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And Then There Was a Play
A Comparison of Agatha Christie's novel and play
And Then There Were None

Bachelor's thesis

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma „And Then There Was a Play:
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Podpis

Acknowledgements and spoiler warning

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Disclaimer: The thesis openly discusses the murderer's identity in Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (novel and play, throughout) and *Curtain* (in section 2.5.11). Without revealing the killer, it mentions significant plot elements of *The Pale Horse* (in section 1.3.1).

Annotation

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Abstract:

This bachelor's thesis aims to provide a comparison between the 1939 novel *And Then There Were None* (also published as *Ten Little Niggers* and *Ten Little Indians*) and its eponymous 1943 stage adaptation, written by Agatha Christie. The works are analyzed in the context of Christie's murder mysteries and plays, the Golden Age of Detective Fiction and the contemporary crime play. The thesis examines the narrative, the setting, and the role of war-time Britain in both texts, and compares the novel and play versions of the main characters, their characterization and their function within the plot.

Keywords:

Adaptation, Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None*, crime play, the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, murder mystery

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Abstrakt:

Cílem bakalářské práce je srovnání dvou děl Agathy Christie: románu *A pak nezbyl žádný* (vyšel také pod názvem *Deset malých černoušků*, 1939) a jeho stejnojmenné divadelní adaptace z roku 1943. Díla jsou analyzována jak v individuálním kontextu autorčiny detektivní tvorby a jejích her, tak v kontextu Zlatého věku anglické detektivky a dobových detektivních divadelních her. Práce se v obou textech věnuje struktuře narativu, časoprostoru a roli válečné Británie, srovnává hlavní postavy a jejich funkce a zkoumá způsoby, jakým jsou informace o nich předávány recipientovi.

Klíčová slova:

Adaptace, Agatha Christie, *A pak nezbyl žádný*, *Deset malých černoušků*, detektivka, detektivní hra, Zlatý věk anglické detektivky

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Introduction

Agatha Christie, widely regarded as one of the most creative and fecund writers of crime fiction of all times, was, as some of her more sharp-tongued characters would undoubtedly put it, a “dabbler.” Although she was universally loved by her readership for the steadfastness and regularity with which she supplied the book market with eagerly anticipated works of fiction, many of her writings come across as unexpected for those less well-versed in her bibliography, and betray a creative spirit needing to conquer new frontiers. Throughout her career, Christie tried her hand at spy novels, psychological romances and an Ancient Egypt murder mystery, produced verses lauding the ethereality of *commedia dell’arte* and poisons alike, and, indeed, wrote theatrical plays.

Christie’s novel *And Then There Were None*,¹ first published in 1939, gained immediate traction among crime fiction readers and became an unrivaled bestseller. The work combines many seemingly uncombinable elements – the harrowing atmosphere of an isolated island, potent commentary on the weight of guilt and human nature, and also a thoroughly clued mystery resting on the gradual execution of a large-scope murderous plan, endowed with both playfulness and a certain otherworldly elegance.

In 1943, the eponymous play based on the novel premiered. From the viewpoint of literary criticism, teatrology and adaptation studies, the duo of works can be seen as a rather rare occurrence: being written by the same author and garnering a significant amount of success, all the while telling slightly different versions of the story. Even though the thriller-like premise of countdown murders of criminals who are unable to mount an escape or indeed, see past their irrationality and paranoia and identify the murderer, remains the same,² the novel and the play also offer a rather contrasting take on the nature of crime and murder, guilt and innocence, justice and its execution.

¹ The thesis will primarily make use of the title *And Then There Were None* and the terms “Indian Island” and “Ten Little Indians nursery rhyme,” in accordance with the Planet Three editions cited. To differentiate between novel and play, footnotes appear as Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel) and Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play). Lastly, in the chapter 2.1 Changes to the title and text, where two other editions of the novel are cited, years of publication have been added for further distinction.

² And, in many ways, constitutes a precursor to the “slasher” fiction of today.

The first part of the thesis will begin by introducing the author herself, putting the novel and the play in the context of Christie's writing and playwriting. Next, it shall examine the 1930s and 1940s crime fiction, through the lens of the tenets of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction – which established a rather strictly defined, if at times unclear and ambiguous, set of rules for its audience to reckon with and for its writers to follow or break – and the conventions of contemporary crime play. Lastly, it shall discuss the publication and the place of the two works in the Christie canon.

The second part of the thesis shall be devoted to changes made in the process of adapting various levels of the text. Starting with the title, the thesis will briefly touch upon the issue of renaming the works (originally published in the UK as *Ten Little Niggers*), the subsequent changes to the corresponding sections of the text itself, and the bearing of these amendments on the mood of the work. The second chapter will analyze changes to the structure and plot, mostly timeline-wise. Chapters three and four will concern matters of space and time – namely, the Indian Island setting, somewhat reduced in the play, and the effect of the pre-war and war climate, during which the works were written and released, on the motifs and elements of the plot. Finally, the closing chapter will paint the portraits of all important characters common to the two works, in each case pointing out the most striking changes to their characterisation and the consequences thereof.

The above analysis will be conducted with an underlying hypothesis in mind: namely that while an adaptation, especially if written by the selfsame author, tends to use different means to convey the same impression as its source material, it can also fall prey to the conventions and topoi of its genre – thus becoming a work with a meaning and effect of its own, placing stock in elements which might have been utterly absent from the original work.

1. Context

1.1 Agatha Christie

Agatha Christie, dubbed the Queen of Crime,³ is commonly viewed as one of the most acclaimed and prolific writers of detective fiction.⁴ In a lesser known capacity, she was also a highly successful playwright, published a book of poems, wrote two autobiographical works and six psychological novels under the pen name Mary Westmacott.⁵

Born in September 1890 in the seaside town of Torquay as Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller, she was the third child of Clarissa and Frederick Miller, a well-to-do upper middle class couple whose riches dwindled somewhat in the later years.⁶ After being homeschooled by her mother, Agatha completed her education in France. Abandoning her dream of becoming a piano player and opera singer,⁷ she returned home and married Archibald Christie, with whom she had a daughter but whom she later divorced.⁸

Christie's service as a nurse and a medical dispenser during WWI equipped her with an expert knowledge of poisons⁹ – already her first published novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), showcases a complex poisoning scheme.¹⁰ In the 1920s, she wrote one book a year.¹¹ It was her sixth, much-discussed novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), as well as the nation-wide interest sparked by her eleven-day disappearance some months later,¹² that helped put her on the literary map.¹³

³ Russell H. Fitzgibbon, *The Agatha Christie Companion* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1980), 15.

⁴ H. R. F. Keating, *The Bedside Companion to Crime* (London: Michael O'Mara Books, 1989), 118.

⁵ Charles Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1999), vii.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1–2.

⁷ Laura Thompson, *Agatha Christie: An English Mystery* (London: Headline Review, 2008), 59–61.

⁸ Fitzgibbon, *The Agatha Christie Companion*, 20.

⁹ Kathryn Harkup, *A is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

¹¹ John Curran, *Agatha Christie's Complete Secret Notebooks: Stories and Secrets of Murder in the Making* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2020), 744.

¹² Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 51–57.

¹³ "Although the lost two weeks were thus proved to be no fake, the publicity results of the case were predictably just the same as if they had been: bookstore stocks of [Christie's] earlier works

In 1930, Christie met and married the noted archaeologist Max Mallowan. She spent most of her later years helping him on the digs in the Middle East,¹⁴ still often returning to England.¹⁵ She was exceptionally well-traveled,¹⁶ and used foreign locations as the setting for several of her works.¹⁷

The 1930s were by far Christie's most prolific period^{18, 19} and saw the publication of some of her best-known novels: *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *And Then There Were None* (1939).²⁰

In the 1940s, the highly technical clue puzzle of the Golden Age²¹ slowly gave way to more character complexity, in novels such as *Five Little Pigs* (1942) and *The Hollow* (1946).²²

Growing frustrated with her most famous creation, Hercule Poirot,²³ Christie turned her attention to other sleuths²⁴ and to the theater. In the 1950s, her career as playwright reached its peak with *The Mousetrap* (1952) and

were quickly sold out, two newspapers began serializing her stories, and her name was on everyone's tongue." Fitzgibbon, *The Agatha Christie Companion*, 20.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ In 1938, the couple acquired one of Christie's most beloved houses, the Devon summer retreat Greenway. Thompson, *Agatha Christie: An English Mystery*, 310.

¹⁶ All her life, Christie thoroughly enjoyed traveling. In 1922, she joined her first husband on the Grand Tour of the British Empire. Pritchard, Mathew, ed., *The Grand Tour: Letters and Photographs from the British Empire Expedition* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2013), 1–9.

¹⁷ Among others, *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), *Death on the Nile* (1937) and *A Caribbean Mystery* (1964). Fitzgibbon, *The Agatha Christie Companion*, 32.

¹⁸ "[S]he would, from now until the end of her life, publish at least one book a year, sometimes one novel and one collection of short stories, sometimes two novels, and in one year (1934) a total of two crime novels, two volumes of short stories and (under a pseudonym) one romantic novel." Charles Osborne, "Appearance and Disappearance," in *Modern Critical Views: Agatha Christie*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 115.

¹⁹ Afterwards, Christie returned to publishing one novel a year, and this highly-anticipated event became affectionately known as Christie for Christmas. "Mrs. Christie looks back upon the first half century of her career with fondness and affection for her readers, although she admits to being a little awed at the idea that she must produce a Christie for Christmas each year lest the earth veer off its course. 'A sausage machine, a perfect sausage machine,' she calls herself." G. C. Ramsey, "The Career of Agatha Christie Mallowan," in *Modern Critical Views: Agatha Christie*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 10.

²⁰ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Complete Secret Notebooks*, 745–746.

²¹ See section 1.2.1 The Golden Age of Detective Fiction.

²² In his succinct vignettes of both books, Robert Barnard stresses the subtle characterization. Robert Barnard, *A Talent to Deceive: An Appreciation of Agatha Christie* (London: Collins, 1980), 187–188.

²³ Quote from Christie's letter written as early as 1938: "Poirot is rather insufferable. Most public men are who have lived too long. But none of them like retiring! So I am afraid Poirot won't either – certainly not while he is my chief source of income." Janet Morgan, *Agatha Christie: A Biography* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1985), 222.

²⁴ Out of the twelve Miss Marple novels, only three were published before 1950. Curran, *Agatha Christie's Complete Secret Notebooks*, 745–747.

Witness for the Prosecution (1953).²⁵ In 1958, she became Co-President²⁶ of the Detection Club, which united all major crime writers of the day.²⁷

In the following years, Christie gained more and more acclaim,²⁸ despite the uneven quality of her output. In the 1960s, she still managed to produce some lauded novels, most notably the dark standalones *The Pale Horse* (1961) and *Endless Night* (1967).²⁹ Her 1970s novels, however, are marked by her failing health³⁰ and the onset of dementia.³¹

For her life's work, Christie was given the title of Dame of the British Empire (DBE) in 1971.³² She wrote her last novel, *Postern of Fate*, in 1973. Afterwards, three more of her previously written works were published: the respective last cases of Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, *Curtain* (1975) and *Sleeping Murder* (1976, posthumous), and her memoirs titled *An Autobiography* (1977, posthumous).³³

Agatha Christie died peacefully in January 1976 and was buried at Cholsey, a little church near her house in Winterbrook, Oxfordshire.³⁴

²⁵ Julius Green, *Curtain Up: Agatha Christie: A Life in Theatre* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2015), 304.

²⁶ The presidency was shared so that Christie, a very shy person, would never have to make a speech. This was her condition for taking on the position. Morgan, *Agatha Christie: A Biography*, 259.

²⁷ Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 93.

²⁸ Morgan, *Agatha Christie: A Biography*, 362.

²⁹ Osborne describes *The Pale Horse* as "one of the most fascinating of crime novels of Agatha Christie's old age" and *Endless Night* as "virtually unique in Mrs Christie's oeuvre [...] in the manner in which it maintains suspense with the minimum of actual detection." Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 303, 329.

³⁰ Morgan, *Agatha Christie: A Biography*, 365–376.

³¹ Marjolein van Velzen, "Linguistics Sleuths Probe the Mental Health of Agatha Christie," interview by Lisa M. P. Munoz, *Cognitive Neuroscience Society*, June 20, 2014. https://www.cogneurosociety.org/linguistics_authors_vanvelzen/.

³² She was previously (in 1956) awarded the lesser rank of CBE, Commander of the British Empire. In a similar vein, in 1968, her husband Max Mallowan was knighted for his archeological exploits, supplying his wife with the title Lady Mallowan. Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 343.

³³ Some of her short stories, which had previously appeared in magazines, were also made into short story collections. *Ibid.*, 359.

³⁴ Morgan, *Agatha Christie: A Biography*, 376.

1.1.1 Writer

The chronology and major points of Christie's writing career have been covered above. This section thus serves more as an addendum, wishing to address some common misconceptions and present a more layered view of the writer.

Agatha Christie is best known for her inter-war writings that embody the tenets of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction (GAD),³⁵ for creating conservative, cozy village mysteries³⁶ and gracing the world with two iconic sleuths: Hercule Poirot, the dandyfied Belgian, and Miss Marple, the village spinster.³⁷

As several scholars point out, this fashion of viewing Christie's work is highly reductive and, as far as conservatism goes, fairly inaccurate.

Firstly, expounding upon Christie's early, holmesian or openly pastiche short stories, Edwardian influences present in her work and her dabbling in various genres during all of the 1920s,³⁸ Alison Light shows that from the start, Christie's writings were in fact very varied and, in their break with tradition, decidedly modern. One of the new notions that Christie (and, indeed, the whole GAD) unabashedly embraced was the previously blasphemous idea of literature as a means to simply relax and "kill time."³⁹

Secondly, the common view of Christie as an author of incessant odes on the halcyon days of old, lauding the virtues of aristocracy and the charms of country villages untouched by progress, is an unwarranted one.^{40, 41} Among

³⁵ Gill Plain, "'Tale Engineering': Agatha Christie and the Aftermath of the Second World War," *Literature & History* 29, no. 2 (2020), 180.

³⁶ Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 38.

³⁷ M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms, Tenth Edition* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), 84.

³⁸ This exploration of non-detective genres is seconded by Barnard: "Of the eleven titles which Agatha Christie published in the 'twenties, only five or six are works of detection. The rest are what for want of a better title we must call 'thrillers'." Barnard, *A Talent to Deceive*, 18.

³⁹ Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 66–69.

⁴⁰ "The assumption, so common now as to be almost unassailable, is that Christie's fiction is that of a 'natural' Tory, with Christie herself a kind of jolly and bucolic lady [...]. Her settings are assumed to be inherently backward-looking, her social attitudes simply snobbish, and her imaginary milieux an idealised picture of 'the long summers' of the English upper middle class in a tightly class-bound society." *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴¹ A similar sentiment is expressed by Julius Green regarding Christie's plays: "[It] would be a mistake to assume that the society reflected in the majority of Christie's stage work is a halcyon one of pre-war vicarage tea parties. Ironically, this relatively elderly woman, whose upbringing

other offenders, Light attributes the propagation of this myth to later adaptations of Christie's work.⁴²

Thirdly, due to the time span of Christie's work (1920–1974), any perception of the author formed solely on the basis of her inter-war writings will necessarily prove wanting.

