

**UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLMOUCI**  
**FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA**

**THE TRAIN AS A CONFINED SPACE IN CRIME FICTION**

**Bakalářská práce**

Olomouc 2024

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KATEDRA ANGLISTIKY A AMERIKANISTIKY**

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Studijní program: Anglická filologie

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V Olomouci dne 9. května 2024

Podpis .....

## **Poděkování**

Nejprve bych chtěla poděkovat vedoucí své práce Mgr. Šárce Dvořákové za odborné vedení, cenné rady, věcné připomínky a vstřícnost při vypracování bakalářské práce. Také chci poděkovat své rodině a příteli za podporu.



## **(Bakalářská práce)**

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### **Abstract**

The thesis explores the role of trains in crime fiction. The confined and isolated nature of train compartments transforms them into a perfect setting for locked room mysteries, a subgenre where crimes occur under seemingly impossible conditions. This thesis examines how trains heighten psychological tension, presenting both obstacles and opportunities for detectives and criminals alike. Starting with the innovative work of Edgar Allan Poe, who established the structure of the locked room mystery, the thesis traces the evolution of this subgenre and its adaptation to train settings by the authors Agatha Christie and Edward Marston. Through a detailed analysis of their selected novels, this study examines the different narrative techniques authors employ to utilize the confined space of the train. The train serves various functions, from using it as a setting for murder, where the perpetrator moves between tight spaces and limited escape routes, to employing it as a means of committing the crime through orchestrated accidents, such as arranged collisions. In each novel, the role of the train is analyzed to understand how it contributes to the complexity of the plot. The thesis reveals how trains not only intensify the narrative but also reflect broader themes related to mobility, technology, and anonymity. This research contributes to the understanding of how specific settings can influence the development of literary genres and character dynamics.

### **Keywords**

train, railway, locked room mystery, confined space, Agatha Christie, Edward Marston, detective, crime fiction

## **Název**

Vlak jako uzavřený prostor v detektivní literatuře

## **Abstrakt**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá rolí vlaků v detektivní literatuře. Stísněný a izolovaný prostor vlakových kupé z nich činí ideální prostředí pro záhady zamčeného pokoje, subžánr detektivní literatury, v němž dochází ke zločinům za zdánlivě nemožných okolností. Tato práce zkoumá, jak vlaky zvyšují psychické napětí a představují překážky i příležitosti, jak pro detektiva, tak pro zločince. Tato práce začíná u průlomového díla Edgara Allana Poea, který představil záhadu zamčeného pokoje a následně popisuje vývoj tohoto subžánru a jeho adaptaci na prostředí vlaků ve vybraných dílech Agathy Christie a Edwarda Marstona. Prostřednictvím analýzy těchto vybraných románů tato práce zkoumá různé vypravěčské techniky, které autoři používají, aby do děje zapojili uzavřený prostor vlaku. Tento prostor je využit několika způsoby. Slouží od dějiště pro vraždu, kde se pachatel pohybuje mezi stísněnými prostory a omezenými únikovými cestami, až po jeho roli jako prostředku ke spáchání zločinu prostřednictvím zinscenovaných nehod, jako jsou kolize. V každém románu je role vlaku rozebrána, abychom pochopili, jak přispívá k napětí v ději. Cílem této práce je dokázat, že vlaky nejen zintenzivňují vyprávění, ale také se zabývají tématy jako technologický pokrok a anonymita, kterou vlaky umožňují. Tato práce přispívá k pochopení toho, jak může prostředí, ve kterém se děj odehrává ovlivnit vývoj literárních žánrů a postav.

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Aneta Eyerová

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## Introduction

“*The murderer is with us—on the train now. ...*”<sup>1</sup>

Imagine you are a passenger, and these haunting words echo through the compartments just as a dead body is discovered aboard your train. Instantly, the journey transforms into a thrilling mystery. Every person aboard becomes a suspect, and each compartment is a room full of secrets. How could the murder have occurred? Who among your fellow passengers could navigate the narrow corridors unnoticed, commit such an evil act, and leave no trace? How can you discover the truth and how can the innocent be distinguished from the guilty? No wonder that the impossible crime, particularly when set within a confined yet complex locked room has fascinated readers and writers of crime fiction for centuries. This thesis deals with the puzzle of train mysteries, exploring how isolation intensifies the tension, making the journey both terrifying and utterly compelling.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces a subgenre of detective fiction – the locked room mystery. Edgar Allan Poe created the locked room mystery with the publication of “Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) in which the detective Chevalier Auguste Dupin first appeared.<sup>2</sup> Poe presented narratives that challenged the boundaries of logical explanations and physical possibilities. His detective used critical thinking and observation of facts to solve crimes, and this deduction method engaged the reader.<sup>3</sup> Further insights from Michael Cook’s *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery* highlight how the confined settings heighten psychological tension and create intricate puzzles of motives and opportunities. Cook describes the subgenre’s impact on the reader and how writers introduce the possibility of engaging and participating in the investigation through clues and false leads.<sup>4</sup> This chapter also outlines the structural and thematic elements of the subgenre.

Chapter Two discusses the adaptation of locked room mysteries to train settings, a development that significantly expanded the subgenre. As the locked room mysteries evolved, authors experimented with new settings. Trains emerged as a new challenge for both the detective

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<sup>1</sup> Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express* (New York: HarperPaperbags, 1991), 28.

<sup>2</sup> John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 19.

<sup>3</sup> John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 19–20.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Cook, *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230313736>, 4, 5, 13.

and the reader. Unlike the static rooms of traditional locked room mysteries, trains presented an exceptional combination of social dynamics and constant motion. Agatha Christie, with her works such as *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), solidified the train's place as a central setting in detective fiction.<sup>5</sup> The train significantly influenced the plot, the confined space served as an opportunity for crime and became an interesting place for the investigation due to the limited number of suspects.<sup>6</sup> The mobility within a train allows for subtle shifts in suspicion and interactions between characters, turning each compartment into a potential crime scene. This setting broadens the scope of possible plots, from murders and robberies to crimes planned with devastating precision.<sup>7</sup>

The following chapter begins with a description of the early use of wagons in Ancient Greece.<sup>8</sup> It moves to Richard Trevithick and his remarkable invention of a steam-powered engine. George Stephenson elaborated on the idea and introduced a functioning steam locomotive called "Rocket" in 1829.<sup>9</sup> The chapter explores the opening of the first public railway line in 1830, marking a significant shift in how distances were perceived, and economies connected. As railroads eased urbanization and cultural exchanges, they reshaped society as well as individual lives.<sup>10</sup> However, this revolution was met with skepticism, and concerns about the impact on the environment and safety were raised.<sup>11</sup> This part of the thesis discusses the challenging working conditions faced by engine drivers and the inherent dangers of early locomotive operation. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, companies focused on making train travel a luxurious experience for the wealthy. Train travel became a symbol of the technical progress of the era.<sup>12</sup> To summarize, this chapter incorporates historical background on the development of railways, and examines their impact on society and consequently on literature to provide essential context for the analysis.

Chapter Four introduces the Railway Detective series by Welsh writer Edward Marston. Edward Marston is a pseudonym used by a Welsh writer Keith Miles, but in this thesis, he is

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<sup>5</sup> Scaggs, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Ewers, "Genre in Transit: Agatha Christie, Trains, and the Whodunit," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 46, no. 1 (2016): 99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44122190>.

<sup>7</sup> Esterino Adami, *Railway Discourse: Linguistic and Stylistic Representation of the Train in the Anglophone World* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019), 32.

<sup>8</sup> Christian Wolmar, *Fire and Steam: A New History of the Railways in Britain*, Google Play (Atlantic Books Ltd, 2009), [https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=4xkAIW\\_4ydAC](https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=4xkAIW_4ydAC), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Christian Wolmar, *Fire and Steam: A New History of the Railways in Britain*, 39.

<sup>10</sup> Wolmar, 44–52.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Cook, *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Martyn Pring, *Luxury Railway Travel: A Social and Business History* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2019), 22–23.

referred to as Marston. The series is ongoing with the first novel published in 2004 and the last one in 2024. Set in the Victorian era, the series introduces Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck and Sergeant Victor Leeming who investigate various crimes occurring within the railway setting. This chapter is divided into an introduction to the series and a subchapter that deals with the perception of trains in literature. Marston's characters embody diverse views of the railways. An engine driver, Caleb Andrews is an admirer of trains, and he positively acknowledges their contribution to the general public. On the contrary, Sir Humphrey Gilzean is an example of the backlash against technological advances, and he blames railways for personal tragedy. Detective Colbeck and Sergeant Leeming offer a more balanced view, recognizing both the benefits and dangers of railway travel. With his detailed knowledge and appreciation of the railways, Colbeck often corrects Leeming's misconceptions about trains as Leeming is rather skeptical.

Chapter Five analyses *Murder on the Brighton Express* by Edward Marston. The novel deviates from straightforward murder plots, instead, Marston introduces a case of an orchestrated sabotage. Detective Colbeck and Sergeant Leeming investigate a train collision arranged by characters driven by revenge and betrayal. The novel explores themes of human vulnerability against technological progress. Unlike the typical murder in the confined space of a train, where the killer is still on board, *Murder on the Brighton Express* employs the train as a weapon to kill a specific individual with the killer watching from afar.

The next part analyzes another novel by Edward Marston – *The Excursion Train*, where the train not only sets the scene for a murder but it is also used for an escape from the crime scene. The novel begins with a strangled man who is discovered on a train traveling to a prizefight. Detective Colbeck's knowledge of the railways helps the investigation as it provides an understanding of how the murderers used the train's schedule and layout to their advantage and they vanished without a trace. The analysis also includes a subchapter that compares Marston's novel with Agatha Christie's novels *4.50 from Paddington* and *The Mystery of the Blue Train*, which similarly use trains as key settings.

