

Origin of Closed circle of suspects in Agatha Christie  
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## **Abstract**

This essay will discuss the closed circle of suspects in Agatha Christie's novels. The closed circle of suspects is a common element of detective fiction, and the subgenre that employs it can be referred to as the closed circle mystery. In other words, it is known that the criminal (murderer) is one of the people present at or nearby the scene, and the crime could not have been committed by some outsider. The detective has to solve the crime, figuring out the criminal from this pool (circle) of suspects, rather than searching for a totally unknown perpetrator. This type of narrative originated with British detective fiction. Agatha Christie's *The "Mysterious Affair at Styles (1920)"* [6][7] had been credited as the work that started this trend and developing into a great achievement in *"Murder on the Orient Express (1934)"* and completed in *"And Then There Were None (1939)"* [6]. This type of narrative originated with the British detective fiction. [6][7] Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles (1920)* has been credited as a work that started this trend. Other writers of that period, dating to the first half of the 20th century, a time known as

the Golden Age of Detective Fiction (or more general, mystery fiction) [6][7]

We will discuss these three novels of Agatha Christie about these closed circle mystery types of narrative.

## **Key words**

Closed circle of suspects, Golden Age, Agatha Christie, Murder on the Orient Express, And Then There Were None, And Then There Were None

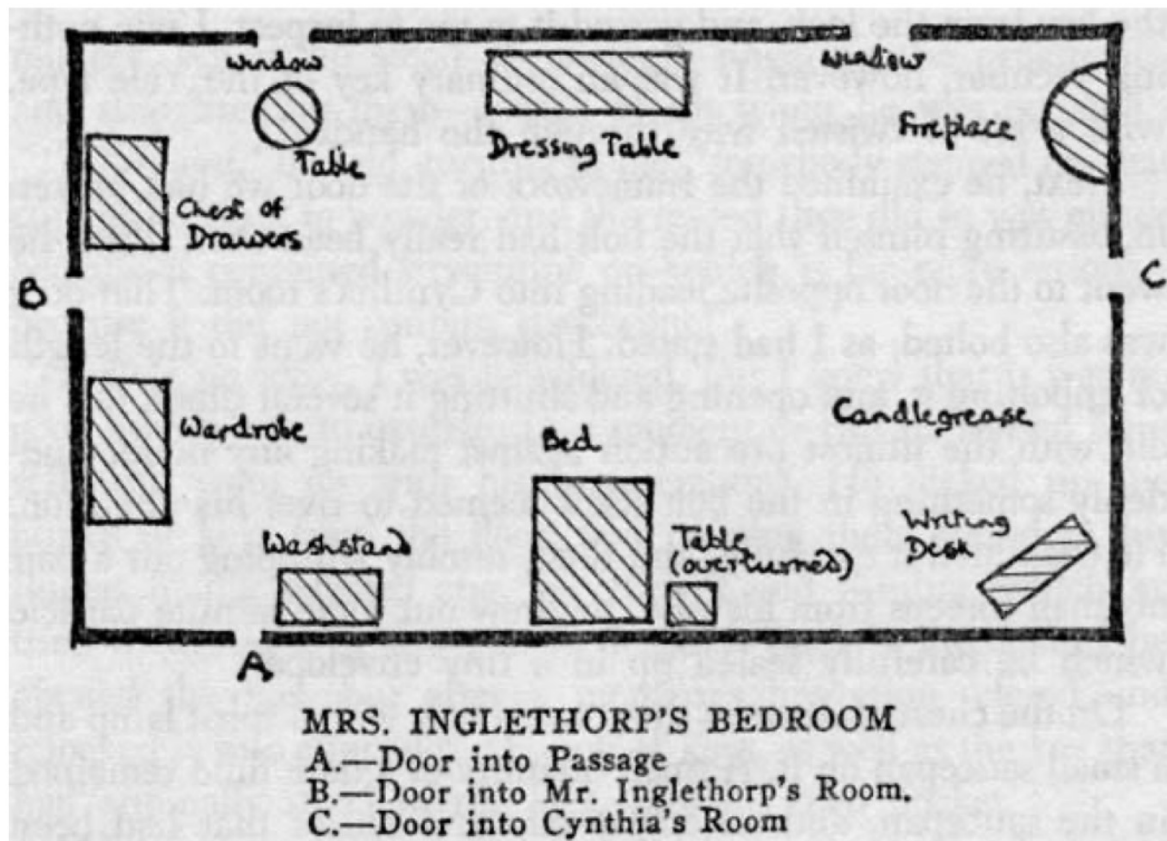
## **Main essay**

There are many details that author is going to tell us Styles Court is a Closed circle, and the author assumes it by writing, "He and his wife had lived at Styles Court in every luxury, surrounded by her care and attention.", or "Ah! In the event of anything happening to your brother, who will inherit Styles Court?"