Although Christie continued exploring the possibilities of the clue puzzle in the latter half of her career, she also took interest in the challenges faced by modern society.⁴³ Apart from documenting the gradual decline of the great country houses and the shrinking quality of domestic service, Christie's works also chronicled the rise of the bourgeoisie⁴⁴ and the emergence of new architectural styles and modes of living – in a groundbreakingly unpatronizing tone.⁴⁵ After World War II, Christie started to engage with the “anxieties of a new modernity” – “grief, demobilisation, gender, citizenship and the new fears of the atomic age”⁴⁶ – and arrived at a somewhat greater racial neutrality.⁴⁷

was defined by the mores of the previous century and whose frame of reference is generally assumed to be that of the pre-war era, found lasting fame as a playwright in the decade when 'angry young men' were allegedly redefining the theatrical playing field at the Royal Court. [...] Her work spans a century of massive social and political change and this does not go unacknowledged within it." Green, *Curtain Up*, 7.

⁴² Light makes a compelling argument comparing the spirit of *Nemesis*, the 1971 novel, with its 1987 TV adaptation: “Written in 1971, *Nemesis* shows little sign of caring about the English past. [...] There is no lingering over the dilapidated glories of classical architecture as we were treated to in the television interpretation [...]; no descriptions of buildings or their interiors; no pregnant pauses in which to contemplate England's grandeur, lost or otherwise: typically the second murder, which the TV company took as an opportunity to wander round an eighteenth-century library, takes place on a blowy cliff-top. [...] In fact the only 'beautifully proportioned' house in the novel is the home of the mentally askew, and this crumbling Queen Anne house, covered with vines and ivies, is far from being the object of authorial drooling on the bounties of the past. It is a pathological place [...]. Light, *Forever England*, 63.

⁴³ Plain, “Tale Engineering,” 194–195.

⁴⁴ Christie herself sums up this societal change in *An Autobiography*: “Three phases have succeeded each other during the span of my life. In the first the questions would be: ‘But who is she, dear? Who are her *people*? Is she one of the *Yorkshire Twiddledos*? Of course, they are badly off, very badly off, but *she* was a *Wilmot*.’ This was to be succeeded in due course by: ‘Oh yes, of course they *are* pretty dreadful, but then they are terribly *rich*.’ [...] The third phase was different again: ‘Well, dear, but are they *amusing*?’ ‘Yes, well of course they are not well off, and nobody knows where they came from, but they are very *very* amusing.’” Agatha Christie, *An Autobiography* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2011), 122.

⁴⁵ Light, *Forever England*, 78–82.

⁴⁶ Plain, “Tale Engineering,” 179.

⁴⁷ “Whilst [Christie] does not challenge the xenophobic statements of her characters neither does she endorse them either as narrator or in the construction of plots. The most offensive remarks are given to the most likely candidates. [...] Moderation, neutrality, impartiality – small gains perhaps, but in a climate of escalating fascism not entirely negligible ones. Where many other authors might effectively have whipped up class feeling or stirred patriotic strings, [...] Christie invites the reader to be both less demonstrative and more lenient.” Light, *Forever England*, 83–86.

On similar grounds, Gill Plain argues that the indifference, sterility and insularity, for which Christie is sometimes criticized, are indeed only surface-level. In fact, throughout her career, a part of Christie's success lay in her expert tale engineering – addressing the shifting fears and anxieties of her readers, but doing so quite unobtrusively, with all the more potency.⁴⁸ As such, Christie's work continues to hold its own as an insightful time lapse of 20th century British society.

1.1.2 Playwright

Compared to her detective novels and short stories, Christie's prolific career in the theater often takes a back seat.^{49, 50} Nevertheless, her success is palpable – not only did she write *The Mousetrap* (1952), West End's longest running play,⁵¹ she is also the only female playwright to date to have had three of her plays running there simultaneously.⁵² Her extensive repertoire includes nineteen staged plays (nine original⁵³ and ten adapted from her writings)⁵⁴ and about a dozen scripts, mainly one-act juvenilia, that remain unperformed.⁵⁵

Although an avid theater-goer who liked to pepper her works with Shakespearean references,⁵⁶ Christie made a relatively late start of her career as playwright. Her first staged play, *Black Coffee*, was performed as early as 1930.⁵⁷ However, it was not until the success of the *And Then There Were None*

⁴⁸ Plain, "Tale Engineering," 195.

⁴⁹ In this section, this thesis will primarily refer to Julius Green's *Curtain Up: Agatha Christie: A Life in Theatre*, due to a lack of other relevant sources which the scholar himself laments. Green, *Curtain Up*, 12–16.

⁵⁰ Green attributes this continuous oversight, firstly, to Christie's collaboration with producer Peter Saunders who frequently fell out with the West End oligarchy of the day, secondly, to Christie's plays standing outside of the then-prevailing theater culture, and, thirdly, to subpar third-party adaptations of Christie's work in which she is credited as co-adaptor without any actual input. *Ibid.*, 3–5, 157–158, 442.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵² They were *The Mousetrap*, *Witness for the Prosecution* and *Spider's Web*. Mark Campbell, *Agatha Christie: The Pocket Essential* (Harpending: Oldcastle Books, 2015), 14–18.

⁵³ *Black Coffee* (1930), *Akhnoton* (written in 1937, first performed in 1980), *Spider's Web* (1954), *Verdict* (1958), *The Unexpected Guest* (1958), *The Rats* (1962), *Afternoon at the Seaside* (1962), *The Patient* (1962) and *Fiddlers Five* (1971). Green, *Curtain Up*, 561–566.

⁵⁴ *Chimneys* (written in 1931, first performed in 2003), *A Daughter's a Daughter* (written in the 1930s, first performed in 1956), *And Then There Were None* (1943), *Murder on the Nile* (1944), *Appointment with Death* (1945), *Towards Zero* (1945), *The Hollow* (1951), *The Mousetrap* (1952), *Witness for the Prosecution* (1953) and *Go Back for Murder* (1960). *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 9–11.

⁵⁷ Peter Haining, *Agatha Christie: Murder in Four Acts* (London: Virgin Books, 1990), 53.

adaptation in 1943 that Christie, in her own words, ventured “on the path of being a playwright” and decided to adapt all of her future works herself.⁵⁸

Writing novels being the job to pay her bills,⁵⁹ Christie found making plays refreshing, and easier to do.⁶⁰ The 1940s set the ball rolling with adaptations of four of her novels. It was, however, her alliance with impresario and producer Peter Saunders from 1950 onward⁶¹ that gave birth to her most successful plays: *The Mousetrap*⁶² and the courtroom drama *Witness for the Prosecution* (1953).⁶³ While the latter adaptation has been unanimously praised as a great piece of craftsmanship,⁶⁴ the Guinness world record run of *The Mousetrap* is sometimes considered a greater mystery than its actual plot.⁶⁵

Christie’s lesser known plays are as varied as her lesser known writings. Three of them can be classed as thrillers,⁶⁶ three others are dramas on personal relationships, beliefs and morality,⁶⁷ and Christie’s final piece, *Fiddlers Five* (1971), is a comedy from the finance world rife with corruption.⁶⁸

⁵⁸ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 472.

⁵⁹ Morgan, *Agatha Christie: A Biography*, 104–105, 252–254.

⁶⁰ Green views playwriting as Christie’s true vocation, since she was “a writer who had a real aptitude for dialogue and who, by her own admission, felt hampered by ‘description,’” and “her determined, twenty-year struggle to gain recognition as a dramatist bears witness to this.” Green, *Curtain Up*, 1–2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶² Its long run aside, the play was also included as the most significant work of Agatha Christie in the NT2000 list of the 100 most important plays of the century, an opinion poll carried out by the National Theatre. Beatrix Hesse, *The English Crime Play in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 14, 244.

⁶³ The popularity of the play being such that, although based on a short story, it got onto the list compiled by the Mystery Writers of America as the 19th best detective novel (sic!) of all time. In a footnote, the editors noted: “As worthy as this brilliant courtroom thriller is, it should not have been ranked as one of the top 100 mystery books because, well, there is no such book.” Otto Penzler and Mickey Friedman, eds., *The Crown Crime Companion: The Top 100 Mystery Novels of All Time, Selected by the Mystery Writers of America* (New York: Crown Trade Paperbacks, 1995), 18, 32.

⁶⁴ Green, *Curtain Up*, 25, 365–371. Haining, *Murder in Four Acts*, 31.

⁶⁵ Green notes that: “Christie believed that critics resented the success of *The Mousetrap*, the longevity of which has become something of a theatrical running joke and which is by no means her best work as a playwright[.]” Green, *Curtain Up*, 24. Campbell observes: “It has been said that *The Mousetrap* is not great, merely good enough, and that’s a pretty fair description of this record-breaking theatrical anomaly.” Campbell, *Agatha Christie: The Pocket Essential*, 89.

⁶⁶ *Black Coffee*, where Hercule Poirot investigates a murder tied to a missing scientific formula, and the two comedic thrillers *Spider’s Web* and *Chimneys*. Campbell, *Agatha Christie: The Pocket Essential*, 87, 90, 92.

⁶⁷ *Akhmaton*, *Verdict* and *A Daughter’s a Daughter*. Green, *Curtain Up*, 134–135, 145, 446.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 538.

Despite the abovementioned caveats, it is Christie's legacy as an adaptor of her most famous Golden Age novel that is of primary interest to this thesis. The next chapter places Christie's work into a wider context, exploring the conventions and tendencies prevalent in crime fiction in the 1930s and 1940s.

1.2 Crime fiction in the 1930s and 1940s

The term crime fiction, also referred to as detective fiction, murder mystery or whodunit, describes narratives that follow the investigation of a serious crime by an amateur or professional detective.⁶⁹ W. H. Auden's basic formula for detective fiction is as follows: "a murder occurs; many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies."⁷⁰

The pioneers of the literary genre, who gave the plot its standard form, are 19th century's detective story writers Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle.⁷¹ However, it was the 1920s and 1930s, when *And Then There Were None* first came out, that saw a great rise of murder mystery novels, in what is called the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. In theater, the 1940s (and so, the adaptation of *And Then There Were None*) are part of the tradition of the English crime play, which emerged at the beginning of the century.⁷² Let us examine the two in greater detail.

1.2.1 The Golden Age of Detective Fiction

Attempting to define certain aspects of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction is fraught with difficulty due to a lack of scholarly consensus.

Despite being called the "golden age," romantically suggesting an era when things were "at their best"⁷³ or "enjoyed unprecedented popularity,"⁷⁴ the term is conspicuously absent from several literary dictionaries in favor of the US hard-boiled school of detective fiction.^{75, 76}

⁶⁹ Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 84.

⁷⁰ W. H. Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage," in *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 15.

⁷¹ Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 84.

⁷² Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 21.

⁷³ J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, Fifth Edition* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 307.

⁷⁴ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 24.

⁷⁵ The on-line dictionary Encyclopedia Britannica only features entries on "detective story" and "hard-boiled fiction." "Detective story," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 18, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/art/detective-story-narrative-genre>. "Hard-boiled fiction," *ibid.*, last modified May 5, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/art/hard-boiled-fiction>.

⁷⁶ Similarly, two printed dictionaries of literary terms, cited below, list entries on "detective fiction" or "detective story" but, within, explicitly mention only fiction of the "hard-boiled" variety. Neil King and Sarah King, *Dictionary of Literature in English* (London and Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2002), 41. Abrams and Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 84.

Indeed, some dictionaries define GAD simply in opposition to the hard-boiled school, and leave it at that. According to this view (very possibly⁷⁷ still influenced by Raymond Chandler's derisive criticism of GAD writings),⁷⁸ the Golden Age is a period of sterility and artificiality, and hard-boiled fiction is a gritty, down-to-earth reaction to it.⁷⁹

Other scholars, however, recognise the hard-boiled school as the mirror movement to GAD, as it sprang from similar inter-war anxiety⁸⁰ and contempt for hypocrisy.⁸¹ Yet others challenge this dichotomy even further and argue that "hard-boiled writers [...] seldom represented as 'objective' or 'realistic' an alternative [...] as they pretended; nor did they participate in a single and coherent literary movement."^{82, 83} And some even go so far as to claim that, similar to art, we simply know GAD "when we see it" and further definition is futile.⁸⁴

In spite of these gray zones and disputes, there are several criteria that hold true for most GAD works and bear a closer look.

As the name suggests, the most basic delimitation of the movement is a temporal one: a prototypical GAD work was written in the inter-war period (in the 1920s and 1930s), sometimes overlapping into the 1940s.⁸⁵

⁷⁷ "It [...] seems even now to annoy critics. We can surely detect a faint misogyny in reaction against 'the feminisation' of the genre and its 'spreading hips of cosiness'; wounded male pride in the mockery of the fiction which takes it as 'emotionally emasculated'. This was the tone first set by Raymond Chandler in 1944 (himself a Dulwich schoolboy turned San Francisco tough guy), for whom the rejection of Englishness between the wars seems to have been a manly necessity." Light, *Forever England*, 75.

⁷⁸ In his famous essay "The Simple Art of Murder," the hard-boiled writer dismissed GAD writings as unrealistic, artificial and overly feminized. Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1946), 453–465.

⁷⁹ Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, 169.

⁸⁰ Lee Horsley, "From Sherlock Holmes to the Present," in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, eds. Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 32.

⁸¹ Light, *Forever England*, 95–97.

⁸² Charles J. Rzepka, "Introduction: What is Crime Fiction?", in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, eds. Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 6.

⁸³ This view is also expressed in Janice Allan et al., eds., *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 5–6.

⁸⁴ Otto Penzler, "When Exactly Was the Golden Age of Detective Fiction? It's a Mystery," *CrimeReads*, July 21, 2021. <https://crimereads.com/when-exactly-was-the-golden-age-of-detective-fiction-its-a-mystery/>.

⁸⁵ Stephen Knight, "The Golden Age," in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 77.

Secondly, most writers of Golden Age Detective Fiction were Anglo-Saxon, chiefly British, and members of the Detection Club. The period is marked by a growing female readership and an abundance of prolific female authors – namely the three Queens of Crime, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, and, of course, Agatha Christie herself. US writers associated with the movement include John Dickson Carr, Ellery Queen and S. S. Van Dine.⁸⁶

The third respect to take into account – and the most interesting one for the purposes of this thesis – is a set of text-oriented criteria: namely, the values and tenets delineated by the members themselves, and the Golden Age tropes and tendencies brought to light by scholars.

The period of inter-war unrest gave rise to what Alison Light calls “literature of convalescence” – writing about crime in a fun and detached way, offering the reader some “light reading” to blot out and exorcize horrors of the war.⁸⁷ The crisis of the traditional masculine hero, whose image had particularly suffered by the war, is reflected in GAD writings: most detective figures are still male, but they have become feminized and dandyfied, with a greater emphasis on intuition, conventionally a female characteristic.⁸⁸ The genre also becomes less bloody and brawly – it might newly be centered around murder, but more often than not, it is quite a non-visceral murder, presented and treated with indifference, or even irony.⁸⁹

In contrast to the crime fiction of the beginning of the century, a prototypical GAD work is a novel (rather than a short story) and the crime investigated by the detective is murder (rather than fraud, theft or kidnapping). The novel features a close-knit cast of characters, usually members of the same social class, who assemble in a confined space, most often a country house. Since it is a clue-puzzle that lies at the heart of GAD mysteries, suspicion falls on most of the characters, and physical clues and red herrings abound.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 37–38.

⁸⁷ Light, *Forever England*, 66.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 72–74.

⁸⁹ Maurizio Ascari, “Counterhistories and Prehistories,” in *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, eds. Janice Allan et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 23.