The first novel presents a case where Mrs. McGillicuddy travels on a train and witnesses a man strangling a woman on another train that passes by. After reporting the crime to the police, she learns that no body was ever found on the train. In contrast to *The Excursion Train*, where the murderer uses the train's layout to escape unnoticed, in *4.50 from Paddington*, the killer disposes of the body by throwing it off the train and removes himself from the crime scene in an unusual

manner. *The Mystery of the Blue Train* introduces a murder that occurred in the confined space of a train, challenging the idea of safety associated with high-class travel. An American heiress Ruth Kettering is found strangled in her compartment. Her murderers used the train's structure to commit the murder unnoticed and then created a false timeline of her death. In parallel to *The Excursion Train*, the train's schedule is used to escape.

The last chapter focuses on *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie. The novel is an iconic example of crime fiction that uses the train as a setting that is influential for the plot. The story features Hercule Poirot who is stuck on the luxury train due to a snowstorm. The narrative begins when Samuel Ratchett, one of the passengers aboard the Orient Express, is found murdered in his compartment. He was stabbed multiple times, and the scenario suggests no one could have entered or left the crime scene as the door to his compartment is locked from inside. Poirot discovers that Ratchett is a notorious criminal. Throughout the investigation, Poirot interrogates the passengers, gathering insights from their testimonies and the physical evidence within the train's limited space. Each clue and interview leads him to the discovery that the passengers are not only connected to the victim but also to each other. Poirot's resolution of the case is a classic demonstration of using logic and deduction to piece together seemingly disparate facts which is typical for the locked room mystery detective.

To summarize, this thesis aims to focus on the traditional perception of the confined space of trains while also exploring how trains enable various narrative possibilities within crime fiction. It examines how the confined space intensifies the psychological tension and creates a sense of urgency and how it both limits and expands the detective's field of investigation. Additionally, it illustrates how trains influence the development of characters, allow unique interactions, and reveal hidden sides of people under the pressure of confinement.

## 1. Locked Room Mysteries

In this chapter, I will briefly introduce the development of the locked room mystery subgenre. The locked room mystery is a subgenre of detective fiction that revolves around a seemingly inexplicable and impossible crime. The crime is committed in a confined space with no apparent escape for the criminal. The origins of the subgenre can be traced back to Edgar Allan Poe who is often considered to be the father of the detective story. Poe's work "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) in which he introduced detective Chevalier Auguste Dupin was the starting point for the subgenre.<sup>13</sup> Dupin is presented with a case where a woman and her daughter are found brutally murdered in a room locked from the inside, defying a logical explanation. This narrative not only established the locked room mystery's key elements but also introduced a different approach to solving crimes.<sup>14</sup> Poe combined logical analysis with observation of facts and created a narrative that challenged both the detective and the reader to consider details and possibilities and look beyond the obvious. Poe's contributions are further evidenced in his short stories "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," and "The Purloined Letter."<sup>15</sup>

Michael Cook in his book *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery* points out the following characteristics of the subgenre. The characters in locked room mysteries are greatly affected by the confined space, both mentally as it plays on their fears and imagination, and physically as it holds them captive.<sup>16</sup> For the detective, the locked room presents the ultimate intellectual challenge that tests his deductive skills and ability to think creatively. For the suspects and the killer, the locked room turns into a place where their motives, fears, and guilt intensify. The murderer uses the confined space to create a setting for an unsolvable crime. This puts pressure on the detective as it creates tension and a sense of urgency. Locked room mysteries typically follow a retrospective structure, often starting after the crime has been committed. The structure allows for a detailed examination of the events that led up to the crime.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Scaggs, 21.

<sup>14</sup> Scaggs, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Scaggs, 33–34.

<sup>16</sup> Cook, 157.

<sup>17</sup> Cook, 67.



The detective pieces the puzzle together with the clues he gathers through witness statements and the deduction of motives and opportunities and comes to a resolution.<sup>18</sup> This approach engages the readers and invites them to solve the mystery along with the detective. It offers a deeper understanding of the characters and the circumstances surrounding the crime. The readers are drawn in because they can solve the mystery before the solution is revealed.<sup>19</sup> The author creates an interaction between the readers and the detective by strategically placing clues but also false leads to maintain suspense. This enhances the enjoyment of the story as well as encouraging critical thinking and paying attention to detail. Some stories directly address the readers by using rhetorical questions to involve them in the thinking process. The narrative often pauses to summarize the evidence and theories, allowing readers to catch up with the detective and form their own conclusion before the solution is revealed.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cook, 13.

<sup>19</sup> Cook, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Cook, 5.

## 2. The Confined Space of Trains

As the locked room mysteries gained popularity, authors came up with ideas on how to modify the stories, and murder afloat was created.<sup>21</sup> Initially, it focused on ships and boats but this variation later expanded to include other settings, such as trains.<sup>22</sup> Agatha Christie was one of the authors who ensured the widespread recognition of locked room mysteries that were set in various places. Her works like *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), set on a luxury train, *Death on the Nile* (1937), which unfolds on a steamship, and *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) where a murder occurs in an isolated country manor showcase her mastery in crafting suspense within confined settings.<sup>23</sup> Trains introduce a dynamic setting that contrasts the static nature of the traditional locked room mysteries. Unlike murders committed on boats, which are isolated by open water limiting the perpetrator's escape options, murders on trains offer a unique advantage. As explored later in this thesis, train settings allow murderers to potentially use the railway line itself as a part of their escape plan. A train's predefined route provides an opportunity for a calculated exit from the crime scene. Trains travel through time as they move through space which adds another layer to the understanding of the story. It shows the passing of time and the unfolding of the events. The confined space of the train evokes the feeling of being trapped.<sup>24</sup> This offers different perspectives on the characters and the detective.

If there is a murder investigation, the passengers among which is the killer, cannot escape. Whereas the detective is trapped more metaphorically, as he is usually pressured to solve the case before the train reaches its destination. The constant movement of the train creates a sense of forward motion which pushes the story forward both literally and figuratively and the reaching of the destination represents the solving of the case. It adds urgency to the characters' actions and heightens anticipation for what is going to happen next.<sup>25</sup>

What is different from the classic locked room mysteries is that the train itself is an interconnected space, but it has separate spaces inside – the carriages. Passengers can move

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<sup>21</sup> Scaggs, 53.

<sup>22</sup> Scaggs, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Scaggs, 26.

<sup>24</sup> Cook, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Cook, 23.

between them and this mobility within a confined setting introduces new plot possibilities.<sup>26</sup> The author can shift the suspicion by moving characters from one carriage to another, effectively isolating them or removing them from the scene of the crime. The setting of a train introduces its own small society where diverse characters are thrown together. It enhances their interactions and conflicts. This diversity of characters and the forced intimacy can increase the tension. Passengers cannot easily avoid each other which leads to confrontation and sometimes unexpected alliances. The unique design of the train, being narrow and long, also intensifies the physical proximity among the passengers. The confined setting heightens passengers' awareness of their surroundings because of the confinement, and every action and word is amplified, making the characters more aware of each other's authentic reactions.<sup>27</sup>

Trains, as confined spaces in detective fiction, go beyond the conventional narrative limits exemplified by Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*. They are not solely setting for mysteries to be both committed and solved within their carriages. Trains also serve as a dramatic setting for a wide range of detective stories and thrillers, ranging from robberies to crimes discovered onboard but solved elsewhere, arranging collisions of trains, and many others.<sup>28</sup> These stories use the vulnerability of trains for disastrous events planned with malicious intentions. This enlarged understanding of confined spaces emphasizes their usefulness in literature as an adaptable literary tool that explores various themes and narratives.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cook, 22–23.

<sup>27</sup> Esterino Adami, *Railway Discourse: Linguistic and Stylistic Representation of the Train in the Anglophone World*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> Adami, 32.

<sup>29</sup> Adami, 29.

### 3. History of the Railway

The development of railways started a revolution in transportation. However, the transportation of heavy commodities has been important throughout history. It can be traced back to Ancient Greek times, some evidence suggests that the Greeks used wagons to transport boats. These wagons were drawn by horses or people along a track that was built into roads. Trains were also used in mining to move coal in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> The railways that were meant for the transportation of people developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Richard Trevithick is credited with the idea of using high pressure and steam to power the engine that he introduced in 1803. Nevertheless, it is George Stephenson who perfected Trevithick's innovation and he is often considered to be the inventor of the first fully functioning steam locomotive called the "Rocket" in 1829.<sup>31</sup>

The first public line was opened in 1830 and it went from Liverpool to Manchester. It was fast and effective and ensured a connection between two important cities.<sup>32</sup> Trains shortened the perception of distance and time. They sped up the movement between cities and regions, which led to economic development and made it easier to enter new markets. Society has also been impacted by railroads. There was a development of modern cities and urbanization since it was simpler for people to relocate. People from all different countries were able to meet and influence each other. Trains continued to improve into high-speed lines, and they became the symbol of modernization during the Industrial Revolution.<sup>33</sup>

Regardless of the railway's usefulness, the response to the invention of trains was not only positive. People questioned the extent to which their lives would be affected. They wondered whether the quality of life of their farm animals would change, fearing that they would be disturbed or even harmed by the locomotives that ran on tracks near their properties. Horse-drawn carriages would slowly disappear and therefore horses would become worthless to their owners. Locomotives were considered dangerous by some, and people were skeptical about their safety.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Wolmar, 11–14.

<sup>31</sup> Wolmar, 30–39.

<sup>32</sup> Wolmar, 37.

<sup>33</sup> Wolmar, 44–52.

<sup>34</sup> Cook, 23.

