ferrars took a way out that you had not expected. If Ackroyd had learnt the truth he would have had no mercy on you—you were ruined for ever.'

'And the telephone call?' I asked, trying to rally. 'You have a plausible explanation of that also, I suppose?'

'I will confess to you that it was my greatest stumbling block when I found that a call had actually been put through to you from King's Abbot station. I at first believed that you had simply invented the story. It was a very clever touch, that. You must have some excuse for arriving at Fernly, finding the body, and so getting the chance to remove the dictaphone on which your alibi depended. I had a very vague notion of how it was worked when I came to see your sister that first day and inquired as to what patients you had seen on Friday morning. I had no thought of Miss Russell in my mind at that time. Her visit was a lucky coincidence, since it distracted your mind from the real object of my questions. I found what I was looking for. Among your patients that morning was the steward of an American liner. Who more suitable than he to be leaving for Liverpool by the train that evening? And afterwards he would be on the high seas, well out of the way. I noted that the Orion sailed on Saturday, and having obtained the

name of the steward I sent him a wireless message asking a certain question. This is his reply you saw me receive just now.'

He held out the message to me. It ran as follows: *'Quite correct. Dr. Sheppard asked me to leave a note at a patient's house. I was to ring him up from the station with the reply. Reply was "No answer."'*

'It was a clever idea,' said Poirot. 'The call was genuine. Your sister saw you take it. But there was only one man's word as to what was actually said—your own!'

I yawned. 'All this,' I said, 'is very interesting—but hardly in the sphere of practical politics.'

'You think not? Remember what I said—the truth goes to Inspector Raglan in the morning. But, for the sake of your good sister, I am willing to give you the chance of another way out. There might be, for instance, an overdose of a sleeping draught. You comprehend me? But Captain Ralph Paton must be cleared—ca va sans dire. I should suggest that you finish that very interesting manuscript of yours—but abandoning your former reticence.'

'You seem to be very prolific of suggestions,' I remarked. 'Are you sure you've quite finished?'

'Now that you remind me of the fact, it is true that there is one thing more. It would be most unwise on your part to attempt to silence me as you silenced M. Ackroyd. That kind of business does not succeed against Hercule Poirot, you understand.'

'My dear Poirot,' I said, smiling a little, 'whatever else I may be, I am not a fool.'

I rose to my feet. 'Well, well,' I said, with a slight yawn, 'I must be off home. Thank you for a most interesting and instructive evening.'

Poirot also rose and bowed with his accustomed politeness as I passed out of the room.

Chapter 27: Apologia

Five a.m. I am very tired—but I have finished my task. My arm aches from writing.

A strange end to my manuscript. I meant it to be published some day as the history of one of Poirot's failures!

Odd, how things pan out.

All along I've had a premonition of disaster, from the moment I saw Ralph Paton and Mrs. Ferrars with their heads together. I thought then that she was confiding in him, as it happened I was quite wrong there, but the idea persisted even after I went into the study with Ackroyd that night, until he told me the truth.

Poor old Ackroyd. I'm always glad that I gave him a chance. I urged him to read that letter before it was too late.

Or let me be honest—didn't I subconsciously realize that with a pig-headed chap like him, it was my best chance of getting him not to read it? His nervousness that night was interesting psychologically. He knew danger was close at hand. And yet he never suspected me.

The dagger was an afterthought. I'd brought up a very handy little weapon of my own, but when I saw the dagger lying in the silver table, it occurred to me at once how much better it would be to use a weapon that couldn't be traced to me.

I suppose I must have meant to murder him all along. As soon as I heard of Mrs. Ferrars's death, I felt convinced that she would have told him everything before she died. When I met him and he seemed so agitated, I thought that perhaps he knew the truth, but that he couldn't bring himself to believe it, and was going to give me the chance of refuting it.

So I went home and took my precautions. If the trouble were after all only something to do with Ralph—well, no harm would have been done. The dictaphone he had given me two days ago to adjust. Something had gone a little wrong with it, and I persuaded him to let me have a go at it, instead of sending it back. I did what I wanted to, and took it up with me in my bag that evening.

I am rather pleased with myself as a writer. What could be neater, for instance, than the following:

'The letters were brought in at twenty minutes to nine. It was just on ten minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone.'

All true, you see. But suppose I had put a row of stars after the first sentence! Would somebody then have wondered what exactly happened in that blank ten minutes?

When I looked round the room from the door, I was quite satisfied. Nothing had been left undone. The dictaphone was on the table by the window, timed to go off at nine thirty (the mechanism of that little device was rather clever—based on the principle of an alarm clock), and the armchair was pulled out so as to hide it from the door.