⁹⁰ Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 37.

To make matters more technical, in 1928, Ronald A. Knox and S. S. Van Dine both drew up their respective lists of rules to follow in order to write detective fiction. Knox's *Decalogue* includes recommendations on how to play fair with the reader, such as "the criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story" or "the detective must not himself commit the crime," and advises against the appearance of twins, suspicious Chinamen and multiple secret passages.⁹¹ S. S. Van Dine proposes twice as many rules, some similar and others more restrictive, such as the presence of only one detective or the absence of any kind of love interest.⁹²

As Lee Horsley notes, it is very easy to fall prey to taking these rules at their face value and perceive GAD fiction as an anemic, formulaic, rigid genre.⁹³ One of the most crucial characteristics of GAD is, however, a sense of play and of self-referentiality. In order to appeal to the experienced reader of detective fiction, writers would aim at putting a fresh, unforeseen twist on the all-too-familiar formula – presenting readers with the usual array of clues and suspects, all the while managing to keep them on their toes and, ultimately, once again deceiving them. This would, more often than not, involve bending or downright breaking the would-be dogmatic rules of the genre.^{94, 95}

Even with these constant tongue-in-cheek variations on the GAD blueprint and tropes, after WWII, the popularity of the clue-puzzle started to wane. Many writers started exploring different paths – thrillers, spy stories and police procedurals.⁹⁶ Christie herself, however, largely remained true to form.⁹⁷

⁹¹ Ronald A. Knox, "A Detective Story Decalogue," in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1946), 194–196.

⁹² S. S. Van Dine, "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories," in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1946), 189–193.

⁹³ Maurizio Ascari, too, strongly criticizes scholars who have done so and perpetuate the notion of GAD's sterility: "What was initially intended as a game for literati, however, became dogma, triggering misguided attempts at critical eugenics. [...] Thus, while debunking the Golden Age myth of generic purity, we should also reassess our present view of the 'Golden Age' of detective fiction in order to eschew any simplistic rendering of what proved to be a period of extraordinary creative and critical vitality." Ascari, "Counterhistories and Prehistories," 24.

⁹⁴ Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 40–41.

⁹⁵ In this sense, both Knox's "commandments" and Van Dine's "rules" have somewhat misleading titles: "guidelines" or "tired old clichés to avoid" might have been better descriptors.

⁹⁶ Plain, "Tale Engineering," 181.

⁹⁷ Light, *Forever England*, 74.

1.2.2 Crime play

If the perception of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction is marked by academic discord, the analysis of the 20th century crime play hurdles on the unfortunate fact that studies on the subject are few and far between.⁹⁸

In her 2015 monograph *The English Crime Play in the Twentieth Century*, Beatrix Hesse defines the crime play simply as “a play revolving around a crime and its detection.”⁹⁹

Despite scholarly neglect, the output of such plays during the course of the 20th century was considerable, the genre’s popularity reaching its peak after both World Wars.¹⁰⁰

In the 1920s, under the influence of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction,¹⁰¹ the melodramatic crime play of the beginning of the century¹⁰² slowly gave way to the whodunit crime play. Here, the investigation of the Great Detective plays a key role, murder is bound to occur and suspicion falls on everyone in turn. Very soon, a number of plays became equally self-referential as GAD novels and openly mocked their own premise.¹⁰³

In the inter-war period, adapting GAD writings for the stage started to be *en vogue*, even though original crime plays continued to outnumber them. Many adaptations turned the detective into an action hero and supplied him with a love interest. From a narrative point of view, suspense before mystery was stressed, the audience often being in the know as to “who did it” before the detective himself.^{104, 105}

⁹⁸ Like Julius Green, Beatrix Hesse bemoans the lack of secondary criticism, as well as the absence of uniform terminology, on the first pages of her monograph. Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 1–3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Hesse sees this as the possible result of a general thirst for seeing law and order reign once more. *Ibid.*, 1, 31.

¹⁰¹ See section 1.2.1 The Golden Age of Detective Fiction.

¹⁰² This subgenre of the Victorian melodrama usually featured a petty crime solved by the comic figure of the detective, his investigation eclipsed by a foregrounded romantic plot. Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 23–25.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 24–27.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 23–24, 201.

¹⁰⁵ All of these traits can be found in *Alibi*, Michael Morton’s 1928 dramatization of Christie’s novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926). *Ibid.*, 198–200. Green, *Curtain Up*, 78.

In the 1940s and 1950s, the whodunit crime play was still going strong.¹⁰⁶ Several new subgenres were imported from the US. They included the courtroom drama, exemplified by Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution* (1953), and the frightwig melodrama, featuring a chilling mind game devised by the killer to terrify the female protagonist.^{107, 108}

Playwrights became newly preoccupied with questions of law and justice, be it enforced by the legal apparatus or handed out by individuals. Some also started experimenting with the genre: creating inverted crime plays where the culprit is known to the audience from the start, or featuring culprits "merely" guilty of a person's suicide.¹⁰⁹

This progression from a more serious treatment of the subject matter to less solemnity can be observed in Christie's adaptations that belong to the subgenre of the murder-house mystery play, as defined by Charles Bernard LaBorde.¹¹⁰ While her later work, *The Mousetrap* (1951), contains some overtly parodic¹¹¹ and farcical¹¹² elements, in *And Then There Were None* (1943), the premise of the serial killer slowly wiping out a house full of victims according to his idea of justice¹¹³ is presented in a much purer form.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 26, 197, 214–216.

¹⁰⁸ As discussed in section 2.5.10 Vera Claythorne: the governess, traces of the frightwig melodrama can also be found in *And Then There Were None*.

¹⁰⁹ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 38–39.

¹¹⁰ Charles Bernard LaBorde, "Form and Formula in Detective Drama: A Structural Study of Selected Twentieth-Century Mystery Plays" (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 1976), 4.

¹¹¹ "Probably the best indicator of the seemingly serious approach of Christie's plays occurs in *The Mousetrap*, where the knowledge that a killer is loose in the house receives less attention from the heroine than does the preparation of meals." *Ibid.*, 50, 78.

¹¹² "*The Mousetrap* is illuminated by references to melodrama, farce, and cinema, yet its overall structure is that of the classical Christie Whodunit." Caroline Marie, "Agatha Christie's *Mousetrap* and Tom Stoppard's *Real Inspector Hound*: Playing Cat and Mouse with Farce, Mystery, and Meta-Theatricality," in *New Perspectives on Detective Fiction: Mystery Magnified*, eds. Casey A. Cothran and Mercy Cannon (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 189.

¹¹³ LaBorde, "Form and Formula in Detective Drama," 43–44.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 80–81.

1.3 *And Then There Were None*

1.3.1 Novel

Bearing in mind the previous chapter of this thesis, it may come as no surprise that for all that Agatha Christie commonly stands for, it is her rather chilling and un-cozy novel *And Then There Were None* (1939), which features none of her famous sleuths and disregards one of Knox's commandments,¹¹⁵ that is often considered the flagship of her work.¹¹⁶ Continuously appearing on top of various "best of" lists (be it an international reader's poll,¹¹⁷ the ranking of the christieologist John Curran,¹¹⁸ or Christie's own list of favorites),¹¹⁹ *And Then There Were None* is only ever dethroned by *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926),¹²⁰ a more emblematic cozy mystery – which, however, owes even more of its reputation to not adhering to the "rules of the game."¹²¹

Out of Christie's sixty-six novels,¹²² *And Then There Were None* is one of twelve standalones, or novels without a recurring detective.¹²³ These books are quite varied in tone and genre, comprising a light-hearted adventure novel, several spy thrillers and a detective novel set in Ancient Egypt.¹²⁴

Standalones that fall into the category of standard murder mysteries are considered some of the darkest in the Christie canon – be it the oppressive

¹¹⁵ Specifically, *And Then There Were None* offers insight into the murderer's mind. See section 2.2 Narrative.

¹¹⁶ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Complete Secret Notebooks*, 303–304.

¹¹⁷ "Result of the World's Favourite Christie Global Vote," Agatha Christie Ltd, last modified December 22, 2015, <https://www.agathachristie.com/en/news/2015/worlds-favourite-christie>.

¹¹⁸ John Curran, "The Top 10 Agatha Christie Mysteries," *The Guardian*, September 16, 2009. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/sep/15/top-10-agatha-christie-novels>.

¹¹⁹ It must be noted, however, that this list is by no means definitive. In the preamble, Christie states that her list of ten best books "would certainly vary from time to time." "Christie's Favourite Christie," Agatha Christie Ltd, accessed June 16, 2024, <https://www.agathachristie.com/en/about-christie/christies-favourite-christie>.

¹²⁰ On the list of top 100 crime novels of all time, compiled by the Crime Writers' Association in 1990, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* ranks 5th and *And Then There Were None* ranks 19th. Susan Moody, ed., *The Hatchards Crime Companion: The Top 100 Crime Novels of All Time, Selected by the Crime Writers' Association* (London: Hatchards, 1990), 3–4.

¹²¹ Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 44–45.

¹²² Not counting Christie's novels written under the names Agatha Christie Mallowan and Mary Westmacott.

¹²³ Recurring detectives are, by convention, Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford, Superintendent Battle and Colonel Race. Fitzgibbon, *The Agatha Christie Companion*, 9.

¹²⁴ *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* (1934, adventure novel), *They Came to Baghdad* (1951, thriller), *Destination Unknown* (1954, thriller) and *Death Comes as the End* (1945, set in Ancient Egypt). Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 111, 245, 271, 209.

atmosphere and “crooked” family in *Crooked House* (1949), the three village witches and extensive poisonings in *The Pale Horse* (1961), or the gipsy curse and the drifter-narrator of *Endless Night* (1967).¹²⁵ *And Then There Were None* does not fall short, being commonly described as “unusually menacing”¹²⁶ and “deeply chilling.”¹²⁷

The novel was written a few months before the outbreak of WWII, in Christie’s writer’s retreat on Burgh Island near the Devon coast. The island also served as the inspiration for the novel’s setting.¹²⁸ The text was first serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post*¹²⁹ and the *Daily Express*¹³⁰ in the spring and summer of 1939, and immediately received high praise.¹³¹ In book form, it was published in November 1939 in the UK and in January 1940 in the US¹³² and quickly became a bestseller.¹³³

Christie herself was mainly satisfied with the technical aspects of the novel, noting in *An Autobiography*: “I had written the book [...] because it was so difficult to do that the idea had fascinated me. Ten people had to die without it becoming ridiculous or the murderer being obvious. I wrote the book after a tremendous amount of planning, and I was pleased with what I had made of it. [...] It was well received and reviewed, but the person who was really pleased with it was myself, for I knew better than any critic how difficult it had been.”¹³⁴

¹²⁵ Curran’s notes on the general feeling of the books are rife with descriptions such as “shocking denouement,” “pervading feeling of evil” and “doom-laden atmosphere.” Curran, *Agatha Christie’s Complete Secret Notebooks*, 473, 583, 627.

¹²⁶ Barnard, *A Talent to Deceive*, 196.

¹²⁷ Green, *Curtain Up*, 157.

¹²⁸ “The History of Agatha Christie & Burgh Island,” Burgh Island, accessed June 18, 2024, <https://www.burghisland.com/about-us/agatha-christie-and-burgh-island-history/>.

¹²⁹ The Saturday Evening Post editors, “Guide to the Archive: Agatha Christie,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 16, 2020. <https://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/2020/03/christie/>.

¹³⁰ David Morris, “Collect: Christie ‘True Firsts’ 1938–1940,” *Collecting Christie*, May 31, 2021. <https://www.collectingchristie.com/post/true-firsts-1938-1940>.

¹³¹ Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 171.

¹³² Barnard, *A Talent to Deceive*, 157–158.

¹³³ Val McDermid, “Foreword,” in *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Agatha Christie*, eds. Mary Anna Evans and J. C. Bernthal (London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), xiii.

¹³⁴ Christie, *An Autobiography*, 471.

1.3.2 Play

In terms of genre, the stage adaptation of *And Then There Were None* (1943) is a murder-house mystery play where, after one-act worth of exposition, an abundance of characters are revealed trapped in a house with a mad serial killer in their midst.¹³⁵ As further analyzed in the second part of the thesis,¹³⁶ the play melds both 19th and 20th century narrative elements.¹³⁷

Albeit this adaptation is eclipsed by the glowing star of *The Mousetrap* (1951) and *Witness for the Prosecution* (1953),¹³⁸ it is still one of Christie's most acclaimed works of theater,¹³⁹ a very rare success in her long row of attempts to adapt full-length novels.¹⁴⁰ To this day, the play is considered a classic of the genre and has enjoyed continuous revivals.¹⁴¹

Yet the production was not without its problems. After the script was written and sent out, many refused to back it, on the grounds that the deaths of so many characters would most certainly look ridiculous on stage.¹⁴² In the end, the play was taken on by producer Bertie Meyer, a previous backer of *Alibi*, director Irene Hentschel and a seasoned cast.¹⁴³ It opened in September 1943 in Wimbledon Theatre as part of its pre-West End tour, and after moving to St. James's Theatre in November 1943, it ran for "a very respectable total" of 261 performances.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁵ LaBorde, "Form and Formula in Detective Drama," 43–45, 47–51, 95–96.

¹³⁶ See section 2.2 Narrative.

¹³⁷ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 203–204.

¹³⁸ Adapted from a radio playlet and a short story, respectively. Amnon Kabatchnik, *Blood on the Stage, 1950–1975: Milestone Plays of Crime, Mystery and Detection: An Annotated Repertoire* (Lanham, Toronto and Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2011), 85, 125.

¹³⁹ Green, *Curtain Up*, 485.

¹⁴⁰ "Christie [...] had not adapted a play from one of her novels since 1951's *The Hollow* had finally laid to rest the memories of her struggles in the 1940s with *Hidden Horizon*, *Towards Zero* and *Appointment with Death*. Having enjoyed in the interim four major successes with plays that did not use her novels as their source material, this seemed like an odd moment to return to a formula where her hands were tied by the logistics of the adaptation process. [...] [But], as [*And Then There Were None*] had amply demonstrated, if there was one thing that Agatha Christie, playwright, enjoyed it was a challenge." Ibid., 485.

¹⁴¹ Amnon Kabatchnik, *Blood on the Stage, 1925–1950: Milestone Plays of Crime, Mystery and Detection: An Annotated Repertoire* (Lanham, Toronto and Plymouth: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 648–650.

¹⁴² As seen in the previous section, these fears mirrored Christie's own when writing the novel.

¹⁴³ Kabatchnik, *Blood on the Stage, 1925–1950*, 648.

¹⁴⁴ Green, *Curtain Up*, 169, 179.

Four months later, *And Then There Were None* suffered the fate of many plays of the WWII period: its run was interrupted by a bomb that destroyed a part of the theater. The piece survived “comparatively well,”¹⁴⁵ moving to Cambridge Theatre and, another three months later, returning to its home venue.¹⁴⁶ In June 1944, it made its Broadway debut at Broadhurst Theatre and reached a total of 426 performances, although garnering more mixed reviews than in the UK.¹⁴⁷

Well aware that literature and drama are different mediums, Christie never shirked from duly reworking various aspects of the source material for the stage.¹⁴⁸ Many adaptations would eliminate extraneous clues and subplots;¹⁴⁹ sometimes, the title of the play would change;¹⁵⁰ oftentimes, Hercule Poirot would get switched out for a different detective.¹⁵¹ And, in some cases, the dénouement itself would undergo a complete revision.¹⁵²

It is a change to the ending that has also befallen *And Then There Were None*. Both in the novel and the play, ten strangers are lured to the secluded Indian Island, are accused of murder and then, one by one, they start dying in accordance with the “Ten Little Indians” rhyme. Yet, while the novel showcases the “perfect crime” trope, ending in complete annihilation as the police baffle over “whodunit” before receiving the murderer’s hand-written confession, the play ends on a much lighter note: two of the characters fall in love, are revealed to be innocent of their past crimes, and are allowed to triumph over the killer before being rescued.^{153, 154}

¹⁴⁵ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 45–46.