The funding for the construction of railways was also questioned. People were dissatisfied with the fact that their land should be taken away from them for the building of tracks.<sup>35</sup>

Turning from the more general impact on society to the personal experiences of those operating the trains, it is important to consider the demanding conditions faced by the engine drivers. They worked long hours and did not have a regular schedule. Engine drivers were exposed to all kinds of weather and since cabins were not designed comfortably, engine drivers had to stand or crouch in unpleasant positions during their shifts.<sup>36</sup> Early locomotives required a lot of manual work and physical strength. Drivers had to operate brakes that were not as efficient as the modern ones, shovel coal into the firebox and adjust levers and valves that regulated the flow of steam to manage speed and power.

Since the locomotives and the railway system were still in development, other risks were associated with the job. Among the dangerous working conditions were collisions, track instability, faulty brakes, and boiler explosions. Drivers were exposed to coal dust, smoke, and other harmful toxins, which could cause respiratory problems and health issues.<sup>37</sup> Doctors were worried about the effect of the railway on the engine drivers, but later in the 1860s, concerns emerged about the health of the passengers. According to some doctors, the body of a passenger was subjected to constant stress, uneasiness, and fear, which negatively affected them physically and mentally.<sup>38</sup>

The evolution of the railways came with significant changes. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was an emphasis on enhancing the travel experience. During those years, trains became associated with luxury that was designed for affluent and wealthy people who sought more than transportation. They desired comfort and exclusivity on their journeys. Railway companies introduced comfortable sleeping compartments, and dining cars that served delicious meals, along with other innovations that transformed train travel into a mix of leisure and sophistication.<sup>39</sup> Companies like The Great British Railway started changing their services and offered exceptional experiences that made long-distance train travel not only bearable but desirable. Different classes were introduced so people of various social statuses could get the experience that was proportionate

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<sup>35</sup> Wolmar, 29–33.

<sup>36</sup> Frank McKenna, “Victorian Railway Workers,” *History Workshop*, no. 1 (1976): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4288033>.

<sup>37</sup> Frank McKenna, “Victorian Railway Workers,” 51.

<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Daly, “Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses,” *ELH* 66, no. 2 (1999): 469–470, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30032080>.

<sup>39</sup> Martyn Pring, *Luxury Railway Travel: A Social and Business History*, 22–23.

to how much money they paid. Train travel reflected the technical advances of the era as well as symbolizing the railway's ability to adapt to changing demands.<sup>40</sup> Given the profound impact of trains as a revolutionary technology and their role in shaping society, often at the risk of people's lives and the emergence of unconventional theories, it was only natural that literature wanted to explore and engage with this topic.

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<sup>40</sup> Pring, 33–35.

## 4. The Railway Detective Series

I will begin the analytical part of this thesis with The Railway Detective series by Edward Marston. The series provides multiple characters that show various perceptions of the invention of trains as well as offering different perspectives on what the confined space of a train means. The series began in 2004 and Marston has continued to release new volumes up to the time of writing. It is historical crime fiction set in the 1850s and 1860s. It portrays the early days of railway investigations. Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck and Sergeant Victor Leeming are the central characters who investigate crimes throughout the novels. Robert Colbeck who is also known as the “Railway Detective” for his investigative skills and deep understanding of the railway system, combines intellect with intuition to solve the mysteries that unfold along the tracks. Although Victor Leeming’s personality and perception of the world seem very different from Colbeck’s, Leeming’s insights contribute significantly to the duo’s success.

Each novel from the series introduces a new antagonist who uses the railways to commit crimes, ranging from orchestrated collisions to murder. These crimes not only reflect the challenges that the rapidly evolving transportation system brought but also highlight the impact of railways on daily life. In the following chapter, I will analyze two novels from the Railway Detective series—*Murder on the Brighton Express: The Railway Detective Investigates a Fatal Collison* (2008), and *The Excursion Train: A Detective Inspector Colbeck Mystery* (2005).

### 4.1 Perception of Trains

As discussed in the “History of the Railway” section, trains were perceived differently among people in society. The advantages of trains exceeded their limitations and different perspectives appear in train-related literature. Throughout the Railway Detective series, there are four examples of people with various opinions on trains. First, Caleb Andrews is the embodiment of the train enthusiasts. Andrews is an engine driver, and he is described as a responsible man who is dedicated to his job. He acknowledges the disadvantages introduced above, but he does not mind them and considers them a part of his job. He appreciates trains and their contributions to society, their strength, and efficiency. He admires the steam engine and other function parts of the trains as well as their designs. Edward Marston describes Andrews’s relationship with trains as follows: “A

locomotive was much more than an inanimate piece of machinery to him. She was a trusted friend, a living creature with moods, likes and dislikes, a complex lump of metal with her own idiosyncrasies, a sublime being, blessed with awesome might, who had to be treated correctly in order to get the best out of her.”<sup>41</sup> Andrews treats trains in almost a human manner and he is horrified when in *The Railway Detective* (2004), the first book of the series, Sir Humphrey Gilzean who is the exact opposite and despises trains, has Andrews’s locomotive destroyed in an arranged robbery.

The second point of view is shown through Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck himself. He is fascinated with trains and enjoys them. He prefers traveling by train and often talks about their importance in the modern world. When there is a case that involves trains, everyone around Colbeck jumps to conclusions and automatically assumes it is an accident because trains are not faultless and if there is a death anywhere near the train, it is either a technical problem or the driver’s mistake. Colbeck’s knowledge of trains enables him to see things differently and he is always the one to figure out that a crime has been committed. “Railway companies are there to serve the needs of their customers, Superintendent.”<sup>42</sup> As Colbeck points this out to his boss while discussing the case. “They simply carry passengers from one place to another. It’s unfair to blame them for any activities that those passengers may get up to at their destination.”<sup>43</sup> The people Colbeck works with, including the Superintendent and Leeming, question the safety of locomotives and Colbeck always tries to defend them.

Sergeant Victor Leeming reflects society’s negative attitude towards trains. He prefers traveling by horse-drawn carriage as he does not believe in the reliability of trains and even if he is presented with statistics and facts, he is hesitant to change his mind. In *Murder on the Brighton Express*, a man derails a train to kill one of the passengers for revenge, which is a human cause, not the fault of the train, yet Leeming’s bias towards trains does not let his rational thinking see that. He tells Colbeck: “You know my opinion, Inspector. Railways are dangerous.”<sup>44</sup> Colbeck presents facts for Leeming, so he knows that Colbeck’s perception of trains does not come solely

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<sup>41</sup> Edward Marston, *The Railway Detective: A Detective Inspector Colbeck Mystery*, Kindle (Allison & Busby, 2009), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Edward Marston, *The Excursion Train: A Detective Inspector Colbeck Mystery*, Kindle (Allison & Busby, 2010), loc. 128.

<sup>43</sup> Edward Marston, *The Excursion Train: A Detective Inspector Colbeck Mystery*, loc. 128.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Marston, *Murder on the Brighton Express: The Railway Detective Investigates a Fatal Collision*, Kindle (Allison & Busby, 2010), 21.



from his fondness for them, but their safety is based on actual data. “That’s not borne out by the statistics, Victor. Millions of passengers travel by rail each year in complete safety. Of the accidents reported, the majority are relatively minor and involve no loss of life.”<sup>45</sup> Colbeck says to Leeming. In the series, Leeming is proven wrong many times, and he is shown that trains are faster and more efficient. Just like the people in society, he eventually acknowledges their benefits. In *The Excursion Train*, Leeming is chasing a suspect and learns that his accomplice is on the way to warn him and the only way to get there in time is by train. Leeming says to his partner “I never expected to hear myself say this, Inspector, but I think we should take a train.”<sup>46</sup> He remains skeptical about trains even though he takes advantage of them sometimes.

I already mentioned Sir Humphrey Gilzean who appeared in *The Railway Detective*. Unlike Leeming who simply dislikes trains, this character represents all the hatred people felt for trains and how they blamed them for the unfortunate things that happened in their lives. Gilzean’s wife died when she fell off a horse that got scared by a train passing by. Trains remind him of his loss, and he is determined to destroy railway companies and with them the suffering he thinks they represent. First, he arranges a robbery and manages to damage a train as well and by this, he wants to show others that trains are dangerous, and crimes are more likely to happen when traveling by train. Then, he unsuccessfully tries to blow up another train with passengers on it. Lastly, he plans to demolish the Lord of the Isles, which set the standard for constructing locomotives and is a pride of the British railways. For Gilzean, it is the symbol of his wife’s death. This character is rather an extreme example of the resentment people had towards trains.

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<sup>45</sup> Edward Marston, *Murder on the Brighton Express: The Railway Detective Investigates a Fatal Collision*, 21.

<sup>46</sup> Marston, *The Excursion Train: A Detective Inspector Colbeck Mystery*, loc. 3364.

## 5. *Murder on the Brighton Express*

In this chapter, I will analyze Edward Marston's *Murder on the Brighton Express*. The novel departs from the traditional case of a murder within a confined space and challenges the readers' understanding of the confined space. Through its unique approach, *Murder on the Brighton Express* offers a different perspective on the impacts of trains and it allows for a deeper exploration of trains as a setting in crime narratives.

The plot develops through an accident rather than a straightforward murder. Detective Colbeck pieces together clues to solve a case that involves betrayal, revenge, and technical manipulation. The story begins with a conversation between an engine driver Frank Pike and a fireman John Heddle. Heddle tells Pike that they should try to make the express go as fast as possible and break the speed record, but Pike insists that safety comes first. He shares the same loving attitude towards trains and his job as Caleb Andrews, whom I discussed earlier. Suddenly, Pike notices there is something wrong with the rails but before he can shut off the steam and apply the brakes, the train goes off the rails and the carriages behind are thrown sideways. The locomotive keeps going forward and Heddle notices that another train is coming towards them. Marston highlights the power of trains in the following quote: "Gibbering with fear, Heddle pointed ahead. A ballast train was puffing towards them on the adjacent line. They could both see the continuous firework display under its wheels as the brakes fought in vain to slow it down. A collision was inevitable. There was no escape."<sup>47</sup> Pike tells the fireman to jump off the train to save himself before the collision happens and so he does. Pike decides to stay and do as much as he can to stop the train, he is too proud to leave it. His job is his life purpose, and he is willing to die for it. The trains collide.