The author assumed it was a Closed circle soon after they find the victims's body and call the Belgian detective Poirot., ""The rooms are locked?" asked Poirot. "Dr. Bauerstein considered it advisable."" , "Then he is very sure. Well, that simplifies matters for us." In this dialogue, the author gave the obvious

point to the reader and drew a map of room where it is apparent that there is no way to get out of.  
Figure1.

Figure1



Also in the novel “Murder on the Orient Express” (1934) all the action occurs on a train which is closed circle same as the crime scene like “I open the door for him with my key. But there is a chain, too, and that is fastened. There is no answer and it is very still in there, and cold—but cold. With the window open and snow drifting in. I thought the gentleman had had a fit, perhaps. I got the chef de train. We broke the chain and went in. He was—Ah! c’était terrible!”, “The door was locked and chained on the inside,” said Poirot thoughtfully. “It was not

suicide— eh?”. (27) It assumes the door had been locked and there are no other route to get out except by the window.

The difference in Closed circle representation between “Murder on the Orient Express” and “The Mysterious Affair at Styles” is related to the difference of the method of operation usage. The “Mysterious Affair at Styles” operation is focused on the poison which is very clear from the beginning, with the discovery of the victim’s body and indication that “strychnine is a fairly rapid poison”. So, it’s not hard for the reader to think that the mystery of a locked room is not deeply related to the operation of the poisoning crime.

On the other hand, first, “Murder on the Orient Express” mentions that “I open the door for him with my key. But there is a chain, too, and that is fastened. There is no answer and it is very still in there, and cold—but cold. With the window open and snow drifting in. I thought the gentleman had had a fit, perhaps. I got the *chef de train*. We broke the chain and went in. He was—*Ah! c’était terrible!*” “The door was locked and chained on the inside” informs the reader that “the victim had been stabbed in ten, twelve, fifteen places”.(27)

This is supposed to be an impossible crime in a closed space. And also the following clue will be mainly focused as the key, how to chain inside and the possible usage of an interconnecting door that connected to Mrs. Hubbard's compartment which is deeply related to the locked room mystery.

Second, the closed circle setting seems to be successfully used to divert the reader's attention from the numbers of murders to the criminal methods. After the occurring of the murder case, the detective Poirot frequently ask witnesses three times about the key and whether the door locked or not which considered as the clue to solve the secret room puzzle. like "If it is necessary, Messieurs," she said quietly when he had finished, "that is all there is to it. My maid has the keys. She will attend to it with you." "Does your maid always carry your keys, Madame?" asked Poirot. "Certainly, Monsieur." (95) and then "The keys?" he said. "It is not locked, Monsieur." Poirot undid the hasps and lifted the lid. (99) and "Here is the explanation of how one man was able to pass through locked doors," said M. Bouc. "Your questions to Mrs. Hubbard were unnecessary. Locked or not locked, the man could easily get through the communicating door. After all, if a Wagon Lit uniform, why not a Wagon Lit key?" "Why not indeed?" returned Poirot. (100). The readers were deeply confused by the way how the murder

get through the locked communication door and naturally mistaken that the numbers of murder must be one or two.

Third, In Christie's novels, the efforts of the detective and unfolding of the narrative produce gradual revelations of previously concealed information about characters (as cited in Ina Rae Hark. 1987). Or in other words, those characters are just puppets under Christie's control, and she is well aware of the suffocating atmosphere that can be created in a closed circle of suspects[7]. It means all characters have their potential development and easiness for the readers to remember in previously concealed information situation especially in the closed environment like "Murder on the Orient Express" which characters are limited. For example, along with the development of the story we know everyone suspected in the train have recognized the victim and did have a motive for killing him. Like "*Mon cher*—we have to *know*. Even if in the end everybody on the train proves to have had a motive for killing Ratchett, we have to know. Once we know, we can settle once for all where the guilt lies." (127). It also appears at "And Then There Were None" at last, the author reveal that everyone has a story and direct or indirectly commit murder explain the motivation by the recorded voice at the beginning "You are charged with the following indictments..."(35)

The criminal sense in “And Then There Were None” (1939) is not limited by a closed circle but the whole storytelling of an island. Furthermore the whole island story is considered as a closed terror and anarchical situation that the author intended to create.

“And Then There Were None” (1939) describe” ten people from various social levels who are lured to a mansion on an island and methodically killed. The murders follow the order in which ten little boys die in a nursery rhyme, a framed copy of which appears above the mantelpiece of every bedroom in the mansion”(18). Over time, it becomes clear to the assembled guests that one of them is the murderer- a man who masqueraded as guest, faked his death, murdered the others, and then committed suicide. (as cited in Craig A. Warren. 2010)