¹⁴⁶ Green, *Curtain Up*, 179.

¹⁴⁷ Kabatchnik, *Blood on the Stage, 1925–1950*, 649–650.

¹⁴⁸ Green, *Curtain Up*, 158–159.

¹⁴⁹ In her memoirs, Christie firmly states: “A detective story is particularly unlike a play, and so is far more difficult to adapt than an ordinary book. It has such an intricate plot, and usually so many characters and false clues, that the thing is bound to become confusing and overladen. What was wanted was *simplification*.” Christie, *An Autobiography*, 471. Hesse demonstrates this simplification on *Peril at End House* and *Alibi*, which are both adaptations of Christie’s novels made by other playwrights. Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 199, 202.

¹⁵⁰ *Five Little Pigs* took on the title *Go Back for Murder*. Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 71.

¹⁵¹ In the adaptations of *Appointment with Death*, *The Hollow* and *Five Little Pigs*, he was replaced by Colonel Carbery, Inspector Colquhoun and lawyer Justin Fogg, respectively. Green, *Curtain Up*, 207, 280, 486–487.

¹⁵² In *Appointment with Death* and *Witness for the Prosecution*. Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 162, 268.

¹⁵³ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 202–204.

¹⁵⁴ Although there are no surviving early drafts of the stage play, correspondence reveals that Christie herself begrudgingly suggested the different ending, to account for the additions proposed by the producer. In late 1942, in a letter to her agent Edmund Cork, who communicated with producer Bertie Meyer on her behalf, Christie calls out the producer’s ideas

The context explained and the plot roughly outlined, we will now plunge into a minute comparison of the novel and the play, addressing the title changes and exploring the narrative, setting, the times and characters of the two works.

as “cheap comedy” coupled with a “silly” love interest, justifiable only by altering the ending from the book’s tragic one to a happy one. Her agent called such a drastic rewrite “a sacrilege” but conceded that “it would make much easier theatre.” The producer seconded this opinion and so, the play was finally greenlit. Green, *Curtain Up*, 158–161.

2. Comparison of the novel and the play

2.1 Changes to the title and text

2.1.1 The Indian in the room

The original UK novel was, quite infamously, titled *Ten Little Niggers*. Not a year later, the first US edition appeared under the now-used name *And Then There Were None*, which became the definitive UK title in 1985.¹⁵⁵ In paperback form, the novel also appeared under the name *Ten Little Indians* in the US.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, the 1943 play first ran under *Ten Little Niggers* in the UK, was retitled to *Ten Little Indians* for the US theaters in 1944 and is now produced as *And Then There Were None*.¹⁵⁷

All the titles are direct quotes from the “Ten Little Niggers” nursery rhyme, originally a 1869 minstrel song by Frank J. Green.¹⁵⁸ They are drawn from the first and final verse, respectively.

The immediate change of the title for the US market reflects the social climate of the times, namely the varying degrees of objectability of the term “nigger” – then, a quite inoffensive word in the UK, yet a downright racial slur in the US.¹⁵⁹ Arguably, the US publisher’s solution, which consisted of replacing “Niggers” with “Indians” in the nursery rhyme, did nothing in the way of addressing and dealing with a racist, colonial past.¹⁶⁰

Finally, in 2004, “Indian Boys” too became a thing of the past, with *And Then There Were None* as the definitive title and “Soldier Boys” as the rhyme’s protagonists.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Blake Allmendinger, “The Erasure of Race in Agatha Christie’s *And Then There Were None*,” *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 32, no. 1 (2018), 60.

¹⁵⁶ This led to some confusion, as the title seems to allude to the 1964 counting song “Ten Little Indians” by Septimus Winner, with simple lyrics that are completely dissimilar to the rhyme used in the novel. Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 169–170.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁵⁸ Ona Opie and Peter Opie, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 156.

¹⁵⁹ Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, 169.

¹⁶⁰ Rather, openly renaming the novel, from 1940 known as *And Then There Were None*, to *Ten Little Indians* some twenty-five years later shows that even as late as the 1960s, the racial slur “nigger” was far more unacceptable than racism itself. Craig A. Warren, “Gender and Moral Immaturity in Agatha Christie’s ‘*And Then There Were None*,’” *CEA Critic* 73, no. 1 (2010), 52.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

This change has sometimes been criticized for detracting from the eerie feeling of the story – as, indeed, one can hardly find a darker sentiment to evoke than racism. Alison Light notes that the name “Nigger Island” is extremely fitting for “a place ‘just off the coast’ of England, belonging to it and yet wildly different from it,” which can be relied upon to “conjure up a thrilling ‘otherness’” and reveal the “dark side of the English.”^{162, 163}

Yet others have gone on to point out that while the term “Soldier Boys” is inoffensive enough, it does not make much sense, as “being a soldier is antithetical to what [the ten characters brought to the island] are.”¹⁶⁴

Lastly, soldiers indubitably fall into the category of war-related themes that inter-war writings hardly wished to heavily evoke. Thus, the modern revisions seem contrary to the spirit of GAD as literature of convalescence.¹⁶⁵

It could be argued, however, that the new editions are in fact well-suited for the modern audience that they are targeting. As we have already established, describing ten murderous characters as soldiers could have been considered bad taste when the works originally came out, just as evoking “niggers” and “Indians” are deemed today.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, we could say that where racism once tapped into the imperialist “imaginings of racial differences”¹⁶⁷ and helped construct a feeling of familiar otherness, it is a similar sense of trauma, shell shock and isolation, inextricably linked to the veterans of the two World Wars,¹⁶⁸ that could fulfill an equivalent function for the modern-day

¹⁶² Light, *Forever England*, 99.

¹⁶³ It is precisely this feeling of slight uneasiness and inadequacy which was used to market the early editions of the novel. The blurb in the 1968 edition reads: “Ten people are invited to a lonely house on Nigger Island, off the coast of Devon, by a host who fails to appear – and each of these ten English people has something to hide. It’s a glorious summer evening when they arrive yet they all sense something odd about the island, something sinister...” Agatha Christie, *Ten Little Niggers* (London and Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1968), 1.

¹⁶⁴ Brad Friedman, “On the Cleverness of Constance Culmington: Eighty Years of And Then There Were None,” *Ah Sweet Mystery*, November 6, 2019. <https://ahsweetmystery.com/2019/11/06/on-the-cleverness-of-constance-culmington-eighty-years-of-and-then-there-were-none/>.

¹⁶⁵ See section 1.2.1 The Golden Age of Detective Fiction.

¹⁶⁶ As the scandalized General Macarthur notes in the 2005 video game, which in turn features Shipwreck Island and the poem “Ten Little Sailor Boys”: “As I remember, the [original] rhyme was about soldier boys. Highly inappropriate, as I recall.” Lee Sheldon, “And Then There Were None,” ed. by Agatha Christie Adventure Games (The Adventure Company, 2005).

¹⁶⁷ Light, *Forever England*, 99.

¹⁶⁸ Peter Leese discusses the perception of a shell-shocked WWI soldier as a “wretched figure, no better off than a blinded or paralysed veteran begging on a street corner,” who suffered from ostracisation through the 1920s and 1930s and is, in modern society, synonymous of mass

readership.¹⁶⁹ In this respect, the new editions have come full circle – returning to WWI imagery at a time when its trauma can once again be freely discussed, without the prior fear of wounding sensibilities.¹⁷⁰

While referring to the ten stranded murderers as “soldiers” might add an unwelcome suggestion of bravery, fine moral compass and heroism, it can also be read as a way to paint the characters as hag-ridden outcasts burdened with a dark past – while the inclusion of “boys” drives the potential heroic angle down, suggesting inherent immaturity and vulnerability.

Lastly, calling the characters “Soldier Boys” offers a strong motivic link to the surname of their killer, Justice Wargrave. This connection, wholly absent from the original text, stresses the fatefulness of Wargrave’s mission on Soldier Island – his nine companions (and, in the novel, Isaac Morris) have been carefully chosen as *his own* playthings and convicts,¹⁷¹ he himself driving them to their early grave, just as the war had done to many a soldier two decades before.

2.1.2 Mr Owen in the woodpile

This progression towards a greater racial sensibility, from “Nigger Boys” to “Indian Boys” and, finally, “Soldier Boys,” does not only concern the titles and the nursery rhymes, but also applies to the text itself. The original novel, specifically, included several passages whose revision required a creative approach.¹⁷²

In the first UK editions of the book, the ten characters are summoned to Nigger Island, which is so named for “its resemblance to a man’s head – a man

trauma. Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 3–6.

¹⁶⁹ Leese notes that from the 1990s onward, “shell shock has become a mirror on the past reflecting back issues of contemporary concern.” He observes a “post-1989 revival of interest in shell shock as a metonymic symbol of the war.” Leese, *Shell Shock*, 161, 172.

¹⁷⁰ “The associations and implications of the term ‘shell shock’ have continued to change, especially during the revival of interest in the Great War after 1989. It was only after 1986, when the Ministry of Defence recognized post-traumatic stress disorder as a legitimate medical condition [...], that a wider public debate became possible.” Leese, *Shell Shock*, 160.

¹⁷¹ See section 2.5.11 Lawrence Wargrave: the judge.

¹⁷² In the play, the word “Nigger” has simply been substituted for “Indian” or “Soldier.” Contrary to the novel (see below), the expression “nigger in the woodpile” made only one appearance, and was replaced with “a bogus little Indian Boy.” Agatha Christie, “And Then There Were None,” in *Appointment with Death and Other Plays* (London: Planet Three Publishing, 2002), 178.

with negroid lips.”¹⁷³ In later editions, the island becomes Indian Island, reminiscent of “an American Indian profile,”¹⁷⁴ a similar, if more vague, racially stereotypical image. Finally, the island was renamed to Soldier Island, which lacks this description entirely.¹⁷⁵ Since the place is otherwise described very concisely, a fair amount of its identity is lost with this omission.¹⁷⁶

Once on the island, Justice Wargrave sums up his feeling of unease by thinking “Nigger Island, eh? There’s a nigger in the woodpile.”¹⁷⁷ Two deaths later, Philip Lombard compares Mr Owen, the missing host and probable murderer, to “another kind of nigger. The Nigger in the Woodpile! [...] One Unknown Lunatic at Large!”¹⁷⁸

The comparison to a “nigger in the woodpile” works well here, as the characters have, by this point, started realizing their role as “niggers” (synonymous here with involuntary outcasts), but wish to set themselves apart from “Mr Owen” – an even more nefarious individual who must be lurking somewhere in a cave or a secret chamber and is, in fact, the actual crook and madman.

This assumption quickly turns out to be wrong,¹⁷⁹ but seems reasonable as a temporary coping mechanism.

In contrast, the first updated edition falls somewhat short, as these passages have remained utterly unchanged. This makes for a much less coherent comment on Wargrave’s part: “Indian Island, eh? There’s a nigger in the woodpile.”¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Lombard and Armstrong first discuss themselves as Indians in the poem, and then Mr Owen as a “Nigger in the Woodpile,”¹⁸¹ with no apparent connection between the two.

The newest version of the novel loses this double use of the same idiom but offers working alternatives. Wargrave simply thinks: “Soldier Island, eh? There’s a fly in the ointment.”¹⁸² Lombard’s subsequent comparison of Mr Owen

¹⁷³ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers* (novel, 1968), 14.

¹⁷⁴ Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None* (London: Planet Three Publishing, 2001), 13.

¹⁷⁵ Agatha Christie, *And Then There Were None* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), 26.

¹⁷⁶ See section 2.3 Setting.

¹⁷⁷ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers* (novel, 1968), 27.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁸⁰ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel, 2001), 27.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁸² Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel, 2003), 49.

to “another kind of soldier. The Unknown Soldier!”¹⁸³ maintains the link between the Soldier Boys and Owen and taps into the same fear of the unknown as the original edition. In hindsight, this is in fact a most accurate description, as the true killer is Wargrave, whose very name is evocative of a Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and who strikes a much more respectable figure than a covert “nigger in the woodpile.”

The last relevant passage concerns a discussion about the twenty-one African men that Philip Lombard abandoned in the jungle. When Emily Brent reprimands Vera Claythorne for her lack of regard for the natives, as “Black or white, they are our brothers,” Vera in turn thinks: “Our black brothers – our black brothers. Oh, I’m going to laugh. I’m hysterical. I’m not myself...”¹⁸⁴ Her agitation here clearly stems from the omnipresent “Nigger” theme¹⁸⁵ – the name of the island, the rhyme and the china figurines on the table. These lines have not been omitted or in any way changed in either of the later editions,¹⁸⁶ presumably for want of any suitable alternative.

In spite of the numerous revisions, Allmendinger points out that “the specter of race continues to haunt Christie’s novel.”¹⁸⁷ The characters’ racist attitudes will be further discussed in section 2.5 Characters.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 130.

¹⁸⁴ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers* (novel, 1968), 71.

¹⁸⁵ Allmendinger, “The Erasure of Race,” 61.

¹⁸⁶ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel, 2001), 69. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel, 2003), 122.

¹⁸⁷ Allmendinger, “The Erasure of Race,” 61.

2.2 Narrative

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon sums up the translation of a literary work into a dramatic medium thus: “In the move from telling to showing, a performance adaptation must dramatize: description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images.”¹⁸⁸ Additionally, the source material has to be simplified.^{189, 190}

Much of the novel *And Then There Were None* has, by necessity, indeed been changed, unified or altogether left out of the stage adaptation. This chapter discusses the solutions employed, throwing light on the main differences as well as on the communalities in some of the seemingly divergent passages of the novel and the play.

2.2.1 Structure

The novel is divided into sixteen chapters, focused on the ten main characters of the story – their backstories, their arrival on the island, their past misdeeds and all their respective demises over the course of four days.¹⁹¹ This is followed by an epilogue, where the police, some days later, unsuccessfully ponder the inexplicable mystery of the missing killer: “‘But in that case,’ [the Assistant Commissioner at Scotland Yard] said, ‘*who killed them?*’”¹⁹² The novel ends with the copy of a manuscript containing the killer’s confession, sent to Scotland Yard by a sailor after an undisclosed amount of time.¹⁹³

The structure of the play is simpler, comprising five total scenes within three acts. Contrary to the source material, it fairly respects the classical unities of place and time¹⁹⁴ – the action is condensed into one and a half days and,

¹⁸⁸ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 40.

¹⁸⁹ “[A] novel, in order to be dramatized, has to be distilled, reduced in size, and thus, inevitably, complexity. [...] [Yet] when plots are condensed and concentrated, they can sometimes become more powerful.” *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁹⁰ This was, indeed, a technique stressed and commonly employed by Christie when adapting detective novels into plays. See footnote 150.

¹⁹¹ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 5–168.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 169–177.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 178–187.