Edward Marston describes the moment of the crash:

"When the engines finally met, there was a deafening clash and the Brighton Express twisted and buckled, tipping its carriages on to the other line and producing a cacophony of screams, howls of pain and groans from the passengers. Both locomotives were toppled by the sheer force of the impact. The long procession of wagons behind the other engine leapt madly off the rails

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<sup>47</sup> Edward Marston, *Murder on the Brighton Express: The Railway Detective Investigates a Fatal Collision*, Kindle (Allison & Busby, 2010), 16.

and broke up like matchwood, scattering their ballast far and wide in a vicious hailstorm of stone. It was a scene of utter devastation.”<sup>48</sup>

This illustrates the physical destruction in addition to the emphasized psychological terror among the passengers. The mentions of screams and pain draw attention to the individual suffering within the collective horror. Later in the story, Segreant Leeming comes back to the memory of the scene of the disaster, he cannot shake off the shock he felt when he saw the wreck of the train, smelled the burned human bodies, and heard the cries of people who survived the crash.

Another passage captures the horrific event:

“It was like the aftermath of a battle. Mangled iron and shattered wood were spread over a wide area. Bodies seemed to be littered everywhere. Some were being lifted onto stretchers while others were being examined then treated on the spot. Dozens of people were using shovels and bare hands as they tried to clear the wreckage from the parallel tracks. The listless air of the wounded was offset by the frenetic activity of the railway employees. Carts were waiting to carry more of the injured away.”<sup>49</sup>

It presents the confined space of the train not only as a setting but as a participant in the tragedy. Marston offers a perspective on human vulnerability and shows how technological progress can serve as a weapon. The collision, which is supposed to look like an accident but is orchestrated, as it will be discussed shortly, is a reminder of the potential of human innovations that can be twisted into harmful tools.

Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck and Detective Sergeant Victor Leeming are called to investigate the crash. Leeming’s first instinct is to assume it was the fault of the train as he perceives it as dangerous and unreliable. On the contrary, Colbeck is careful with examining the scene of the accident. He notices there is a bend on the rails that was not caused by high speed and after searching the area, he finds a fish plate along with bolts that were removed from the rails. Fish plates are metal plates used to join two sections of rail ends to maintain a line and stability of tracks and they ensure a smooth and safe passage for trains.<sup>50</sup> They are undamaged which convinces Colbeck the collision was caused by someone who knew what they were doing and therefore they are no longer investigating an accident but rather an intentional crime. This

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<sup>48</sup> Marston, *Murder on the Brighton Express: The Railway Detective Investigates a Fatal Collision*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Edward Marston, *Murder on the Brighton Express: The Railway Detective Investigates a Fatal Collision*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> “Fish Plates,” Fish Plate, accessed March 11, 2024, [https://www.iricen.gov.in/ModelRoom/C3\\_Fish%20Plates.html](https://www.iricen.gov.in/ModelRoom/C3_Fish%20Plates.html).

observation underlines Colbeck's excellent detective skills and further demonstrates how his understanding and enthusiasm for trains are reflected in the quality of his work.

The discovery of the fish plates leads Colbeck to think that this crime must have been committed by a former employee of the LB&SCR, the railway company. An ordinary person would try to derail the train by putting something on the rails and that would have been noticed by the engine driver and therefore the accident would have been avoided. Additionally, Colbeck notes that the train the Brighton Express crashed into was a goods train and only a railway employee would know at what time goods trains run. Caleb Andrews confirms this assumption as he tells Colbeck that trains cannot be derailed unless somebody derails the train on purpose or it is the driver's fault, which is ruled out by the discovery of the fish plates. Colbeck excludes the possibility that the perpetrator was someone from a rival company as it is bad publicity for all the railway companies. This crime appears to have been committed by a person who wanted revenge on the company that likely had them dismissed and also caused the death of someone on the train. If everything went according to plan, the police would assume that the train was derailed by the engine driver who was driving too fast, and among all the victims nobody would suspect that only one person was supposed to be the target.

The investigation later reveals that two people arranged the train collision. One of them was Dick Chiffney, who was let go of his job because he punched his foreman. The other is Captain Jamieson who found out his wife had an affair with Ezra Follis, a priest from London, and the priest took the Brighton Express to see her every Friday. Edward Marston merges the lives of two characters who collaborate to use the railways as a means for committing a murder. Chiffney found himself short of money and had no job, he agreed to be hired by a man who had a vendetta against the railways as well. He used his knowledge of the train schedules to execute the plan. Colbeck and Leeming discover that it was these two who caused the accident. Chiffney wants to take a train and escape his arrest but at the train station, he notices that the detectives are looking for him and starts running away. His attempt to flee ends when he runs through the track lines, and he is hit fatally by an approaching train.

Chiffney's ending in the book is symbolic. "As for that rogue, Dick Chiffney, death under the wheels of a locomotive was a poetic justice. Now he *knows* what it's like to be killed in a railway accident."<sup>51</sup> This ironic conclusion is a reminder of the danger of the train, not only as

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<sup>51</sup> Marston, *Murder on the Brighton Express: The Railway Detective Investigates a Fatal Collision*, 280.

a weapon manipulated for evil but also as a force that can take lives in moments of carelessness or misfortune. Furthermore, Chiffney's death presents a full circle, showing the impartial capability of the train for destruction but also a sort of justice for the orchestration of such a catastrophic event.

Captain Jamieson is determined to kill the man his wife had an affair with as well as to destroy the train that is a reminder of the affair. He chooses the confined space of the train as a place that isolates Follis. Jamieson's attempt to kill Follis is unsuccessful, and he survives. However, the collision results in multiple victims, injuring many people. Jamieson completely disregards the innocent passengers who become collateral damage to his vindictive plan. The survival of the priest makes Jamieson's act not only pointless but morally reprehensible. This tragedy serves to further contrast Jamieson's perception of being wronged by his wife with the actual harm he does in pursuit of his revenge. Just as with Chiffney, there is a sense of irony in Jamieson's situation. In attempting to hold his wife accountable, he fails to recognize the seriousness of his own actions. He is blind to the inequality between his wife's betrayal and the real consequences of the deadly train crash that affected those with no connection to his situation.

Jamieson picks his accomplice wisely to make sure that there are no traces that would lead the police back to him. Captain Jamieson is confronted at the train station as well. He is so desperate to escape that he climbs onto a moving train, but Colbeck follows him, and they fight. His arrest on the moving train highlights the role of the train as a dynamic setting for the execution of a crime and the maintenance of justice. The stories of both of their characters show that trains in detective fiction are more than just a setting. They show the technical duality of a train, allowing the author to explore deeper themes such as revenge and punishment. Trains also offer a lot of possibilities to be used symbolically. In *Murder on the Brighton Express* solely, the confined space of the train is used to isolate the target and commit murder and because this plan is unsuccessful, another role for the train is provided. The train transforms into a place where the acts of an individual, although unintentionally, terribly affect everyone aboard. This novel extends beyond using the train solely as a confined space setting. Instead, it uses the entire train as an element, where an orchestrated collision transforms the train into a murder weapon, resulting in fatalities and injuries. Additionally, the train is used as a tool for death but an

unintentional one resulting from negligence, further highlighting its complex role in the narrative.

## 6. *The Excursion Train*

In Edward Marston's *The Excursion Train*, the train serves as a crime scene but also as a means for the perpetrators to disappear from it. This chapter analyzes how the murderers use the train's layout and schedule to their advantage, both in committing the crime and attempting escape. It illustrates Detective Colbeck's deduction skills and presents how his knowledge of the railways helps him solve cases. This chapter also explores how Agatha Christie's novels *The Mystery of the Blue Train* and *4.50 from Paddington* contrast to Marston's novel in their use of the setting.

At the beginning of the novel, passengers get off a train traveling to a prizefight, and a policeman who is there as security comes into a carriage where he finds a man who looks like he is sleeping. He tells him to get up and when he touches him to wake him up something unexpected happens. "[T]he man was in no position to go anywhere. His body fell sideward and his head lolled back, exposing a thin crimson ring around his throat. The blood had seeped on to his collar and down the inside of his shirt. When he set out from London, the passenger was looking forward to witnessing a memorable event. Somewhere along the line, he had become a murder victim."<sup>52</sup>

The policeman reports the crime to the railway staff and Detective Inspector Colbeck is called to investigate the crime as the railway companies tend to seek his assistance. Colbeck brings Sergeant Leeming with him to the crime scene. As always Leeming is skeptical about railways, and he insists that the murder is their fault as they do not ensure the safety of the passengers. Colbeck responds that "[r]ailway companies are there to serve the needs of their customers . . . they simply carry passengers from one place to the other. It is unfair to blame them for any activities that those passengers may get up to at their destination."<sup>53</sup> After examining the body, Colbeck finds a bill in the dead man's pocket and identifies him as Jacob Bransby. He has been strangled with a thin and sharp object by somebody with great strength.

One of the members of the railway staff remarks that such a murder would not have occurred had Bransby traveled the first or second class. This comment represents the idea of that time that luxury trains carrying rich passengers, were immune to crimes. It reflects a misconception of wealth being equal to moral integrity and nobility, suggesting that higher social classes are above criminal acts. This idea has been proven wrong by numerous detective stories, including Agatha

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<sup>52</sup> Marston, *The Excursion Train: A Detective Inspector Colbeck Mystery*, loc. 87.

<sup>53</sup> Marston, *The Excursion Train: A Detective Inspector Colbeck Mystery*, loc. 128.

Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*. The situation in *The Excursion Train* invites an analysis of how trains, especially in the Victorian era and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became a symbol of progress and luxury but at the same time were associated with danger and criminality. The accessibility and anonymity provided by the railway sometimes helped the criminals escape unnoticed which contributed to the public's different perceptions of trains. The classes of the train were thought to separate the social classes as well. The first class should represent a safe space that hid respectable people from the disreputable ones, assuming that money could serve as a protection against crime.<sup>54</sup> This simple comment, made by the employee of the railways, therefore introduces the Excursion train as a confined space where social prejudices, human behavior, and criminal impulses are explored.

Colbeck interrogates the passengers and learns that a woman was present aboard but only on the way to the prizefight, not back. This strikes Colbeck as odd, given the societal norms and expectations of the era. Prizefights were predominantly male events and a woman's presence would not only be unusual but more so suspicious. Colbeck thinks that the woman must have been there to distract Bransby. The fact that Bransby was strangled suggests that the perpetrator was someone strong. Therefore, Colbeck comes up with a theory that the murder involved more than one person, and the roles were divided between distraction and execution. The woman not returning on the train adds another layer of suspicion to her involvement. It implies that she knew that if she was present on the return journey, it might expose her to investigation or even capture. The murder therefore must have been pre-planned and committed by a strong man who was being helped by a woman. The confined space of the Excursion Train enabled them to isolate their target and manipulate the situation to their advantage, ensuring that Bransby was vulnerable and distracted at the crucial moment when the train arrived at its destination and people were getting off.

Detective Inspector Colbeck seeks out the family of the victim and discovers his real name is Jacob Gutteridge, an infamous hangman. This discovery leads Colbeck to a recent case that involved Nathan Hawkshaw. Hawkshaw was sentenced to death by execution for the murder of Joe Dykes, a man who tried to rape his stepdaughter. Hawkshaw, his family, and friends claimed he was innocent and even wrote a petition demanding a reexamination of the case and Hawkshaw's release from prison. They were unsuccessful and Hawkshaw was executed by Guttridge. However,

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<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey Richards and John M. Mackenzie, *The Railway Station: A Social History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 137–139.



this event occurred with serious errors and inhumanity that outraged the public. As Hawkshaw accepted his fate and prayed, Gutteridge lost his nerve and triggered the execution mechanism too soon, cutting Hawkshaw off in the middle of his prayer. This mistake caused Hawkshaw to unintentionally brace himself against the trap door, preventing an immediate fall and intensifying the already tense atmosphere among the crowd to the verge of rioting. Gutteridge was forced to intervene directly, but Hawkshaw violently resisted. Ultimately, the execution went horribly wrong. Instead of dying from the fall, Hawkshaw was left to suffer for several minutes while his family and friends had to witness this event. Hawkshaw's family therefore seemed to have a motive to want Gutteridge dead.

There is another man who contributed to Hawkshaw's suffering. As mentioned above, Hawkshaw's loved ones tried to get him acquitted. Colbeck interrogates Hawkshaw's wife, and he learns that Reverend Narcissus Jones bullied Hawkshaw when he was in prison. Hawkshaw's last days before the execution were no better than the execution itself. The Reverend kept Hawkshaw chained up. He limited and heavily supervised Hawkshaw's interaction with his wife, but she managed to smuggle out a note from Hawkshaw. In the note he described how Reverend Jones verbally abused him and pressured him to confess even though Hawkshaw insisted he was innocent. When Hawkshaw fought back, the Reverend punched him in the face. Reverend Jones also devalued the petition that was organized for Hawkshaw and thus destroyed his only chance for the reexamination of his case.

During the investigation of the crime, another murder occurs, and it is done in the same manner. Reverend Narcissus Jones is found in a carriage of a train, strangled. This time, the readers are presented with a descriptive passage of how the murder occurs. Reverend Jones comes into his carriage and just before the train departs from its station a man jumps into the carriage as well. The Reverend sees that in the carriage, there is a woman crying. He comes to her and asks her about the destination.

Unable to contain her sorrow, she began to sob loudly and press the handkerchief to her eyes. Jones put his Bible aside and rose to his feet so that he could bend solicitously over her. It was a fatal error. As soon as the chaplain's back was turned to him, the other man got up, produced a length of wire from his pocket and slipped it around the neck of Narcissus Jones, pulling it tight with such vicious force that the victim barely had time to pray for deliverance. When the train stopped at the next station, the only occupant of the carriage was a dead prison chaplain.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Marston, *The Excursion Train: A Detective Inspector Colbeck Mystery*, loc. 1847.

Here again, the confined space of the train carriage is used to isolate Reverend Jones. The usage of the wire as a murder weapon further exemplifies the advantage taken of the confined space where even a moment of distraction provides an opportunity for crime. The isolation and proximity allow for intimacy and vulnerability and illustrate how physical limitation can form the unfolding of events.

This murder occurs on a moving train which is even more dangerous than the murder of Guttridge as the killers could be seen. Colbeck is asked to come to examine the crime scene. His investigation reveals that the crime has been committed by the same people and an additional discovery is that at least one of them must have a good knowledge of the schedule of the train and geography. One member of the railway staff tells Colbeck he has seen a woman entering the train, but no woman is present on the train as they are speaking. Colbeck therefore deduces that the killers have jumped out of the moving train. If the train was going high speed that would be impossible, so it seems that they have a knowledge of the train's line and used the opportunity to escape when the train slowed down in a certain area. Colbeck's ability to piece together the clues is not only based on his deductive skills but it underscores his profound understanding of the railways. This knowledge enables him to come up with scenarios that others, like Sergeant Leeming, who lack railway insight, would likely overlook.

Colbeck has the surroundings checked. He tells his Superintendent: “[w]e found a place where there were distinct footprints, as if someone landed heavily and skidded down the grass. My suspicion was correct,”<sup>56</sup> confirming that his theory turned out to be true. With this strategic escape, the killers used the limited visibility from the compartment to avoid being seen. By realizing that the murderers must be connected to the railways and they went after the people who wronged Nathan Hawkshaw, Colbeck realizes he has a suspect. A family friend of the Hawkshaws, Gregory Newman, works for the railways. He was one of the people who fought hard to get Hawkshaw released. However, Colbeck notices that Newman fancies Hawkshaw's wife, and the narrative takes a dark turn. It is revealed that it was Newman who murdered Joe Dykes after a public confrontation between him and Hawkshaw when Dykes tried to assault Hawkshaw's daughter. Newman took advantage of that situation, killed Dykes, and framed Hawkshaw. Newman did this to eliminate Hawkshaw so he could be with his wife. Newman's actions go beyond the initial crime, he murders Guttridge and Reverend Jones not out of justice for Hawkshaw, but in an attempt to punish those

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<sup>56</sup> Marston, *The Excursion Train: A Detective Inspector Colbeck Mystery*, loc. 2126.

who hurt Hawkshaw's wife. This is a situation Newman himself orchestrated through his initial crime and deception.

This twisted logic reveals Newman's flawed understanding of justice as he seeks to punish those who furthered Hawkshaw's wife's suffering, oblivious to the fact that his actions are the root cause of her pain. What is even more ironic is that Newman also has a mistress although he claims to do all the horrible things to be with Hawkshaw's wife. The mistress is Kathleen Brennan, a former prostitute who was once assaulted by Dykes too and that is why she agreed to participate in the murder. However, she helped Newman commit the other two murders as well by distracting the two men, but she did so solely because of her love for Newman.

*The Excursion Train* demonstrates how central the train and its confined space are for the killings. Kathleen Brennan uses the intimacy and distractions possible within the confined space of the train to distract the victims. She uses the proximity of the carriage to her advantage. She is enabled to engage the victims in a manner that seems innocent yet is calculated to lower their defenses. Her role in the murders is crucial as the distraction she provides for Newman allows him to execute the crimes undetected. Kathleen Brennan's manipulation of the victims illustrates the power of the confined space as it presents a false sense of security among the passengers. Gregory Newman's understating of the railway system helps him to orchestrate the two murders and leave the crime scene unnoticed.

## 6.1 Similarities to Christie's Works

### 6.1.1 *4.50 from Paddington*

There is a parallel between Reverend Jones's murder and a murder that happens in Agatha Christie's novel *4.50 from Paddington* (1957). In both cases, the confined space of the train is used not only as a backdrop but also as a critical element in the execution and concealment of the murder, highlighting the shared motif of strangulation. Strangulation, by its very nature, requires proximity, which is heightened by the limited confined space of a train. However, in the novels, the roles of the victim and the perpetrator are swapped in relation to the movement of the train. In *4.50 from Paddington*, a murder is witnessed by Mrs. McGillicuddy, who is traveling on a train from Paddington, and she sees a man strangling a woman on a passing train.

Standing with his back to the window was a man. His hands were round the throat of a woman, and he was slowly strangling her. Her eyes were wide open and her face was purple. As Mrs. McGillicuddy watched, the woman's body collapsed. At the same time, the other train began to go forward faster and a moment later, it had passed Mrs. McGillicuddy's train and disappeared.<sup>57</sup>

This shocking observation is dismissed by the police when no body is found on the train, leading to the assumption that Mrs. McGillicuddy was mistaken.

Nevertheless, Miss Marple, upon hearing out Mrs. McGillicuddy is convinced that the only explanation for the absence of the body is that it must have been thrown out of the train. Given the detailed knowledge of the train's route and the timing required to commit this murder without being noticed, it is implied that the murderer knows the railway line well. Miss Marple deduces that the body could have been disposed of in such a way it would not be easily found, specifically by being thrown off at a curve where the train slowed down and the body could land far from the tracks, thus remaining undiscovered. This is an ingenious plan as it allows the murderer to remain on the train while the crime scene itself moves from the evidence. This contrasts with the murder of Reverend Jones where his body is left aboard, and the killers use the knowledge of the train's route to jump off it and escape. It is not as connected to the murder of Jacob Guttridge as the perpetrators simply left the train when everyone else did but the method of the murder is parallel as well. The inversion presents an interesting exploration of how both narratives use the physical and operational characteristics of the train. While in *4.50 from Paddington*, the crime is exposed to an

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<sup>57</sup> Agatha Christie, *4.50 from Paddington* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2023), 3.

external observer, in *The Excursion Train* the murder remains unseen, yet both cases show the killers' calculated manipulation of the confined space.