I must admit that it gave me rather a shock to run into Parker just outside the door. I have faithfully recorded that fact.

Then later, when the body was discovered, and I sent Parker to telephone for the police, what a judicious use of words: *'I did what little had to be done!'* It was quite little just to shove the dictaphone into my bag and push back the chair against the wall in its proper place. I never dreamed that Parker would have noticed that chair. Logically, he ought to have been so agog over the body as to be blind to everything else. But I hadn't reckoned with the trained-servant complex.

I wish I could have known beforehand that Flora was going to say she'd seen her uncle alive at a quarter to ten.

That puzzled me more than I can say. In fact, all through the case there have been things that puzzled me hopelessly.

Everyone seems to have taken a hand.

My greatest fear all through has been Caroline. I have fancied she might guess. Curious the way she spoke that day of my 'strain of weakness.'

Well, she will never know the truth. There is, as Poirot said, one way out . . .

I can trust him. He and Inspector Raglan will manage it between them. I should not like Caroline to know. She is fond of me, and then, too, she is proud . . . My death will be a grief to her, but grief passes . . .

When I have finished writing, I shall enclose this whole manuscript in an envelope and address it to Poirot.

And then—what shall it be? Veronal? There would be a kind of poetic justice. Not that I take any responsibility for Mrs. Ferrars's death. It was the direct consequence of her own actions. I feel no pity for her.

I have no pity for myself either.

So let it be veronal.

But I wish Hercule Poirot had never retired from work and come here to grow vegetable marrows.

Appendix 5: *The ABC Murders*

Extracts from Agatha Christie's *The ABC Murders* (Christie 2004a:318-338) with chapter headings reproduced. All italics from the original and Chapter 30's newspaper headlines presented as in the original.

Chapter 25: Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative

Mr Cust came out of the Regal Cinema and looked up at the sky.

A beautiful evening…A really beautiful evening…

A quotation from Browning came into his head.

'God's in His heaven. All's right with the world.'

He had always been fond of that quotation.

Only there were times, very often, when he had felt it wasn't true…

He trotted along the street smiling to himself until he came to the Black Swan where he was staying.

He climbed the stairs to his bedroom, a stuffy little room on the second floor, giving over a paved inner court and garage.

As he entered the room his smile faded suddenly. There was a stain on his sleeve near the cuff. He touched it tentatively—wet and red—blood…

His hand dipped into his pocket and brought out something—a long slender knife. The blade of that, too, was sticky and red…

Mr Cust sat there a long time.

Once his eyes shot round the room like those of a hunted animal.

His tongue passed feverishly over his lips…

'It isn't my fault,' said Mr Cust.

He sounded as though he were arguing with somebody—a schoolboy pleading to his headmaster.

He passed his tongue over his lips again…

Again, tentatively, he felt his coat sleeve.

His eyes crossed the room to the wash-basin.

A minute later he was pouring out water from the old-fashioned jug into the basin. Removing his coat, he rinsed the sleeve, carefully squeezing it out…

Ugh! The water was red now…

A tap on the door.

He stood there frozen into immobility—staring.

The door opened. A plump young woman—jug in hand.

'Oh, excuse me, sir. Your hot water, sir.'

He managed to speak then.

'Thank you…I've washed in cold…'

Why had he said that? Immediately her eyes went to the basin.

He said frenziedly: 'I—I've cut my hand…'

There was a pause—yes, surely a very long pause—before she said: 'Yes, sir.'

She went out, shutting the door.

Mr Cust stood as though turned to stone.

He listened.

It had come—at last…

Were there voices—exclamations—feet mounting the stairs?

He could hear nothing but the beating of his own heart…

Then, suddenly, from frozen immobility he leaped into activity.

He slipped on his coat, tiptoed to the door and opened it. No noises as yet except the familiar murmur arising from the bar. He crept down the stairs…

Still no one. That was luck. He paused at the foot of the stairs. Which way now?

He made up his mind, darted quickly along a passage and out by the door that gave into the yard. A couple of chauffeurs were there tinkering with cars and discussing winners and losers.

Mr Cust hurried across the yard and out into the street.

Round the first corner to the right—then to the left—right again…

Dare he risk the station?

Yes—there would be crowds there—special trains— if luck were on his side he would do it all right…

If only luck were with him…

Chapter 28: Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative

[…]

Mr Cust put the receiver back very gently on the hook.

He turned to where Mrs Marbury was standing in the doorway of the room, clearly devoured with curiosity.