¹⁹⁴ “The so-called Aristotelian three unities – so-called because they are inaccurately derived from Aristotle’s *Poetics* – supposedly require a play to be consistent in time, place, and action. Unity of time means that a play’s action happens in twenty-four hours or less; unity of place holds the action to a single locale, such as one room; and unity of action (the unity suggested by

in the tradition of the murder-house mystery genre,¹⁹⁵ is confined to the living room and terrace of the house on Indian Island.¹⁹⁶ This has meant some alterations to the beginning and end of the story, as well as some changes to the pacing in the middle section.

2.2.2 Plot

The opening chapter of the novel consists of eight vignettes written in free indirect speech, relaying the thoughts of the characters converging to Indian Island.¹⁹⁷ As noted by Hesse, this was a narrative technique previously unseen in detective fiction, admired by some¹⁹⁸ but thought a trifle doubtful by others.¹⁹⁹

The chapter makes for an efficient introduction of all main characters (but for the servants, Mr and Mrs Rogers), ostensibly in no particular order. However, the killer and final survivor, Judge Wargrave, is displayed prominently, and the first sentence of the novel serves as foreshadowing of the last one.²⁰⁰

Similarly, in the play, the curtain both rises and falls to the sound of the motorboat hooter, signaling, respectively, the arrival of guests and the arrival of long-awaited rescue.²⁰¹ In terms of characters, the attention is centered on Mr and Mrs Rogers and the boatman Narracott, in a conventional opening scene²⁰² of servants putting final touches to the room and supplying context about the guests.²⁰³

Aristotle) requires the play to dramatize only one central story or action [...].” Louis E. Catron, *The Elements of Playwriting* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2002), 30.

¹⁹⁵ LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 43–44.

¹⁹⁶ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 117.

¹⁹⁷ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 5–14.

¹⁹⁸ “This technique was recognized as something new in the field of detective fiction, as the reviewer of the *New Statesman* pointed out: ‘Mrs Christie even allows us to know what every character present is thinking – and still we can’t guess!’” Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 202.

¹⁹⁹ The very first Commandment by Ronald Knox reads: “The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.” However, the writer immediately includes an addendum: “The second half of the rule is more difficult to state precisely, especially in view of some remarkable performances by Mrs. Christie. It would be more exact to say that the author must not imply an attitude of mystification in the character who turns out to be the criminal.” Knox, “A Detective Story Decalogue,” 194.

²⁰⁰ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 5, 187.

²⁰¹ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 119–121, 205.

²⁰² Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 203. LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 49.

²⁰³ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 119–121.

The play goes on to mirror the novel, first introducing the two final survivors, Vera Claythorne and Philip Lombard, and immediately establishing their likeability and chemistry: “LOMBARD: I think we [are both going to enjoy ourselves]. (*Holding up drink*) Here’s to you – you’re very lovely.”²⁰⁴ Their romantic entanglement constitutes an addition, again conforming with the conventions of the crime play of the day.²⁰⁵

The remainder of the first half of the first act is devoted to the arrival of the rest of the guests – the younger ones, as a rule, clambering up the steep climb faster than the elderly.²⁰⁶ LaBorde praises this segment for the brief and varied methods of characterization employed in the introduction of each character, a refreshing alternative to the standard, cumbersome method of exposition in the murder-house mystery genre.²⁰⁷

The novel’s feeling of inadequacy at the mention of the mysterious hosts is briefly summed up in the narrator’s voice: “It was as though the mention of their host and hostess had a curiously paralysing effect upon the guests.”²⁰⁸ This is translated to the stage in the form of monotonous repetitions under a cadence of normalcy and outpoured drinks.²⁰⁹ As Vera and Lombard are repeatedly mistaken for the missing hosts, they duly assume these roles and even flirt to that effect.²¹⁰ In view of the revelation that Mr and Mrs Owen are monikers of the “unknown” killer, the scene takes on a macabre, Gothic quality.^{211, 212}

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 121–123.

²⁰⁵ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 204.

²⁰⁶ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 119–137.

²⁰⁷ “The standard procedure of providing all pertinent details as each guest arrives forces the playwright into dull repetition; however, the technique of [*And Then There Were None*], which employs numerous ways of introducing the details of characterization, offers a refreshing variety.” LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 49.

²⁰⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 19.

²⁰⁹ The following exchange, with some degree of variation, is repeated with each guest: “MARSTON: Wizard place you’ve got here. (*Prepares to greet VERA as his hostess. LOMBARD stands beside her like a host.*) VERA: (*Shakes hands*) I’m Mrs. Owen’s secretary. Mrs. Owen has been detained in London, I’m afraid, and won’t be down until tomorrow. [...] LOMBARD: Have a drink? [...] Say when!” Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 124.

²¹⁰ “LOMBARD: (*Sitting beside VERA on sofa*) Good evening, Mrs. Owen. [...] You’d make the most attractive wife for any wealthy businessman.” *Ibid.*, 136.

²¹¹ Other Gothic elements in the play include unwitting references to the rhyme: Vera says that Lombard has “overslept himself,” an exact quotation of the second verse of the rhyme, and that Judge Wargrave is sitting on the terrace “in the sun,” in an allusion to the penultimate verse of the rhyme. Blore and Vera also correctly miscount corpses lying in the next room, since the Judge’s “body” is in fact alive. *Ibid.*, 159, 166, 171, 194.

²¹² In the novel, Emily Brent indulges in a spot of automatic writing, spelling out the name of her past victim, and Vera entertains the possibility that justice is being administered by “judges not from this world.” Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 108–109, 159.

The abnormally long exposition in murder-house mystery plays strives to flesh out all of the many characters before carnage ensues.²¹³ Thus, the first murder typically only occurs at the very end of the first act.^{214, 215} In the case of *And Then There Were None*, this is not contrary to the spirit of the novel, where Marston dies at the end of Chapter Four out of the total sixteen.²¹⁶

The middle section of both works consists of a string of accusations by gramophone record, followed by a succession of quick deaths,²¹⁷ while the victims try, and mostly fail, to come to grips with the situation.

Where the novel explores the character's hopes and fears via their thoughts in privacy, the stage adaptation often opts for the performative act of speaking to the room. Thus, we witness Miss Brent reading the Bible out loud in the living room, instead of in the quiet of her bedroom before dinner²¹⁸ – wholly undeterred by the fact that nobody cares to listen: “‘The wicked shall be turned into hell.’ (*Turns head sharply*) Be quiet.”²¹⁹

A similar shift in immediacy concerns the time plain: haunting thoughts of the past tend to be brought to the present in a more tangible form. In the novel, the General softly calls out his dead wife's name to the sea: “General Macarthur looked out to sea again. He seemed unconscious of [Vera's] presence behind him. He said very gently and softly: ‘Leslie...?’”²²⁰ The stage adaptation has him mistake his wife for Vera and proclaim that she is alive and on the island: “MACKENZIE: Forgive me. I took you for my wife. [...] VERA: But I thought your wife was dead – long ago. MACKENZIE: Yes. I thought so, too. But I was wrong. She's here. On this island.”²²¹

Besides stirring up feelings of fear and suspense, the play's tone can also be light-hearted, even bordering on the farcical. The game-like nature of the whole

²¹³ LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 86.

²¹⁴ “Ordinarily the playwright devotes the entirety of the first act of a murder-house mystery to exposition. Despite the rapid insertion of the murder theme, the act moves rather slowly before it culminates in an initial on-stage murder.” Ibid., 51.

²¹⁵ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 153–154.

²¹⁶ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 47–48.

²¹⁷ LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 86.

²¹⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 28.

²¹⁹ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 171.

²²⁰ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 81.

²²¹ “Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 158–159.

murder-house premise²²² and the “playful quality of plot mechanics” are, naturally, present in the novel, but their absurdity gets amplified in the adaptation.²²³ This is, perhaps, at its most visible in the public confessions peppered throughout the play which, very conveniently and almost invariably, function as the characters’ last words.²²⁴ These shameless admissions of guilt are often prompted by another character, who has no trouble remembering the victim’s full name from one mere mention on the gramophone record.²²⁵ Thus, such scenes require a certain amount of suspension of disbelief from the audience.

For added gravitas, the discovery of someone’s demise often marks the ending of a chapter²²⁶ or scene;²²⁷ Marston’s death (the first murder) and Wargrave’s death (the faked murder) are given prominent spots in the structure of both works. Alternatively, some chapters and scenes end in devastating realizations: another Indian Boy figurine has disappeared,²²⁸ the island is utterly deserted,²²⁹ “Mr Owen is one of us!”,²³⁰ the missing revolver cannot be found.²³¹

Perhaps the main difference lies in the pacing of the murders, as pertaining to the intradiegetic timeframe of the works. In the novel, gradation is continuous, as the deaths are eerily symmetrical to the number of days spent on the island: on Day One, only one person dies; on Day Four, the four final deaths occur.²³²

²²² LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 76–77.

²²³ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 204.

²²⁴ As Hesse observes: “Whenever a character feels the sudden urge to own up to his or her crime, the spectator may be sure that (s)he will be killed soon.” *Ibid.*, 203.

²²⁵ “VERA: (*Coldly angry*) What about – Beatrice Taylor? EMILY: Who? VERA: That was the name, wasn’t it? (*Looks at her challengingly.*) EMILY: You are referring to that absurd accusation about myself? [...] Now that we are alone, I have no objection to telling you the facts of the case.” Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 169–170.

²²⁶ In the novel, Marston dies at the end of Chapter Four, Judge Wargrave fakes his death at the end of Chapter Thirteen, Armstrong’s body is discovered at the end of Chapter Fifteen, and Vera Claythorne hangs herself at the end of Chapter Sixteen. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 47, 139, 162, 168.

²²⁷ In the play, Marston dies at the end of Act One, Emily Brent at the end of Act Two, Judge Wargrave is presumed dead at the end of Scene One of Act Three and truly killed at the end of Scene Two of Act Three. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 153–154, 182, 192, 204.

²²⁸ At the end of Chapter Six and Chapter Fourteen. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 66, 151.

²²⁹ At the end of Chapter Eight. *Ibid.*, 85.

²³⁰ At the end of Scene One of Act Two. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 173.

²³¹ At the end of Chapter Twelve. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 130.

²³² If, like the characters in the story, counting the Judge’s arranged death as real. *Ibid.*, 47, 141–168.

Meanwhile in the play, due its long exposition and tighter timeframe, Marston is killed on Day One, and the remaining deaths are evenly distributed between the last two days and acts.²³³ Tension builds up predominantly in the climax, leading to the culmination of three deaths in the span of three pages, in the morning of Day Three.²³⁴

It is in the finale that the novel and play are the most divergent.

The climax of the novel is straightforward, with no shift in tone or subversion of the reader's expectations. The premise of ten people lured to the island to die, as governed by the "Ten Little Indians" nursery rhyme, is carried out right to the fatalistic end: "He went and hanged himself, and then there were None."²³⁵ Ensur two postscripts: the epilogue, where the flabbergasted police sum up the unsolvable mystery, and the message in the bottle which reveals the murderer's identity and, in the very technical fashion of the GAD, clears said mystery up.²³⁶

The play dispenses with much of the mechanics of the murderer's plan and omits the element of an "insoluble mystery." In a fashion typical for the murder-house mystery genre, the villain unmask himself in his final monologue to his final victim.²³⁷ Although Wargrave's speech is 373 words long,²³⁸ compared to the novel, it reveals only a modicum of information: a brief account of each of the deaths, the Judge's own "death" made possible with the help of the doctor, and his insanity which has warped his sense of justice.²³⁹

This, however, is where the simplification ends. The play, arguably more upbeat throughout, concludes with a happy ending for the two young leads. To this end, the *dénouement* subverts expectations both in terms of the characters'

²³³ A total of four people die on Day Two and three characters (including the unmasked Judge) are killed in the morning of Day Three. LaBorde, "Form and Formula in Detective Drama," 252–253.

²³⁴ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 199–202.

²³⁵ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 167–168.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 169–187.

²³⁷ LaBorde, "Form and Formula in Detective Drama," 64–66.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

²³⁹ "WARGRAVE: So you didn't drown that boy after all? Very interesting. But it doesn't matter much now, does it? [...] I can't spoil my lovely rhyme." Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 202–204.

established guilt and the outcome of the rhyme: Vera and Lombard are revealed innocent of their past crimes,²⁴⁰ and the Judge's plan gets thwarted by Lombard's own timely resurrection.²⁴¹ The spectators' fear, suspense and bafflement gives way to relief, and with the reversal of the rhyme's final verse and the symbolic transformation of Vera's noose into a marital vow,²⁴² the tonal shift is complete.²⁴³

The ending of the play does, again, conform to the tradition of the murder-house mystery. Lacking characters who could successfully deduce it, the murderer himself reveals the solution to his crime, in a turnaround which is explained by his mental imbalance.²⁴⁴ In the end, however, black-and-white morality prevails – the heroism of the protagonists²⁴⁵ is rewarded with survival and love, while the crimes and offenses of other characters are punished by death.²⁴⁶

Tying the play's ending back to the novel, Hesse posits that the survival of Vera and Lombard is the theatrical equivalent of the message in a bottle – a time-honored device of “somebody left to tell the tale” to the audience.²⁴⁷ Both the novel and the play are thus indebted to the 19th and 20th century tradition, making use of old and new narrative devices while embodying many tenets of GAD writing and of the murder-house mystery crime play.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 200–202.

²⁴¹ “VERA: I thought you were dead. I thought I'd killed you. LOMBARD: Thank God, women can't shoot straight. At least, not straight enough.” Ibid., 205.

²⁴² She and Lombard literally become yoked together: “LOMBARD: You know there's another ending to that Ten Little Indian rhyme: 'One little Indian boy left all alone, We got married – and then there were none!' (*Takes rope and puts his head in noose too. He kisses her.*)” Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 204–205.

²⁴³ LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 86–87.

²⁴⁴ “At some point in the script, the author decides to have the murderer reveal himself, although the villain has gone to great lengths until then to conceal his identity.” Ibid., 64–65, 95–96.

²⁴⁵ Both Vera and Lombard in fact tried to save their would-be victims, but failed. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 200–202.

²⁴⁶ LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 97–98.

²⁴⁷ “In her autobiography [Christie] wrote that [full-scale death in the play] would have been impossible, because no one would be left to tell the tale.’ [...] Christie evidently does not intend her audience to pretend that they are actually watching the events as they unfold, but that they are watching a reenactment of a sequence of events that actually did occur earlier in history.” Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 203.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 203–204.

2.3 Setting

In keeping with the tradition of the Golden Age, most of the *And Then There Were None* novel is set in a confined environment: after a brief journey on the train, car and boat, the characters reach their final destination, Indian Island.²⁴⁹ The murder-house mystery play goes even further and confines the plot to one unique locale:²⁵⁰ “the living room of the house on Indian Island, off the coast of Devon.”²⁵¹

While the play is understandably fairly mum on the subject of Indian Island,²⁵² the novel, too, features little in the way of physical description.²⁵³ Blore recalls it from memory as a “[s]melly sort of rock covered with gulls – stood about a mile from the coast.”²⁵⁴ We further learn that while the south side with the house “shelv[es] gently down to the sea,” only the “boldly silhouetted rock with its faint resemblance to a giant Indian’s head,” which gave the island its name, is visible from the shore.²⁵⁵

Most of the island’s characterization rests on its double character: the discrepancy between the characters’ preconceived, romanticized idea of the place, and the grim reality of their actual stay. As Allmendinger puts it: “While [adventure novels read by Judge Wargrave in his youth] feature people stranded on a deserted island, who gradually transform their new world into a self-sustaining society, Christie’s novel does the opposite, chronicling the extermination of civilization.”²⁵⁶

Chapter One paints each of the characters’ excitement at going away to an island, viewed as an exotic summer retreat, and more specifically Indian

²⁴⁹ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 5–21.