### **6.1.2 *The Mystery of the Blue Train***

*The Excursion Train* in some aspects resembles another one of Agatha Christie's novels – *The Mystery of the Blue Train*. This novel, featuring Hercule Poirot, was published in 1928 and revolves around a murder that occurs on the luxury Blue Train that travels from London to the French Riviera. American heiress Ruth Kettering is found strangled with a disfigured face in her compartment with a valuable ruby, the “Heart of Fire,” missing. Ruth's troubled marriage sets the ground for an interesting investigation. Hercule Poirot happens to be on the same train, he is not initially involved in the case, but he is drawn into the mystery through a series of coincidences and his own interest in justice.

Poirot's investigation uncovers that the crime was orchestrated by two people, Ruth's maid Ada Mason, and Major Richard Knighton, Ruth's father's secretary. Knighton who operated under the alias of the Marquis had been plotting to steal the “Heart of Fire.” They arranged the murder to make it seem like it was done by Ruth's estranged husband who was traveling on the train as well. He would inherit all her property once she was dead. The common motif in *The Mystery of the Blue Train*, *4.50 from Paddington*, and *The Excursion Train* is that the murderers take advantage of the confined space and strangle their victims. The disfigurement of Ruth Kettering's face was supposed to further complicate the identification of the body and confuse the investigators. By making it difficult to immediately recognize Ruth, Mason and Knighton aimed to make the investigators question whether the dead woman was indeed Ruth Kettering.

Another common motif is that the perpetrators use the structure and schedule of the train for their escape. Ada Mason was supposed to get off at a stop in Paris. Ruth Kettering was murdered before the train left its stop in Paris, but her body was found 12 hours after that which ruled out Mason as a suspect. Poirot tells this to Ruth's father while explaining what happened:

Knighton was in Paris that day on your business. He boarded the train somewhere on its way round the ceinture. Mrs. Kettering would be surprised, but she would be quite unsuspecting. Perhaps he draws her attention to something out the window, and as she turns to look he slips

the cord round her neck - and the whole thing is over in a second or two. The door of the compartment is locked, and he and Ada Mason set to work.<sup>58</sup>

Knighton takes the “Heart of Fire” and leaves the train. Ada Mason disguised herself in Ruth’s clothes, making herself appear to be Ruth to the other passengers and train staff. This disguise allowed her to move about the train and speak to the conductor without raising suspicion, creating the illusion that Ruth was still alive. Ada was careful to pick the people she spoke to and picked rather strangers, like the conductor, who knew what Ruth Kettering looked like, but did not know her enough to recognize it was not her. Poirot comments on Ada’s disguise to Ruth’s father:

*Les femmes*, they look so much alike nowadays that one identifies them more by their clothing than by their faces. Ada Mason was the same height as your daughter. Dressed in that very sumptuous fur coat and the little red lacquer hat jammed down over her eyes, with just a bunch of auburn curls showing over each ear, it was no wonder that the conductor was deceived.<sup>59</sup>

Her actions create a false timeline and position the murder hours later than it actually occurred. After ensuring that the conductor and other passengers believed Ruth was still alive and well in her compartment, Ada Mason set up a scene to make it seem like Ruth was sleeping in her bed. Mason changed into men’s clothing and discreetly exited the train, exploiting the moment when the conductor was distracted. Mason’s unobserved departure to another platform and her return to Paris, where she was supposed to be, highlight her use of the train’s stop and the general anonymity that railways provide.

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<sup>58</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers Ltd, 2015), 226.

<sup>59</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Mystery of the Blue Train*, 225.

## 7. *Murder on the Orient Express*

*Murder on the Orient Express* written by Agatha Christie is one of the most iconic works in crime fiction that deals with confined spaces and detective fiction in general. It is the focus of the final analysis of this thesis. This novel, published in 1943, not only represents Christie's excellent skills in creating mysteries but also elevates the Orient Express from a simple setting to an important element of the story that significantly influences the plot.<sup>60</sup> Christie's masterful construction of suspense and her use of the train setting have established *Murder on the Orient Express* as the traditional model for train-based narratives, making it an indispensable topic in the exploration of the confined space of trains in this thesis.

*Murder on the Orient Express* is famous for its genius setting, a rich variety of characters, and a moving plot that transports the readers to the Golden Age of railways.<sup>61</sup> The story has remained so popular that it has been made into four films with the last adaptation in 2017. The novel is set on a luxury train that travels from Istanbul to Calais and introduces the atmosphere that was significant for railway travel at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The narrative centers around the mysterious detective Hercule Poirot who finds himself in the middle of a murder investigation as the train unexpectedly stops during a snowstorm. The victim, Samuel Ratchett, is found stabbed multiple times in his compartment. The train is isolated by the snow and the murder is still presumably among the passengers, and Poirot faces a complicated case.

Before the murder occurs, Samuel Edward Ratchett comes to Hercule Poirot as he feels threatened and wants Poirot's professional assistance. He tells Poirot that he worries his life is in danger and he has been receiving threatening letters that he believes are blackmail. Ratchett wishes to hire Poirot to protect him and offers him a financial reward for his services. Guided by his intuition, Poirot declines this offer and diplomatically expresses his reservations. "If you will forgive me for being personal—I do not like your face, M. Ratchett."<sup>62</sup> This statement shows Poirot's ability to see beyond the surface as he thinks that Ratchett's face mirrors his dark and twisted personality which Poirot wants to turn away from.

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<sup>60</sup> Chris Ewers, "Genre in Transit: Agatha Christie, Trains, and the Whodunit," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 46, no. 1 (2016): 103. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44122190>.

<sup>61</sup> Chris Ewers, "Genre in Transit: Agatha Christie, Trains, and the Whodunit," 104.

<sup>62</sup> Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, 20.

This interaction is important for several reasons. First, it establishes the tension aboard the Orient Express and hints that there are secrets among the passengers. Second, it foreshadows the mystery of Ratchett's murder and casts him as both a victim who seeks protection and a character with a hidden wicked secret. Lastly, by refusing Ratchett's offer, it is shown that Poirot places importance on the morality of those he chooses to work with. It sets the ground for the moral dilemmas Poirot will have to face during the investigation. By refusing to protect Ratchett, Poirot unintentionally steps away from the opportunity to prevent the murder which makes the narrative more complex.

The murder scene in Ratchett's compartment presents the classic locked room mystery. His compartment is locked from the inside, a physical barrier that suggests the impossibility of an outsider committing the crime, effectively imprisoning Ratchett with his murderer. Furthermore, he is stabbed twelve times. Despite the violent nature of the crime, his body is discovered in bed which suggests he was asleep or at least lying in bed when the crime happened. This fact adds another layer of the mystery because it does not seem logical that Ratchett could remain resting calmly while being attacked so brutally. As Hercule Poirot tells the conductor M. Bouc: "[t]he impossible cannot have happened, therefore the impossible must be possible in spite of appearances,"<sup>63</sup> when asked how there could be no evidence of the murderer. This reflection mirrors the deductive reasoning of Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, emphasizing a rational approach to seemingly irrational crimes.

Poirot is convinced that they should believe anything is possible even though they have yet to figure out how everything happened. Poirot finds the wounds unusual as some of them could be inflicted only by a right-handed person and some of them only by a left-handed person. Another oddity is that some of the wounds seem to be done by a weak person not strong enough to stab Ratchett properly, presumably a woman, whereas others required great strength and seem to be done by a man.

Poirot's examination of the crime scene reveals several clues. There is a handkerchief monogrammed with the initial "H", a pipe cleaner, which seems out of place given that Ratchett only smoked cigars, and a burned threatening letter that hints that the person whom Ratchett wanted protection from is the killer. Additionally, the window of the compartment is slightly open, and Poirot thinks this may have been used as a misleading clue to suggest that the murderer has escaped

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<sup>63</sup> Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, 86.



through it. “Nobody left the carriage this way. Possibly the open window was intended to suggest that somebody did; but if so, the snow has defeated the murderer’s intention.”<sup>64</sup> It is unlikely that the murderer escaped through the window since there are no footprints in the snow, the train is stranded in a desolate area, and it is very cold outside. The examination presents Poirot’s approach to detection, emphasizing the importance of observation, the interpretation of the physical evidence, and the psychology of the people involved that characterizes Agatha Christie’s detective literature and locked room mysteries in general.

The discovery of the burned letter is significant as what is left of it mentions the name Daisy Armstrong. Poirot recalls a case that happened in America:

Colonel Armstrong was an Englishman—a V.C. He was half American, his mother having been a daughter of W. K. Van der Halt, the Wall Street millionaire. He married the daughter of Linda Arden, the most famous tragic American actress of her day. They lived in America and had one child—a girl whom they idolized. When she was three years old she was kidnapped, and an impossibly high sum demanded as the price of her return. I will not weary you with all the intricacies that followed. I will come to the moment when, after the parents had paid over the enormous sum of two hundred thousand dollars, the child’s dead body was discovered; it had been dead for at least a fortnight. Public indignation rose to fever point. And there was worse to follow. Mrs. Armstrong was expecting another baby. Following the shock of the discovery, she gave birth prematurely to a dead child, and herself died. Her broken-hearted husband shot himself.<sup>65</sup>

A man named Cassetti was arrested for the kidnapping but due to his wealth and connections, he managed to get acquitted, changed his name, and left America. Poirot realizes that Samuel Ratchett is Cassetti.