'Not often you have a telephone call, Mr Cust?'

'No—er—no, Mrs Marbury. It isn't.'

'Not bad news, I trust?'

'No—no.' How persistent the woman was. His eyes caught the legend on the newspaper he was carrying.

Births—Marriages—Deaths…

'My sister's just had a little boy,' he blurted out.

He—who had never had a sister!

'Oh, dear! Now—well, that is nice, I am sure. ("And never once mentioned a sister all these years," was her inward thought. "If that isn't just like a man!") I was surprised, I'll tell you, when the lady asked to speak to Mr Cust. Just at first I fancied it was my Lily's voice—something like hers, it was—but haughtier if you know what I mean—sort of high up in the air. Well, Mr Cust, my congratulations, I'm sure. Is it the first one, or have you other little nephews and nieces?'

'It's the only one,' said Mr Cust. 'The only one I've ever had or likely to have, and—er—I think I must go off at once. They—they want me to come. I—I think I can just catch a train if I hurry.'

'Will you be away long, Mr Cust?' called Mrs Marbury as he ran up the stairs.

'Oh, no—two or three days—that's all.'

He disappeared into his bedroom. Mrs Marbury retired into the kitchen, thinking sentimentally of 'the dear little mite'.

Her conscience gave her a sudden twinge.

Last night Tom and Lily and all the hunting back over dates! Trying to make out that Mr Cust was that dreadful monster, A B C. Just because of his initials and because of a few coincidences.

'I don't suppose they meant it seriously,' she thought comfortably. 'And now I hope they'll be ashamed of themselves.'

In some obscure way that she could not have explained, Mr Cust's statement that his sister had had a baby had effectually removed any doubts Mrs Marbury might have had of her lodger's bona fides .

'I hope she didn't have too hard a time of it, poor dear,' thought Mrs Marbury, testing an iron against her cheek before beginning to iron out Lily's silk slip.

Her mind ran comfortably on a well-worn obstetric track.

Mr Cust came quietly down the stairs, a bag in his hand. His eyes rested a minute on the telephone.

That brief conversation re-echoed in his brain.

'Is that you, Mr Cust? I thought you might like to know there's an inspector from Scotland Yard may be coming to see you…'

What had he said? He couldn't remember.

'Thank you—thank you, my dear…very kind of you…'

Something like that.

Why had she telephoned to him? Could she possibly have guessed? Or did she just want to make sure he would stay in for the inspector's visit?

But how did she know the inspector was coming?
And her voice—she'd disguised her voice from her mother…
It looked—it looked—as though she knew …
But surely if she knew, she wouldn't…
She might, though. Women were very queer. Unexpectedly cruel and unexpectedly kind. He'd seen Lily once letting a mouse out of a mouse-trap.
A kind girl…
A kind, pretty girl…
He paused by the hall stand with its load of umbrellas and coats.
Should he…?
A slight noise from the kitchen decided him…
No, there wasn't time…
Mrs Marbury might come out…
He opened the front door, passed through and closed it behind him…
Where…?

Chapter 30
Not from Captain Hastings' Personal Narrative

Mr Cust stood by a greengrocer's shop.
He stared across the road.
Yes, that was it.
Mrs Ascher. Newsagent and Tobacconist…
In the empty window was a sign.
To Let.
Empty…
Lifeless…
'Excuse me, sir.'
The greengrocer's wife, trying to get at some lemons.
He apologized, moved to one side.
Slowly he shuffled away—back towards the main street of the town…
It was difficult—very difficult—now that he hadn't any money left…
Not having had anything to eat all day made one feel very queer and light-headed…
He looked at a poster outside a newsagent's shop.
The A B C Case. Murderer Still at Large. Interviews with M. Hercule Poirot.
Mr Cust said to himself:
'Hercule Poirot. I wonder if he knows…'
He walked on again.
It wouldn't do to stand staring at that poster…
He thought:
'I can't go on much longer…'
Foot in front of foot…what an odd thing walking was…
Foot in front of foot—ridiculous.
Highly ridiculous…
But man was a ridiculous animal anyway…
And he, Alexander Bonaparte Cust, was particularly ridiculous.
He had always been…
People had always laughed at him…
He couldn't blame them…
Where was he going? He didn't know. He'd come to the end. He no longer looked anywhere but at his feet.
Foot in front of foot.
He looked up. Lights in front of him. And letters…
Police Station.

'That's funny,' said Mr Cust. He gave a little giggle.
Then he stepped inside. Suddenly, as he did so, he swayed and fell forward.