²⁵⁰ LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 43–44.

²⁵¹ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 117.

²⁵² Characters do move about the island and it is duly searched for the “hidden” Mr Owen, but other than a stranding device, it is not very relevant for the plot of the play. In a telling scene in Act One, Mrs Rogers (and, by extension, the audience) has to be reminded of the fact that she is on an island, and therefore cannot leave. *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁵³ Brittain Bright observes that Christie “suited herself by constructing virtually the whole novel in dialogue or internal monologue,” leaving little room for detailed description. Brittain Bright, “Writing through War: Narrative Structure and Authority in Christie’s Second World War Novels,” in *Agatha Christie Goes to War*, eds. Rebecca Mills and J. C. Bernthal (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 50.

²⁵⁴ This description seems highly inaccurate, as neither gulls nor smells come up again at any point of the novel. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 13.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 18, 21.

²⁵⁶ Allmendinger, “The Erasure of Race,” 63.

Island, with its glamorous reputation and promise of every mortal luxury.²⁵⁷ For most, the island means either fun,²⁵⁸ rest²⁵⁹ or easy money.²⁶⁰ It is only after seeing the island for the first time that it starts to appear a “sinister,” “damned odd sort of place.”²⁶¹ In a highly symbolic scene, Vera “shivers faintly” upon glimpsing the head-shaped rock²⁶² – as if the true nature of the island was seeping through its facial features, written into its very topography.

If Indian Island subverts the expectations of the characters, the house built upon it also plays with the expectations of the avid consumer of the genre. To wit: instead of an “old house, with creaking wood, and dark shadows, and heavily panelled walls,”²⁶³ which would have been the traditional way to “reflect ideas of dark heritage” in detective fiction,²⁶⁴ the scene is set in a house that exudes an aesthetic of lack.

Both in the novel and the play, the setting largely abides by the Chekhov’s gun principle: every element of the setting and décor which is not highly conventional (i.e. the fireplace) comes into play later in the story.²⁶⁵ In the play, the various chairs and tabourets²⁶⁶ are, at some point, all used for seating; the framed “Ten Little Indians” nursery rhyme and china figurines²⁶⁷ lie at the heart of the mystery in both versions of the story; the vanishing scarlet oilsilk curtain is used to dress up the judge.²⁶⁸ An addition to the stage adaptation is the bearskin rug, which, while irrelevant for the story itself,

²⁵⁷ “Indian Island! Why, there had been nothing else in the papers lately! All sorts of hints and interesting rumours. Though probably they were mostly untrue. But the house had certainly been built by a millionaire and was said to be absolutely the last word in luxury.” Ibid., 6–7.

²⁵⁸ “[Lombard] fancied that he was going to enjoy himself at Indian Island...” Ibid., 8.

²⁵⁹ “Emily Brent thought to herself: ‘I shall be getting a free holiday at any rate.’” Ibid., 10.

²⁶⁰ “The letter [Dr Armstrong] had received had been rather vague in its terms, but there was nothing vague about the accompanying cheque. A whacking fee. These Owens must be rolling in money.” Ibid, 11.

²⁶¹ A sentiment expressed by Vera Claythorne and General Macarthur, respectively. Ibid., 18, 21.

²⁶² Ibid., 18.

²⁶³ Ibid., 50.

²⁶⁴ Rebecca Mills, “England’s Pockets: Objects of Anxiety in Christie’s Post-War Novels,” in *The Ageless Agatha Christie: Essays on the Mysteries and the Legacy*, ed. J. C. Bernthal (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2001), 29–44.

²⁶⁵ Peter M. Bitsilli, *Chekhov’s Art: A Stylistic Analysis*, trans. Toby W. Clyman and Edwina Jannie Cruise (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1983), x.

²⁶⁶ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 119.

²⁶⁷ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 24, 29. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 119.

²⁶⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 109, 138. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 177, 192.

provides some comic relief²⁶⁹ and a motivic link to the marble clock shaped like a bear which ultimately kills Blore.²⁷⁰

Furthermore, in the play, the stage directions specify that the room is “barely” furnished and, in the opening scene, Narracott the boatman remarks upon “rich folks [liking] places bare.”²⁷¹ The room and house are, however, subsequently allowed to come to life, with the play’s natural emphasis on the characters’ movements²⁷² and a romantic backstory added in to underscore the nascent attraction between Vera and Lombard: “LOMBARD: Old Johnny Brewer, a pal of mine, built this house – it’s a sad and poignant story. [...] He was a wealthy old boy and fell in love with the famous Lily Logan – married her – bought the island and built this place for her. VERA: Sounds most romantic.”²⁷³

At first, the novel is less explicit in its descriptions of the barren house, focusing mostly on the overall resplendent luxury and shiny modernity.²⁷⁴ Coupled with the excellent service of Mr and Mrs Rogers, this aspect of the house momentarily dispels the guests’ initial misgivings: “The whole party had dined well. They were satisfied with themselves and with life. [...] There was a silence – a comfortable replete silence.”²⁷⁵

This brief respite following the first supper is promptly put paid to by an “inhuman, penetrating” Voice,²⁷⁶ which reveals the true purpose of Indian Island. The island and the house become an involuntary purgatory, a place

²⁶⁹ “BLORE: ‘Three little Indian boys walking in the Zoo. A big bear hugged one and then there were two.’ (*He laughs*) He’ll have a job with that one. There’s no Zoo on this island! (*His laughter is cut short as he sees the big bear rug on which he is standing. He edges off the rug and turns to LOMBARD.*)” Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 198.

²⁷⁰ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 160. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 199.

²⁷¹ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 119–120.

²⁷² Interaction with space can also serve as a means of characterization. See section 2.5.4 John Macarthur: the general.

²⁷³ The story ends by Johnny getting jilted and having to sell the house, but is nevertheless much more lighthearted than the book’s simple statement of fact: “The unfortunate fact that the new third wife of the American millionaire [Elmer Robson] was a bad sailor had led to the subsequent putting up of the house and island for sale.” Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 122. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 5.

²⁷⁴ “A perfect bedroom decorated throughout in the modern style. Off-white rugs on the gleaming parquet floor – faintly tinted walls – a long mirror surrounded by lights. A mantelpiece bare of ornaments save for an enormous block of white marble shaped like a bear, a piece of modern sculpture in which was inset a clock. Over it, in a gleaming chromium frame, was a big square of parchment – a poem.” Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 23–24.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

of no escape and no rest for the wicked, and the characters soon realize as much. The curious lack of atmosphere is thus allowed to come to the fore: “There was nothing hidden in this house, nothing concealed. It had no atmosphere about it. Somehow, that was the most frightening thing of all...”²⁷⁷

Rebecca Mills recognizes this absence of atmosphere and objects as a common element in Christie’s later writings, which serves to encapsulate the feeling of an anxious modernity, of “a hidden and dangerous self” and of “a negation of humanity.”²⁷⁸

Indeed, in the novel *And Then There Were None*, ten characters with a past are brought to a house with, seemingly, no past, and the truth suddenly has nowhere to hide. Like U. N. “Unknown” Owen²⁷⁹ and the “Ten Little Indians” nursery rhyme, the unnamed house and Indian Island are two sides of the same coin – one provides the vacuum needed for the fulfillment of the other. The house becomes the blank slate upon which the nursery rhyme is written in blood. In the play, this fateful dimension is somewhat weakened by the backstory and overall smaller role²⁸⁰ of Indian Island, and by a happy ending for the innocent.

In contrast, the weather in *And Then There Were None* certainly constitutes a highly conventional atmospheric element which has great bearing on the mood. The novel features a double use of pathetic fallacy: the storm breaks out “just as the old [General]’s body [is] borne in through the door,”²⁸¹ and as soon as it becomes a thing of the past, the spirits of the characters are lifted.²⁸² The stage adaptation copies this, making use of muted visual effects and various sound effects, including howling wind, off-stage shrieks and gull cries, to heighten the sense of suspense:²⁸³ “BLORE goes out;

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 50–51.

²⁷⁸ Mills, “England’s Pockets,” 29–44.

²⁷⁹ “Ulick Norman Owen – Una Nancy Owen – each time, that is to say, U. N. Owen. Or by a slight stretch of fancy, UNKNOWN!” Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 40.

²⁸⁰ In total, the words “Indian Island” only appear six times in the play. Two of these occurrences are part of the stage directions and two others constitute the letterheads in the character’s invitation letters. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 117, 119, 144–145, 157, 164.

²⁸¹ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 91.

²⁸² “Outside, the sun shone. It was a lovely day. The storm was a thing of the past. And with the change in the weather, a change had come in the mood of the prisoners on the island. They felt now like people just awakening from a nightmare.” Ibid., 152.

²⁸³ LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 105.

takes candle from bookcase. A pause. EVERYBODY watches door. A gust of wind – the curtains rattle."²⁸⁴

Like the rest of the setting, inclement weather also has a clear function within the plot. Besides serving as a further stranding device²⁸⁵ and the source of many frustrations, the success of Wargrave's plan hinges on the resultant noise and darkness – the wind, Vera's cries and flickering candlelight²⁸⁶ providing the perfect backdrop for his highly theatrically staged death.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 188.

²⁸⁵ LaBorde, "Form and Formula in Detective Drama," 43–44.

²⁸⁶ Wargrave sums up the scene in the Manuscript: "A little plaster of red mud on the forehead – the red curtain and the wool and the stage was set. The lights of the candles were very flickering and uncertain and the only person who would examine me closely was Armstrong. It worked perfectly." Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 184.

²⁸⁷ "The robes are a scarlet curtain and the wig is made from wool stolen from a female knitter; there is a certain second-ratedness about the travesty of the law. [...] [T]he judge is not dead, but has rigged up an appearance of death, made [all] the more convincing because of its strangeness; the baroque appearance of the body ensures that no one investigates it except for the doctor, who is in on the deceit." R. A. York, *Agatha Christie: Power and Illusion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11–12.

2.4 The times

The stage adaptation of *And Then There Were None* establishes the time of the narrative as “the present.”²⁸⁸ As shown in the first part of the thesis, although GAD writings were, on the surface level, removed from the geopolitical happenings of the day, Christie’s works readily interact with modernity and, in the pre-war and WWII era, often feature an undercurrent of fear and instability. In recent years, *And Then There Were None* has been explicitly classed as a war text.²⁸⁹

The gloom of the extradiegetic social climate manifests itself primarily through the gradual decline of the society on Indian Island²⁹⁰ – until, in the case of the novel, the nihilist ending or, in the case of the play, the murderer’s unhinged rejection of justice.

As Brittain Bright demonstrates, this slow unraveling is woven into the novel’s very narrative, where the usual authorial voice of the narrator is all but replaced by a heavy focus on dialogue and a direct insight into the minds of characters. As the story progresses, this leads to more and more scattered, confused points of view and almost a complete disintegration:²⁹¹ “*It’s crazy – everything’s crazy. I’m going crazy. Wool disappearing – red silk curtains – it doesn’t make sense. I can’t get the hang of it...*’ [...] ‘*Six of those little china figures... only six – how many will there be by tonight?*’ ‘Who’ll have the last egg?’ ‘Marmalade?’ ‘Thanks, can I give you some ham?’ Six people, behaving normally at breakfast...”²⁹²

A similar incoherence marking mental imbalance can be found in Wargrave’s final monologue in the play: “As between our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the Bar – will true deliverance make – Guilty, my Lord. Yes. (*Nods*

²⁸⁸ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 117.

²⁸⁹ “Several critics and scholars have highlighted *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe* and *And Then There Were None* as war texts, including Katherine A. Miller [...] and Brittain Bright [...]” J. C. Bernthal, “Christie and the Carnage of War,” In *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Agatha Christie*, eds. Mary Anna Evans and J. C. Bernthal (London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 183.

²⁹⁰ “[T]he island becomes an existential prison for representative members of the corrupt human race, a Darwinian environment containing an animalistic predator and its prey.” Allmendinger, “The Erasure of Race,” 62. Further analogies could be drawn with William Golding’s dystopia *Lord of the Flies* (1954).

²⁹¹ Bright, “Writing through War,” 50–52.

²⁹² Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 120–121.

head) Guilty. You were all guilty, you know, but the Law couldn't touch you, so I had to take the Law into my own hands."²⁹³

Moreover, the absence of a detective figure makes, in both versions of the story, for a very unsatisfying conclusion: the mystery of Indian Island has to be explained by the murderer himself,²⁹⁴ be it by manuscript or monologue. This refusal of authority presents an antithesis to the usual premise of the detective genre – “outwitting an evil villain [...] in order to return the chaotic world to its more peaceful status quo.”²⁹⁵

The war had also rekindled interest in exploring justice in both crime novels²⁹⁶ and plays.²⁹⁷ The very premise of *And Then There Were None* ostensibly belies the efficiency of the official legal apparatus. Yet in the novel's Manuscript, just after having executed a perjuring policeman and nine other people unpunishable by the law, Wargrave exhibits an almost touching faith in the system: “On at least two occasions I stopped cases where to my mind the accused was palpably innocent [...]. Thanks, however, to the fairness and efficiency of our police force, the majority of the accused persons who have come before me to be tried for murder, have been guilty.”²⁹⁸

This presents the reader with an interesting dilemma: if one sees the logic in Wargrave's mission on Indian Island, how can one still believe in the near infallibility of the system? It appears to be a paradox still waiting to be addressed, and reveals the unassuming way in which Christie leads a dialogue with the complexity of modernity.

²⁹³ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 203.

²⁹⁴ “The nihilism of *And Then There Were None* stands out, not only because everyone dies, but because the crime is unsolved. The letter that concludes the novel is profoundly unsatisfying, not least because it undermines the reader's faith in the detective form.” Bright, “Writing through War,” 53.

²⁹⁵ Kristine A. Miller, *British Literature of the Blitz: Fighting the People's War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 117.

²⁹⁶ “[T]he idea of reckoning justice and the theme of unsustainable social norms and structures that permit injustice and are ultimately doomed to some form of destruction were highly topical. After all, when *And Then There Were None* was published, Britain was heading straight into war [...]” Bernthal, “Christie and the Carnage of War,” 182–183.

²⁹⁷ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 38–39.

²⁹⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 178–179.

2.5 Characters

In terms of characters, Christie is a writer known for having her types: the boring colonel, the simple rural clergyman,²⁹⁹ the young war hero unfit for peacetime.³⁰⁰ Similar typified characterization – the comic servant, the young lovers, the romantic foil – can be found in the murder-house mystery play.³⁰¹ Many scholars argue for the advantages of such conventionality, as it allows for universal,³⁰² consistent³⁰³ characters.

And Then There Were None both fulfills and subverts some of the above stereotypes. While each of the ten main characters can be, and often is,³⁰⁴ summed up in one simple word (“cook,” “spinster,” “playboy”), most of them transcend this simplification. From the first, the reader of the novel can access the characters’ very thoughts,³⁰⁵ while the play primarily fleshes out the players as the plot progresses: after the gramophone revelation of their past crimes, the characters’ reactions to the accusations and to the mounting pressure reveal much of their moral and mental makeup.³⁰⁶ The play is also somewhat blunter in its characterization, dispensing with the characters’ natural reticence³⁰⁷ and endowing many of them with an exaggerated trait.³⁰⁸

²⁹⁹ Barnard, *A Talent to Deceive*, 122–123.