In "And Then There Were None," the first is a closed circle, indicating that there is no route back to the mainland: "I beg your pardon, sir, but there's no boat on the island." "No boat at all?" "No, sir.", "No sign of that motor boat yet. I've been watching for it." , "Is the boat coming?" "Not yet," said Vera." , "But the motor boat had gone back to the mainland." The reader is given some hope, "Tomorrow, of course, when the motor boat came from the mainland." also give some

fear and disturbed emotion to the author by writing ““What time does the motor boat usually come over?” “Between seven and eight, sir. Sometimes it's a bit after eight. Don't know what Fred Narracott can be doing this morning. If he's ill he'd send his brother.” Thus the Closed circle device can be created in many places, a big court, train, and in its most extreme, an island. ““I know what you're thinking, Mr. Lombard. I've asked myself the same question. Motor boat ought to have been here nigh on two hours ago. It hasn't come? Why?” ”, ““The motor boat's not coming,”” , ““There were no fishing boats out - and no sign of the motor boat. ”. Christie, heightens the suspense by adding touches of despair, “We're counting on the motor boat to take us off the island. That's the meaning of the whole business. We're not going to leave the island... None of us will ever leave... It's the end, you see - the end of everything...” (80). This conversation shows readers that there is no way to escape, which makes them nervous and impulsive to read further to see if the inevitable comes to fruition.

Second, the author mentions that the character Vera pays attention to a poem in a gleaming chromium frame , “The Ten Little Indian Boys” .which is the boys from the nursery rhyme.



“One choked his little self and then there were nine.  
One choked his little self and then there were nine.  
Nine little Indian boys sat up very late; One overslept  
himself and then there were eight. Eight little Indian  
boys traveling in Devon; One said he'd stay there  
and then there were seven. Seven little Indian boys  
chopping up sticks; One chopped himself in halves  
and then there were six. Six little Indian boys playing  
with a hive; A bumblebee stung one and then there  
were five. Five little Indian boys going in for law; One  
got in Chancery and then there were four. Four little  
Indian boys going out to sea; A red herring  
swallowed one and then there were three. Three  
little Indian boys walking in the Zoo; A big bear  
hugged one and then there were two. Two little  
Indian boys sitting in the sun; One got frizzled up  
and then there was one. One little Indian boy left all  
alone; He went and hanged himself and then there  
were none.” (24)

The number of boys in the poem matches the number of people who came to the island plus housekeeper and shows how they will die in the future. It is a premonition. The poem is also supposed to show the criminal *modus operandi*.

Third, in the locked-room scenario, everyone fears the situation of anarchy; then a commanding voice speaks: “You are charged with the following

indictments”(34), and then the keyword become “together” , “Allow me, Madam, I'll speak to her. Ethel - Ethel - it's all right. All right, do you hear? Pull yourself together.”, "Pull yourself together, Ethel." (38) after they heard the voice and “But she hadn't found Arthur Richmond dull. They'd got on well together from the beginning. They'd talked of plays and music and pictures together.”(63). After the first victim’s death, “by all means. But in doing so, we have to be careful to stay together. Remember, if we separate, the killer has a chance.”(167) .This quote, written in the book, explains that the main reason for staying together is to protect oneself from the possibility of committing a crime caused by the locked environment in anarchy.

### **According to A Čechová(2014)**

In the Golden Age, a great emphasis was put on the specific environment and the mystery placement. In its consequence, many subgenres appeared, such as the “country-house mystery, in which the circle of suspected is restricted to a microcosm of inhabitants of a particular place”. Christie was very fond of this subgenre and having grown up in the country in a big house, many of her detective stories take place in the countryside. “A locked room mystery on the other hand explores the method used to commit apparently impossible crime (howdunit) in a closed space. Combination of these two gave rise to a snow-bound mystery and a murder afloat” (The Mousetrap, The Death on the Nile). The isolation and the

impossibility for characters to leave the place bring the readers a very attractive claustrophobic atmosphere.[7]

The concept of this essay deals with the atmosphere of the claustrophobic environment of the heart that closet murder brings to the reader, but it is not detailed enough. First of all, country house mysteries such as "Mysterious Affair at Styles" mentioned above, it does give the reader the setting and the location of the mystery. But it is clearly not enough in giving the reader the atmosphere of the secret room and the claustrophobia. As the first mystery murder novel, its claustrophobic setting is limited to deepening the complexity and mystery of the case. Rather than bringing anxiety and helplessness to the reader.

Then this article mentions "The Mousetrap" and "Death on the Nile". Yes, it is indeed one of Agatha Christie's most famous works. However, these two works are not representative enough in the claustrophobic atmosphere. First of all, "The Mousetrap" is set in the Monkswell estate in the far suburbs of London, and there are police officers who come because of the murder, so the work is not sufficiently closed in the stage setting. And then there was the "The Death on the Nile", which took place on a cruise on the endless sea on its way to Egypt, but the author did not use the same sense of

disorder and out-of-control claustrophobia as in "And Then There Were None".

"Murder on the Orient Express" and "And Then There Were None" are the two works that give the reader a very attractive and claustrophobic atmosphere. The former is able to go further into the environmental closing to create the impossibility of crime diverting the reader's attention from the numbers of murders. In the last example, "And Then There Were None" Christie reaches the height of her powers, and fully utilizes the potential of the Closed circle mystery.

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