As Hercule Poirot continues with the investigation, he constructs a timeline detailing the whereabouts of each passenger and their interactions leading up to and following the murder of Samuel Ratchett. This timeline becomes crucial as it also captures the alibis and motives of the suspects. Poirot begins by interviewing each passenger and asks them about their movements on the night of the murder. Through these questionings, he notes who might have had the opportunity to commit the crime, based on their proximity to Ratchett’s compartment. Each passenger’s answer is carefully examined for inconsistencies or potential motives. Poirot pays close attention to the layout of the train to understand how the murderer could have navigated the narrow corridors

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<sup>64</sup> Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, 33.

<sup>65</sup> Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, 39.

without being noticed. “On the table in front of Poirot was a plan of the Istanbul-Calais coach with the names of the passengers marked in red ink. The passports and tickets were in a pile at one side. There was writing paper, ink, pen, and pencils.”<sup>66</sup> Poirot’s knowledge of the physical space within the train is crucial as it allows him to assess the accuracy of passengers’ testimonies. Since Poirot ruled out the possibility of the murderer escaping, the murderer must still be on board. The confined space and interconnected compartments of the Orient Express provide both a challenge and an advantage in narrowing down the number of suspects.

The power dynamics between Poirot and the suspects are affected by the confined space as well. The intimacy of the compartments along with the unavoidable proximity of Poirot creates a unique setting that differently influences the reactions of the passengers. It is impossible to escape the confinement both physically and mentally and it forces the suspects to open up in a different way than they would in a free setting. This intimacy leads to moments of vulnerability where the suspects could reveal more than they intended because they are stressed by Poirot’s interrogation. This pressure of confinement is the reason for Count Andrenyi’s initial efforts to shield Countess Andrenyi from Poirot’s interrogation. His protective actions suggest an anticipation of how the pressure amplified by Poirot’s questions might affect her. Although this situation takes place later in the novel when Poirot directly confronts Countess Andrenyi about her identity her immediate confession confirms the Count’s concerns.

On the contrary, some passengers become more alert due to this same intimacy. The suspects are well aware of the fact that in a confined space, every word and gesture undergo careful examination which makes them more cautious of their behavior. Sharing the confined space of the train makes passengers more observant, as they instinctively try to control the narrative they present to Poirot. This heightened awareness makes them cautious in their responses to avoid revealing anything suspicious. Poirot uses the confined space to his advantage while the suspects balance the fine line between revealing the truth and keeping secrets.

Colonel Arbuthnot’s interactions with Poirot after the murder are an example of this as Colonel Arbuthnot is careful about how much information he provides. Throughout the interview, Arbuthnot reveals a comprehensive knowledge of the events that occurred and the passengers but takes a guarded stance when it seems that his insights could incriminate him or others. He is strategic with his answers, he says enough to cooperate with Poirot but not so much as to endanger

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<sup>66</sup> Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, 41.

anyone. When Poirot asks him why he is traveling from India not by a boat but rather by the Orient Express, the Colonel replies: “I chose to come by the overland route for reasons of my own.”<sup>67</sup> This brief answer to a very simple question suggests that he does not want to disclose the reason for his travel on the Orient Express specifically, and he tries to maintain control over the information he reveals. The pipe cleaner found in Ratchett’s compartment connects Arbuthnot to the crime scene as so far, he is the only one who admits to smoking a pipe. This is another calculated answer as he casually acknowledges that he smokes pipe because if he lies or denies it, it could make Poirot more suspicious.

Hercule Poirot has limited resources available on the train which is why he relies heavily on questioning, observation, and psychological insight. Although he possesses some evidence, his primary tool is his exceptional ability to read people and situations. Poirot tells M. Bouc, the director of the railway company: “We are cut off from all the normal routes of procedure. Are these people whose evidence we have taken speaking the truth, or lying? We have no means of finding out—except such means as we can devise ourselves. It is an exercise, this, of the brain.”<sup>68</sup> This shows Poirot’s creativity and ability to adapt. For example, with Greta Ohlsson who appears as a more vulnerable and emotional person, Poirot uses empathy to gather information in a manner that acknowledges her fragility.

In contrast, with more resistant and controlling characters like Princess Natalia Dragomiroff, Poirot adopts a direct attitude and uses his observation skills to get to her. Princess Dragomiroff seems distant and rather cold at first. This is a façade she puts on for the investigation. However, her behavior is not static, it evolves because of the confined space. Despite her initial coldness, her loyalty and care for those who are close to her come to the surface. Especially her protective actions towards Countess Andrenyi. By intentionally misleading Poirot about her identity, she reveals her compassion. This act shows the strong bonds and determination among the people connected to the Armstrong tragedy and demonstrates how the confined space helps to reveal true character and intentions. Poirot’s ability to recognize the Russian letter “H” on the handkerchief as “N” shows how his linguistic knowledge helps connect the evidence directly to Princess Natalia Dragomiroff. Agatha Christie employs this clever trick frequently to unravel key points in her mysteries.

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<sup>67</sup> Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, 68.

<sup>68</sup> Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, 102.

While each interview with the passengers aboard the Orient Express offers its own unique insight and contributes significantly to the unraveling of the narrative, I will analyze only the investigation of Mrs. Hubbard and the rest of the interviews will be examined as a whole. Mrs. Hubbard insists that a man was in her compartment during the night of the murder as her compartment shares a connecting door with Ratchett's. The confined space of the train has a psychological impact. It intensifies fear and suspicion and makes people more observant and anxious about their surroundings. Her testimony about the intruder becomes crucial in the investigation as it introduces the possibility of someone moving unobserved through the train. However, Poirot discovers that Mrs. Hubbard is lying. She claims that she could not see if the connecting door was locked, and therefore somebody could get in, because her sponge bag blocked the lock. Mrs. Hubbard is in number 3. Poirot noticed that odd-numbered compartments have the lock above the handle and therefore it was not possible for the sponge bag to block it. Even though she only pretends to be afraid, the reader does not know that until the end of the story. Mrs. Hubbard uses the confined space to give her story credibility.

Through the series of interviews, Poirot places together the puzzle that exceeds the individual stories and reveals a collective case tied to the Armstrong family. While the interactions differ, Poirot discovers that the passengers are an organized group rather than strangers bound together by circumstance. This realization underscores how the confined space of the train, although complicating the investigation, ultimately contributes to Poirot's ability to uncover the truth. The passengers' purpose is to repair the injustice of the Armstrong kidnapping and murder case. With each testimony, subtle connections among the passengers emerge and together they introduce a story full of grief, loyalty, and moral ambiguity.

The interviews gradually show the various degrees of connections to the Armstrong family, from direct relationships to more distant ones. Each story adds another layer to the motive for Ratchett's murder. It is obvious that the presence of the passengers on the Orient Express was planned. This orchestration is disguised as coincidental travel. The interviews serve not only as a clarification of the case but also introduce the ethical difficulties of seeking justice outside of the law. "Society had condemned him—we were only carrying out the sentence."<sup>69</sup> Mrs. Hubbard defends the passengers' actions when Poirot confronts them. The passengers created a case that

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<sup>69</sup> Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*, 136.

challenges the traditional perception of morality and justice, and the confined space highlights the intensity and intimacy of the investigation.

Poirot's way of presenting his findings to the passengers is as calculated and precise as his investigation. He gathers all the passengers in the dining car which despite the overall confinement allows for the meeting of the entire group. By bringing them together, Poirot emphasizes that the murder is a collective matter, and the passengers will therefore be confronted as a group. This method of unveiling conclusions remains consistent across different works by Agatha Christie that feature Hercule Poirot. Although Poirot employs this tactic regardless of the setting, the confined space of the train intensifies the psychological pressure and Poirot strategically uses the setting to provoke reactions. In the dining car, Poirot systematically lays out two possible scenarios of how the murder could have happened, one which exonerates the passengers and another which views them as a united group seeking justice for the Armstrong tragedy. This strategy not only demonstrates Poirot's understanding of human behavior but also uses the confined space of the train to heighten the impact of his discoveries. Since they are all stuck there, no one can avoid the truth. This creates a tense atmosphere that reflect how serious the crime was.

The confined space of the Orient Express hence becomes a crucial element in Poirot's presentation, turning the dining car into a courtroom. The passengers are not only observers but active participants in this process. This creates a unique form of justice where the passengers collectively act as jury and judge, influenced by Poirot's findings. Poirot has to deal with the idea of justice, guilt, and punishment. He forces each passenger to confront their actions and conscience collectively. All of them had their reasons for wanting Cassetti dead. *Murder on the Orient Express* invites the reader to empathize with the passengers' desire for justice while also acknowledging the seriousness of their actions. The story comments on the limitation of the legal system, suggesting that perhaps sometimes justice is not served within the confines of the law and it makes the reader confront the difficulty of defining right and wrong in certain situations. Poirot himself has trouble deciding which version should be told to the police, as he holds high moral standards for those he works with. And so, he leaves it up to the director of the company.

## Conclusion

This thesis examines the role of trains in detective fiction as a key element that shapes the plot, the interactions of the characters, and the psychological aspect of the mystery. It illustrates that the confined space of the train heightens the psychological tension and creates a unique narrative. First, the thesis discusses the subgenre of detective fiction known as the locked room mystery. It is characterized by crimes committed in seemingly inescapable places, questioning the boundaries of logical explanation. Edgar Allan Poe and his influential work “Murders in the Rue Morgue” established the narrative where the detective, embodied by characters like Chevalier Auguste Dupin, employs logical analysis and careful observation to solve mysteries that appear unsolvable. These narratives not only emphasize the attention to detail required to solve such puzzles but also engage the reader directly in the detective’s thought process, inviting the reader to participate in the investigation of the mystery.

Michael Cook’s *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery* helps to further depict the subgenre’s characteristics, noting the impact of confined spaces on both the characters and the plot. This book establishes the locked room as a place where motives, fears, and guilt are intensified which creates a challenge for the detective’s deductive reasoning and creativity. Additionally, the subgenre’s retrospective narrative structure and strategic placement of clues but also traps serve to heighten suspense. This approach to locked room mysteries makes the reader feel involved in the story and think about the characters and it makes the reading more interesting and challenging.