³⁰⁰ Paula Bowles, “Christie’s Wartime Hero: Peacetime Killer,” in *Agatha Christie Goes to War*, eds. Rebecca Mills and J. C. Bernthal (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 36–37.

³⁰¹ LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 88–92.

³⁰² “[T]he interesting thing about Agatha Christie is not only that she uses stereotypes for most or all of her suspects, but that her stereotypes are not even particularly vivid. There is a sort of general ‘feel’ about her characters [...] And it is the fact that she is not aiming at particularity, that her scene painting and characterization are marked by generality rather than vividness, that is her strength rather than her weakness, precisely this that gives her her universality. Her books are like a child’s colouring-book, where the basic shape of the picture is provided, and the child fills in the details and decides on the colours himself.” Barnard, *A Talent to Deceive*, 122–123.

³⁰³ “The use of types makes it considerably easier for an author to create characters that are congruent with those suitable Aristotelian qualities of being good, appropriate, consistent, and like. The term ‘good’ can mean having a moral purpose, but it may also refer to a character’s having a dramatic function and fulfilling that function. The typed personages in murder-house mysteries all have fairly standardized functions.” LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 92.

³⁰⁴ Bernthal, “Christie and the Carnage of War,” 182. Kabatchnik, *Blood on the Stage, 1925–1950*, 648–649. LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 252.

³⁰⁵ See sections 2.2 Narrative and 2.4 The times.

³⁰⁶ LaBorde, “Form and Formula in Detective Drama,” 91.

³⁰⁷ In the novel, most characters own up to their crimes privately or not at all. The play, meanwhile, features shameless public confessions of all characters. See section 2.2.2 Plot.

³⁰⁸ Among other things, adding in Blore’s food obsession and amplifying Brent’s bigotry and Lombard’s joking. Several characters also receive a catch phrase. See the respective vignettes.

Furthermore, *And Then There Were None* breaks with the conventional quartet of the detective genre, all but erasing the lines between victim, suspect, sleuth and murderer. As observed by Maida and Spornick: “All the players change positions so that [ten] individuals play three distinct roles: victim, suspect and sleuth. One of the [ten] also plays a fourth role, that of murderer.”³⁰⁹ As further analyzed below,³¹⁰ Judge Wargrave is the only one to assume both the role of the Great Detective and of the “Great Murderer.”

Despite these unorthodox traits, *And Then There Were None* remains a product of its time,³¹¹ with its inherent classism, racial prejudices and gender stereotypes. Compared to the novel, the play somewhat improves on the first two but falls short in the feminist department – largely, but not only, owing to its ending.

While both works are uncommonly heterogenous³¹² in their portrayal of class – ranging from a young Aristocrat to cook and butler –, the servants, Mr and Mrs Rogers, enjoy little stage time, and even less page time. Compared to the rest of the characters, they remain undeveloped.

Racial prejudices are mainly present in the novel, be it in the prominent role of Indian Island³¹³ with its resemblance to “an American Indian profile,” or Philip Lombard’s comment targeting the “Semitic lips” of Isaac Morris, a Jew who is absent from the play.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Taking into account their past, the role of the murderer could apply to the previous nine as well. Patricia D. Maida and Nicholas B. Spornick, *Murder She Wrote* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1982), 81.

³¹⁰ See section 2.5.11 Wargrave.

³¹¹ “Each of Christie’s plays is firmly set in its own time [...]. Although the moral dilemmas faced by the characters and their guilt, obsession, love and jealousy are timeless, their behaviour and interactions are very much a function of the social mores of the time in which each play is set, and modern communications technology would severely compromise elements of the plotting.” Green, *Curtain Up*, 6–7.

³¹² GAD writings often feature characters with similar social backgrounds. Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 37.

³¹³ See section 2.3 Setting.

³¹⁴ Wargrave explains in his Manuscript that Morris, a crook and dope pedlar, served as the tenth Indian Boy, having been responsible for the addiction and suicide of a young woman. Wargrave gave him spiked medicine after Morris arranged the purchase of Indian Island and all accompanying necessities. Upon meeting the man before coming to the island, Lombard describes “a very faint smile on the thick Semitic lips of Mr Morris.” Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 8, 181–182.

Most of the colonialist aspects of the novel, however, survived the translation to the stage. Both Judge Wargrave and Philip Lombard attribute lesser worth to the life of native Africans. Philip Lombard gets his comeuppance from the Judge for murdering a total of twenty-one African men, while the rest of the characters are on trial for murdering one white person each.³¹⁵ When confronted, Lombard dismisses the men's death as a matter of self-preservation and proclaims: "Natives don't mind dying, you know. They don't feel about it as Europeans do."³¹⁶ In the novel, this view is subsequently also shared by Vera Claythorne: "They were only natives..."³¹⁷

In general, the novel is fairly light on sexist attitudes.³¹⁸ One of the few examples comes early in the story, when the three fit men, Lombard, Blore and Armstrong, form an alliance, discussing their suspicions while excluding the others. Before going to search the island, Lombard's reasoning for not involving the others is based on class (he wholly ignores Mr and Mrs Rogers), traits of the two men, and gender: "Better not tell the women. As for the others, the General's ga-ga, I think, and old Wargrave's forte is masterly inactivity. The three of us can attend to this job."³¹⁹ The women are, however, included in all later discussions and searches.

In the play, a different handling of male and female characters mostly comes through where drinking is concerned.³²⁰ At some point in the play, all three women display a teetotalist attitude and violently condemn alcohol.³²¹

³¹⁵ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 31. Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 137–138.

³¹⁶ Although in the play, Lombard turns out innocent of the crime against his men, he initially pretends to be guilty and utters this remark. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 43. Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 152.

³¹⁷ Allmendiger brings up all of these points, attributing some of the racism to Christie herself: "Vera Claythorne is appalled by Lombard's inhumanity. Later, however, when Emily Brent recalls Lombard's ghastly deed, Vera defends the Captain, claiming the black men 'were only natives.' Miss Brent retorts: 'Black or white, they are our brothers.' [...] Christie also causes the reader to question Miss Brent's assertion, having previously depicted the spinster as a religious fanatic. Yet if the author agrees with Miss Brent, why do twenty-one black people need to die in order to place Lombard in the same criminal category as the other characters, each of whom has murdered a single white individual?" Allmendiger, "The Erasure of Race," 61.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

³¹⁹ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 73–75.

³²⁰ The changed ending is discussed in section 2.5.10 Vera Claythorne: the governess.

³²¹ Mrs Rogers scoffs at the guests for "making that steep climb and excuse for a drink" before they even arrive, and continuously chides her husband for liking beer. Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 120, 133.

Meanwhile, all men except for the doctor consume alcohol freely, and even go so far as to drink to temperance and crime. The latter scenes contain a fair amount of irony and comic relief – it is Blore, a slave to his stomach,³²² who drinks to temperance, while Marston drinks to crime, immediately chokes and dies.³²³

Lastly, both works depict female characters in moments of extreme physical and mental frailty: Mrs Rogers faints upon hearing the gramophone record, and the usually cold-blooded Vera has a “fit of hysterics” and has to be slapped to come to her senses.³²⁴

Having described the generalities, we will now compare the novel and play version of each character, starting with Narracott the boatman and continuing with the main ten, arranged in order of death.

2.5.1 Fred Narracott: the boatman

As the local boatman in charge of catering and ferrying the guests to Indian Island, Fred Narracott is the only character common to the novel and the play who is an outsider to Wargrave’s killing scheme. In both versions of the story, however, it is implied that he advised to off to keep away from the island so that Wargrave could enact his plan.³²⁵

In the play, he strikes a fairly conventional figure, only appearing at the beginning of Act One for two brief interactions with Mr and Mrs Rogers. All members of the working class, they are united in their sociolect and disdain

Emily Brent is arguably a teetotaler in the novel as well, as she demands a glass of water when everyone else “needs a stimulant.” In the play, she openly admits to “never touch[ing] alcohol.” Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 36. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 127.

And while Vera Claythorne seems to bear alcohol no grudge and would have accepted a drink if not on duty, she also becomes extremely upset with Lombard: “A drink! Two corpses in the house at nine o’clock in the morning and all you say is ‘Have a drink!’ [...] Everything’s fine so long as you have a drink.” Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 123, 168–169.

³²² J. C. Bernthal, “‘When She Eats She Will Die’: Informal Meals and Social Change in Sad Cypress and ‘And Then There Were None,’” in *Agatha Christie Goes to War*, eds. Rebecca Mills and J. C. Bernthal (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 90.

³²³ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 125, 130, 153.

³²⁴ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 32, 115. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 138, 182.

³²⁵ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 77–78. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 164.

for the whims of the rich: “ROGERS: Looks nice, don’t it, Fred? NARRACOTT: Looks neat enough for me. Kind of bare, but rich folks like places bare, it seems. MRS. ROGERS: Rich folks is queer.”³²⁶

While his physical description is left out of the stage directions, the novel describes Narracott as a man of the sea with a weather-beaten face, evasive eyes and a soft Devon accent.³²⁷ This is in accordance with his slightly more important, and highly Charonian, role of the ferryman. In Chapter Two, he transports all the guests, whose thoughts the reader learned in the previous chapter,³²⁸ offering additional, this time external insight into their character: “One old maid – the sour kind – he knew them well enough. She was a tartar he could bet. Old military gentleman – real Army look about him. Nice-looking young lady – but the ordinary kind, not glamorous – no Hollywood touch about her. That bluff cheery gent – *he* wasn’t a real gentleman. [...]”³²⁹

Narracott’s astute summing up can be seen as the equivalent of the stage directions used to describe characters upon their first appearance in the play – as both supply information about all the guests except for Judge Wargrave.³³⁰

2.5.2 Anthony Marston: the young idler

In both versions of the story, Anthony Marston is described as a wealthy, handsome young man of precious little brains.

The play’s characterization is very blunt, the stage directions identifying him as a “*Good-looking young man of twenty-three or so. Rich, spoiled – not very intelligent.*”³³¹ His catchphrase, the adjective “Wizard!”, appears a total of seven times, mostly in very close succession: “MARSTON: Well, it’s a pretty wizard island. Rather a wizard girl, that secretary. She ought to liven things up a bit.

³²⁶ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 120.

³²⁷ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 19.

³²⁸ See section 2.2.2 Plot.

³²⁹ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 20–21.

³³⁰ This seems an odd decision, as the works otherwise make no secret of Wargrave being a shrewd old man. If, however, Narracott’s views and the stage directions are supposed to constitute a fairly objective account of reality, this omission might be attributable to Christie’s fear of “unfairly” misleading the reader and the audience. Ibid. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 127.

³³¹ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 124.

I say, old man, what about dressing for dinner if there's time? LOMBARD: Let's go and explore. MARSTON: Oh, wizard!"³³²

The novel conveys the same sentiment in a more round-about way: "Anthony Marston was in his bath. He luxuriated in the steaming water. Very few thoughts passed through his head. Anthony was a creature of sensation – and of action."³³³

As Marston is the first to die, most of his further characterization rests on his love for speedy cars, which also lies at the bottom of his invitation to Indian Island – having killed two children while speeding, readily admitting to it, but feeling more remorse for his loss of license than for the lives he had taken.³³⁴ In his Manuscript, Wargrave recognizes Marston's offense as rather commonplace, his innate callousness nevertheless making him "a type dangerous to the community and unfit to live."³³⁵

In the play, the recklessness of Marston's driving is amplified, with an upset Dr Armstrong directly confronting him: "ARMSTRONG: You nearly drove me into the ditch. MARSTON: (*Unmoved*) Did I? Sorry. [...] BLORE: (*To relieve atmosphere*) Oh, well, what about a drink?"³³⁶ Marston is further made unlikeable and dispensable to the audience through his romantic rivalry with Philip Lombard, the hero of the piece.³³⁷

Meanwhile, the novel portrays his handling of his car as both dangerous and magnificent. First passing Dr Armstrong who vents his frustration privately,³³⁸ Tony proceeds to the harbor where his descent leaves the others in awe:

³³² *Ibid.*, 128.

³³³ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 27.

³³⁴ Gill Plain discusses the depravity of Marston's character in depth, mainly in light of his predatory masculinity enhanced by the deadly modern sports car: "Marston is in thrall to mechanised modernity, announcing 'Speed's come to stay' before complaining that 'English roads are hopeless, of course. Can't get up a decent pace on them.' [...] Seeking an autoroute or, even better, an autobahn, his affiliation with modernity is deadly and fascistic. The book does not dwell on this pathology – Marston will be the first to die – but the brief snapshot of his solipsistic relationship with the car suggests a gendered shift in the symbolic function of motoring from an optimistic encapsulation of female emancipation to a pessimistic indictment of hard-bodied male virility." Gill Plain, "Death on the Roads: Motoring with Agatha Christie," *Crime Fiction Studies* 5, no. 1 (2024), 18–33.

³³⁵ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 180.

³³⁶ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 136.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 136–137.

³³⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 12.

“Down the steep track into the village a car was coming. A car so fantastically powerful, so superlatively beautiful that it had all the nature of an apparition. At the wheel sat a young man, his hair blown back by the wind. In the blaze of the evening light he looked, not a man, but a young God, a Hero God out of some Northern Saga.”³³⁹

This “fantastic moment,” in which Marston seems to be “something more than mortal,”³⁴⁰ serves as a potent counterpoint to his untimely demise two chapters later: “They didn’t take it in. Not at once. Dead? *Dead?* That young Norse God in the prime of his health and strength. Struck down all in a moment. Healthy young men didn’t die like that, choking over a whisky and soda...”³⁴¹ His death fulfills the first verse of the rhyme: “*One choked himself, and then there were Nine.*”³⁴²

2.5.3 Ethel Rogers: the cook

The classist aspects of *And Then There Were None* hold especially true for Mrs Rogers, the cook and maid, who spends most of her time in the kitchen and, apart from her husband, is seen directly interacting with two characters at most: Vera Claythorne and Dr Armstrong in the novel,³⁴³ and Narracott the boatman in the play.³⁴⁴

The novel describes her as a respectable-looking, bloodless woman with eyes darting from place to place, who, even before the first death, appears to be in a constant state of mortal fear.³⁴⁵ Before dying in her sleep in the night of the first day, she has a total of ten speaking lines.³⁴⁶ Accordingly, she is defined by her profession and material contributions: while her husband carries on impassively, other characters mainly lament the loss of her excellent cooking.³⁴⁷

³³⁹ Ibid., 19–20.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.

³⁴¹ Ibid., 47–48.

³⁴² Ibid., 56. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 153.

³⁴³ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 22–23, 34.

³⁴⁴ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 120.

³⁴⁵ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 22.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 22–23, 34.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 83.