The second chapter of the thesis explores the adaptation of locked room mysteries to include the confined spaces of trains. This has expanded the genre significantly and it introduced a narrative with a sense of urgency and intimacy. Agatha Christie, a key figure in popularizing this adaptation, used trains not as an ordinary setting but as a fundamental component of the mystery. Unlike the static environment of classic locked room mysteries, trains offer a dynamic setting that amplifies the tension of crime stories as it limits the mobility of suspects. The compartments of trains offer an escape for the murderer and allow authors to explore the themes of manipulation, suspense and isolation. The confined space of a train serves as a literary tool for a variety of crimes and investigations.

The “History of the Railway” chapter demonstrates the transformation of train travel from its beginnings to its status as a symbol of modernization and luxury. Starting with ancient transportation methods and moving through to the Industrial Revolution, this chapter outlines how the invention of steam-powered locomotives, symbolized by George Stephenson’s “Rocket” made a revolution in the movement of goods and people, effectively shortened distances and supported economic growth and urbanization. Moreover, it also describes the mixed reactions the technological progress had to face. Concerns ranged from the impact on daily life and displacement caused by the railway construction to the physical toll on the engine drivers and the safety of the passengers. Despite the initial resistance, the railway’s evolution towards luxury and comfort by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century marked a shift in the perceptions of society and made train travel a desirable experience. This historical overview not only highlights the railway’s significant role in society but also sets the ground for understanding its narrative potential in literature, particularly detective fiction.

The introduction of *The Railway Detective Series* by Edward Marston mentions the different perceptions of trains during the Victorian Era, showing how they are reflected in detective fiction. The protagonists of the series are Detective Inspector Robert Colbeck and Sergeant Victor Leeming, and they investigate the early railway crimes. Through various characters, the thesis explores different attitudes towards trains. For the positive outlook, it describes engine driver Caleb Andrew who is a passionate train enthusiast, and Detective Colbeck who admires railways, their power, and the opportunities offer. On the contrary, Sergeant Leeming is distrustful of the railways, and he remains skeptical towards them. One last character is introduced in this part of the thesis, Sir Humphrey Gilzean, who despises trains because blames them for the loss of his wife and he is determined to destroy them. *The Railway Detective Series* portrays the evolution of public opinion of trains, acknowledging their role in shaping society while also recognizing the challenges they introduced.

In the exploration of *Murder on the Brighton Express*, this thesis discusses how Edward Marston redefines the traditional narrative of the confined space of a train. He departs from the conventional murder mystery set on the train and he presents a narrative that includes betrayal, revenge, and planned derailment. The plot focuses on taking advantage of the railway system. The investigation led by Detective Colbeck shows not only his profound knowledge of the railway and his fondness for it but also how trains play a role in crimes and their resolutions. Through Colbeck’s

precise detective work, the chapter illustrates the potential of the train to be used for a personal vendetta. The orchestrated accident reflects on the implications of technological progress. Furthermore, the tragic ending of Dick Chiffney under the wheel of the locomotive presents an ironic twist that underscores the novel's exploration of trains as both symbols of progress and instruments of fate.

In *The Excursion Train*, the train is employed as an element in the orchestration and concealment of the crime. This narrative showcases how the confined space of the train becomes a tool for the murderers. They use the train's layout and schedule to execute their plan and escape from the crime scene. The thesis also again explores people's attitudes towards trains, from the perception of first-class compartments as places of safety and morality to the tough reality of crimes committed on trains. Gregory Newman driven by his own twisted sense of justice, orchestrates crimes by exploiting his knowledge of the train's timetable and the geography of the train's line and Kathleen Brennan manipulates the vulnerable victims who are trapped in the confined space. She lowers the victims' defenses and uses the false sense of security provided by the confined space.

The thesis demonstrates the similarities between Agatha Christie's novels *4.50 from Paddington* and *The Mystery of the Blue Train* and Edward Marston's *The Excursion Train*. Central to these narratives is the utilization of the train's confined space not only as a scene for murder but also as a means for the murderer's escape. Both Christie and Marston employ strangulation as the murder method, which highlights the intimacy and vulnerability within the confined space. In *4.50 from Paddington*, the killer uses the confined space to strangle the victim and then uses the train to dispose of the body in such a way that it vanishes completely from the crime scene. It is thrown out of the train when the train slows down and the murderer therefore takes advantage of the train's line as well. In contrast, *The Excursion Train* explores how the knowledge of the schedule enables the killers to escape from the train unobserved. Similarly, *The Mystery of the Blue Train* shows how the train helped the perpetrators to manipulate the investigation and mislead the detective.

The last part of the thesis analyzes the iconic *Murder on the Orient Express* by Agatha Christie. She elevated the setting of a train into a component that significantly influences the plot. This novel is an example of Christie's exceptional writing skills and establishes the train as a setting in narratives of detective fiction. The luxury and isolated environment of the Orient Express combined with diverse characters introduces a complex murder investigation led by the famous



detective Hercule Poirot. Here the thesis examines how Christie uses the confined space to heighten the suspense of the locked room mystery, where the murder of Cassetti presents a seemingly unsolvable puzzle. The restrictions of the train's layout and the isolation caused by the snowstorm amplify the tension and force Poirot to rely on his observation skills and psychological insight. This chapter also analyzes Poirot as the typical locked room mystery detective. The novel's exploration of moral dilemmas, justice, and the impact of collective action against perceived injustice adds depth to the narrative, commenting on the limitations of the legal system and complexities of human morality.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that trains play a crucial role in crime fiction. Through a detailed examination of works by Agatha Christie and Edward Marston, it becomes evident that the train transcends its role as a setting and contributes to crime narratives significantly. The ongoing appeal of these narratives shows not only the versatility of the train as an influential setting for the plot but also its impact on the evolution of crime fiction. As this demonstrates, the confined space of the train is a literary tool where each carriage and compartment hide secrets waiting to be unraveled, showing the endless possibilities of human ingenuity, dilemmas, and the continuous pursuit of the truth.

## Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá roli vlaků v detektivní literatuře a nahlíží na vlaky jako na klíčový prvek, který formuje děj, interakce postav a zvyšuje napětí. Práce je rozdělena do dvou částí a její první kapitoly se zabývají teorií. První kapitola rozebírá subžánr detektivní literatury známý jako záhada zamčeného pokoje, charakteristický zločiny spáchanými na zdánlivě izolovaných místech. Edgar Allan Poe, zakladatel tohoto subžánru, představil ve svém díle Vraždy v ulici Morgue (1841, česky 1960) detektiva C. Auguste Dupina, který pomocí pozorování a logického myšlení řeší na první pohled neřešitelné záhady. Dále práce popisuje, jak autoři jako Agatha Christie a Edward Marston přizpůsobují své psaní tomuto subžánru a zasazují svá díla do prostředí vlaků. Kapitola zabývající se historií železnice popisuje proměnu cestování vlakem od jeho počátků až po symbol modernizace a luxusu.

Druhá, analytická část práce začíná představením série knih *The Railway Detective* (Železniční detektiv) od Edwarda Marstona. Tato série, s první knihou, která vyšla v roce 2004, čítá 24 románů z nichž žádný nebyl přeložen do češtiny. Všechny romány se odehrávají v prostředí železnic, odráží různé vnímání vlaků v době viktoriánské éry a ukazují, jak jsou vlaky zobrazeny v detektivní literatuře. Jako první je analyzován Marstonův román *Murder on the Brighton Express* (Vražda v Brighton expresu) vydaný v roce 2007, kde je vlak netradičně použit jako zbraň. Vykolejení vlaku zde slouží jako prostředek pomsty a představuje nové možnosti použití vlaku v detektivní literatuře. Naopak Marstonovo dílo z roku 2005, *The Excursion Train* (Výletní vlak) ukazuje vlak jako uzavřený prostor. Zločin a následný útěk pachatelů se odehrávají přímo během jízdy. Pachatelé využijí znalosti linky vlaku a když vlak zpomalí, tak z něj vyskočí a z místa činu tak uprchnou.

V kontrastu s tímto Marstonovým dílem jsou dvě díla Agathy Christie. Těmi jsou *Vlak z Paddingtonu* (1957, česky 1982) a *Záhada Modrého vlaku* (1928, česky 1999), ve kterých autorka rovněž využívá vlaky jako místo činu a ve všech třech románech je oběť uškrcena. V knize *Vlak z Paddingtonu* je vražda viděna z protějšího jedoucího vlaku a vrah zde opět využije trasu vlaku, tentokrát ne pro svůj útěk, ale pro zbavení se těla. V místech, kde vlak zpomalí jej totiž z kupé vyhodí ven. V románu *Záhada Modrého vlaku* prostředí vlaku pomohlo pachatelům zmanipulovat vyšetřování a zmást detektiva.

Posledním analyzovaným románem je *Vražda v Orient expresu* (1934, česky 1935) od Agathy Christie. Uzavřený prostor vlaku je zde využit k izolaci oběti a následné vraždě. Hercule

Poirot vyšetřuje typickou záhadu zamčeného pokoje, když řeší vraždu muže, který byl nalezen ubodaný v kupé zamčeném zevnitř. Omezení pohybu způsobené stísněným prostředím vlaku a izolace způsobena sněhovou bouří zvyšují napětí a nutí Poirota se spoléhat na své pozorovací schopnosti a logické myšlení.

Závěrem, v této bakalářské práci byla na ukázkách z vybraných románů ilustrována zásadní role vlaků v detektivní literatuře. Přesahují funkci dopravního prostředku a pouhého místa děje a stávají se klíčovým prvkem, který působí na styl vyprávění. Vlaky, jako uzavřené prostředí přináší rozmanitost, která ovlivňuje vyšetřování a chování postav a zároveň zvyšují napětí a nevyhnutelně tak vtahují čtenáře do děje.

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