In the play, her role is somewhat larger. She is still a “*thin, worried, frightened-looking woman*,” but in conversation with her husband, she comes across as much more assertive, chiding Mr Rogers for his fondness for alcohol and acidly complaining about the guests, the island, and having to serve: “MRS. ROGERS: Beats me why the Owens wanted to buy it, living on an island. ROGERS: Oh, come off it, Ethel, and take all that stuff out into the kitchen. They’ll be here any minute now. MRS. ROGERS: Making that steep climb an excuse for a drink, I suppose. Like some others I know.”³⁴⁸

Having killed a previous employer for money, the passive Mrs Rogers had, according to the Judge, “acted very largely under the influence of her husband”³⁴⁹ and is assigned an early, peaceful death by barbiturates: “*One overslept himself, and then there were Eight.*”³⁵⁰

2.5.4 John Macarthur: the general

General Macarthur, called Mackenzie in the play,³⁵¹ is one of the more recognizable Christie types.³⁵² A retired WWI hero, he is ostensibly invited to the Island to meet some old army cronies and talk about the war.³⁵³ However, in the novel, he immediately does not quite hold true to the “military club bore” type: “[Lombard] thought to himself: ‘He’ll ask me now if I was old enough to be in the War. These old boys always do.’ But General Macarthur did not mention the War.”³⁵⁴

The play amps up the General’s old age habits, describing his face as “*tired*”³⁵⁵ and adding a scatterbrained fussiness which was not present in the source material. A creature of habit, the General even asks the Judge to switch chairs, which adds dynamics to an otherwise static scene: “WARGRAVE: Aren’t you

³⁴⁸ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 120.

³⁴⁹ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 182.

³⁵⁰ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 61. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 160–161.

³⁵¹ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 116.

³⁵² Bowles, “Christie’s Wartime Hero: Peacetime Killer,” 33.

³⁵³ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 10. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 146.

³⁵⁴ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 18.

³⁵⁵ “GENERAL MACKENZIE *arrives on balcony from Left. Upright soldierly old man, with a gentle, tired face.*” Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 125.

going to sit down? MACKENZIE: Well, to tell you the truth, you seem to be in my chair. [...] To tell you the truth, I've never been here before. But you see I live at the Benton Club – have for the last ten years. And my seat is just about there. Can't get used to sitting anywhere else."³⁵⁶ As evinced by the excerpt above, the General is also given to repeating the filler phrase "to tell you the truth."

In both the novel and the play, the General understands the meaning of Indian Island before everyone else and is possibly the only character to feel at peace for "coming to the end." Having sent his wife's lover, a lower ranking army officer, to death, he has faced suspicion, ostracization and loneliness ever since. His wife Leslie long dead, he comes the closest to feeling remorse: "I had no regrets. *Serves him damned well right!* – that's what I thought. But afterwards – [...] I don't know if Leslie ever guessed... I don't think so. But, you see, I didn't know about her any more. She'd gone far away where I couldn't reach her. And then she died – and I was alone..."³⁵⁷

The General's demise constitutes the first death which is irrefutably classed as murder. In the novel, he is struck on the head while sitting on the cliffs, in accordance with the verse "*Eight little Indian Boys traveling in Devon, / one said he'd stay there and then there were Seven.*"³⁵⁸ This is altered to "*one got left behind*" in the tighter setting of the play, to account for Mackenzie getting stabbed on the balcony.³⁵⁹ The verse also underlines the General's continuous loneliness and marginalization by the others: "MACKENZIE: None of us will ever leave this island. BLORE: Can't somebody shut up Grandpa?"³⁶⁰

2.5.5 Thomas Rogers: the butler

Given slightly more attention than his wife, Rogers is described as a correct, grave and reassuring butler in the novel and "*just a trifle specious and shifty*" house-parlourman in the play.³⁶¹

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 128.

³⁵⁷ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 80–81. Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 167–168.

³⁵⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 90–92.

³⁵⁹ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 173.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 165.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 120. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 21–22.

In the novel, he is the perfect embodiment of the good servant, especially in view of his wife's death: "Philip Lombard said lightly: 'Wonderful animal, the good servant. Carries on with an impassive countenance.' Armstrong said appreciatively: 'Rogers is a first-class butler, I'll say that for him!'"³⁶²

In the stage adaptation, Rogers is featured in more prominence, the talks with his wife providing comic relief and making him much more human: "ROGERS: Davis gives out he's a millionaire or something. You should see his underwear! Cheap as they make 'em. [...] MRS. ROGERS: I don't know as I fancy being on an island. ROGERS: Don't know that I do, either, come to that. No slipping down to a pub, or going to the pictures. Oh, well, it's double wages on account of the difficulties. And there's plenty of beer in the house."³⁶³

The play, however, does not bridge the gap between classes either; Rogers's interactions with the guests are limited and his habits get ridiculed behind his back: "LOMBARD: Well, does [Rogers] want some coffee? VERA: He'd rather make himself a nice cup of tea!"³⁶⁴

Rogers is dispatched by an ax blow to the head while chopping sticks in the woodshed: "*One chopped himself in halves and then there were Six.*"³⁶⁵

2.5.6 Emily Brent: the spinster

In Christie's pantheon of self-righteous elderly spinsters, Emily Brent constitutes a rare exception in terms of self-absorbedness. Although very quick to judge and condemn other people, she is not too perspicacious and does not seem to indulge in gossip.³⁶⁶

Described as a "*tall, thin spinster, with a disagreeable, suspicious face*"³⁶⁷ who sits "enveloped in an aura of righteousness and unyielding principles,"³⁶⁸

³⁶² Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 83.

³⁶³ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 132.

³⁶⁴ Tea as the drink of choice of the working class is also disparaged by Blore when discussing the death of Mrs Rogers: "BLORE: Let's be practical. What did the woman have to eat and drink last night after she went to bed? ARMSTRONG: Nothing. BLORE: Nothing at all? Not a cup of tea? [...] I'll bet you she had a cup of tea. That sort always does." Ibid, 162.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 181–182. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 114–115.

³⁶⁶ Compare with the acid, shrewd and gossipy Miss Weatherby (*Murder at the Vicarage*), Caroline Sheppard (*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*) or Miss Ramsbottom (*A Pocket Full of Rye*).

³⁶⁷ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 126.

³⁶⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 9.

most of her characterization rests on her harshness and bigotry. These traits have, once again, been amplified for the sake of the play.

In both iterations of the story, Miss Brent's crime is turning her maid out of the house for getting pregnant out of wedlock, driving the young woman to suicide. Like most of the characters, Brent feels no reproach whatsoever. In the novel, this is where the account ends.³⁶⁹ The stage version of Miss Brent, however, goes on with "*horrible fanaticism*": "I told her what a low depraved thing she was. [...] I told her that her child would be the child of sin and would be branded all its life – and that the man would naturally not dream of marrying her. [...] I'm glad to say I broke her down utterly."³⁷⁰

Emily addresses these words to Vera Claythorne, who is also at the receiving end of her other scathing remarks on the depravity of youth: "EMILY: (*Nastily*) Your dress is rather tight, isn't it? [...] A well-bred woman doesn't like her secretary to appear flashy. It looks, you know, as though you were trying to attract the attention of the opposite sex. [...] (*Spitefully*) Young people nowadays behave in the most disgusting fashion."³⁷¹

The death of Miss Brent causes a great stir in the novel, as Wargrave brings a bumblebee to the island and lets it out in the room after killing Emily with a syringe, to fulfill the verse "*A bumblebee stung one and then there were Five.*" Such attention to detail rattles even the level-headed Philip Lombard, who exclaims: "It's our murderer's touch of local colour! He's a playful beast. Likes to stick to his damnable nursery jingle as closely as possible! [...] It's mad! – absolutely mad – we're all mad!"³⁷²

Arguably, a live bumblebee could not very well be brought onto the stage, and its absence is made up for by Wargrave's comment: "[A hypodermic syringe.] The modern bee-sting."³⁷³

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 69–70.

³⁷⁰ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 170.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 133–134

³⁷² Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 125–126.

³⁷³ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 182.

2.5.7 Edward Armstrong: the doctor

The character of Dr Armstrong, a surgeon turned a sought-after Harley Street nerve specialist,³⁷⁴ has undergone a significant makeover for the purposes of the play.

In the novel, the Doctor shows a similar level of stolidity as Blore and Lombard. When confronted with his crime, he does not move a muscle: “Dr Armstrong, very much master of himself, shook his head good-humouredly. ‘I’m at a loss to understand the matter,’ he said. ‘The name meant nothing to me when it was spoken. What was it – Clees? Close? I really can’t remember having a patient of that name. [...]’ He sighed, shaking his head. He thought: *Drunk – that’s what it was – drunk... And I operated! Nerves all to pieces – hands shaking. I killed her all right. [...] But who could have known about it – after all these years?*”³⁷⁵

His gradual unraveling mainly shines through in his disjointed thoughts, seen in Chapter Thirteen of the novel: “Why don’t we wake up? Wake up – Judgment Day – no, not that! If only I could think... My head – something’s happening in my head – it’s going to burst – it’s going to split...”³⁷⁶

Meanwhile, in the play, Armstrong is constantly fidgeting, pacing, shivering³⁷⁷ and proposing irrational plans of action: “ARMSTRONG: (*Breaking out*) We – we shouldn’t just sit here, doing nothing! There must be something – surely, surely, there is something that we can do? If we lit a bonfire – [...] WARGRAVE: It is, I am afraid, a question of time and patience. The weather will clear. Then we can do something. [...] ARMSTRONG: (*Rises to up Right*) A question of time – time? (*Laughs in an unbalanced way*) We can’t afford time. We shall all be dead.” Before aiding Wargrave in faking his death, he is also the only person who is specifically described as “*dirty and unshaven.*”³⁷⁸

Although Armstrong is as unapologetic as most of the others, his crime features some extenuating circumstances. The killing of his patient was unpremeditated

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 185. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 11–12, 46.

³⁷⁵ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 46.

³⁷⁶ These musings are, however, one of many – each of the five remaining characters is similarly shaken. Although their thoughts are anonymous, retroactively, it becomes clear which belong to whom. Ibid., 132–133.

³⁷⁷ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 180–184.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 183–184.

and, giving up drinking and changing his line of work,³⁷⁹ the Doctor is the only one to actively try to prevent another such incident from recurring. Wargrave, however, spares Armstrong no pity, killing him quite late in the game, having first gained his trust and then pushed him off the cliff: “*A red herring swallowed one and then there were Three.*”³⁸⁰ Arguably, the Judge’s decision is informed more by the Doctor’s usefulness for his plan – he would be the only one to closely examine the body³⁸¹ – than by the seriousness of his past offense.

2.5.8 William Blore: the policeman

Blore, a private investigator, is a stolid, unfearing man of action³⁸² yet quite a plodding former policeman. Displaying little aptitude at thinking outside the box, he mainly deals in plain facts and concrete evidence, such as the invitation letter: ““*Coronation* machine. Quite new – no defects. *Ensign* paper – the most widely used make. You won’t get anything out of that. Might be fingerprints, but I doubt it.”³⁸³ In the novel, Philip Lombard sums up Blore’s predicament thus: “Your lack of imagination is going to make you absolutely a sitting target. A criminal of the imagination of U. N. Owen can make rings round you any time he – or she – wants to.”³⁸⁴

Before his real name is revealed on the gramophone record, Blore assumes the identity of Davis, a Colonial from Natal, South Africa.³⁸⁵ The general loud impression he gives off in the novel – “a big bluff man” with a breezy laugh³⁸⁶ – is translated to the stage through loud clothes and the cheerful catchphrase “Davis, Davis is the name.”, which appears five times in the span of as many

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 185. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 11–12, 46.

³⁸⁰ In the Manuscript, Wargrave drily states: “According to my plan I should shortly need an ally. I selected Dr Armstrong for that part. He was a gullible sort of man, he knew me by sight and reputation and it was inconceivable to him that a man of my standing should actually be a murderer! [...] I took him up a little way behind the house on the edge of the cliff. [...] He was still quite unsuspecting – and yet he ought to have been warned – if he had only remembered the words of the nursery rhyme. ‘A red herring swallowed one...’ He took the red herring all right.” Ibid., 183–184.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² “Whatever else he lacked, Blore did not lack courage. Show him the danger and he would tackle it pluckily. He was not afraid of danger in the open, only of danger undefined and tinged with the supernatural.” Ibid., 148.

³⁸³ Ibid., 37. An almost identical uttering appears in Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 143.

³⁸⁴ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 118.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 18. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 125.

³⁸⁶ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 18.

pages.³⁸⁷ The fact that his disguise is seen through at once by Lombard,³⁸⁸ and, in the play, even by the servants who remark upon his suspiciously cheap underwear,³⁸⁹ is a further testament to Blore's incompetence.

The play makes Blore into a much more colorful figure, endowing him with a charming vernacular full of phrases and idioms.³⁹⁰ Furthermore, the novel's marginal mention of his domesticity³⁹¹ and hunger on the last day³⁹² is magnified to the utmost. The play's version of Blore is simply obsessed with food, bringing it up at every possible moment,³⁹³ even in the figurative sense: "The wind has freshened a bit. Rather a mackerel sky."^{394, 395}

Blore's past crime is that of perjury, which had led to the conviction of a frail innocent man who later died in prison. In turn, Blore got money from a gang, a promotion from his unknowing superiors³⁹⁶ and a particularly harsh death sentence³⁹⁷ from Judge Wargrave: his head gets crushed by a marble clock

³⁸⁷ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 124–129.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 147. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 39.

³⁸⁹ See section 2.5.5 Thomas Rogers: the butler.

³⁹⁰ "Well – [the Rogers] know there's no immediate danger to them. Then, last night, some lunatic goes and spills the beans. What happens? It's the woman who cracks. [...] [Her husband] was like a cat on hot bricks. And that's the position. They've done a murder and got away with it. But if it's all going to be raked up again now, it's the woman will give the show away. [...] He'll go on lying till the cows come home, but he can't be sure of her. So what does he do? He drops a nice little dollop of something into a nice cup of tea, and when she's had it, he washes up the cup and saucer and tells the doctor she ain't had nothing." Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 162–163.

³⁹¹ "They finished clearing away the breakfast things. Blore said: 'I'm a domestic sort of man. I'll give you a hand, Miss Claythorne.'" Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 122–123.

³⁹² "Blore was looking at his wristwatch. He said: 'It's two o'clock. What about lunch?' Vera said obstinately: 'I'm not going back to the house. I'm going to stay here – in the open.'" *Ibid.*, 156.

³⁹³ "Time and again, Blore insists, 'What about something to eat?', 'What about the food idea?', and 'Starving won't do us any good'. 'Do stop thinking about your stomach, Blore', says the hero of the piece. 'This craving for food and drink will be your undoing'." Bernthal, "When She Eats She Will Die," 90.

³⁹⁴ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 155.

³⁹⁵ Bernthal dedicates much of his article on victual habits in the play "And Then There Were None" to Blore, linking it to animality: "When dinner is skipped on the second day, Blore can stand it no longer. 'Go and have a guzzle by yourself', says the young hero. Blore finds a tin of biscuits and 'wolf[s] the lot' because nobody else is hungry. The animal language is emphasized in both stage directions and dialogue. Eating biscuits in front of the others, Blore demonstrates that he is unable to live without the structure of three meals a day, but he abandons their 'square' aspect and their social side. In the microcosm of the Island, civilization has collapsed and Blore, trying to recreate the old structures for himself alone rather than as a communal act, is the butt of a joke." Bernthal, "When She Eats She Will Die," 90–91.

³⁹⁶ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 117–118. Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 196.

³⁹⁷ In the Manuscript, Wargrave explains: "I took a serious view of Blore's offence. The police, as servants of the law, must be of a high order of integrity. For their word is perforce believed by virtue of their profession." Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 180–181.

in the shape of a bear. Thus, “A big bear hugged one and then there were Two.”³⁹⁸

2.5.9 Philip Lombard: the soldier of fortune

Captain Lombard embodies all traits of the ultimate survivor, being both a man of action³⁹⁹ and of very astute instincts. In both the novel and the play, he has nerves of steel, constantly makes light of the situation, yet is the only one to ever suspect that the killer is Wargrave: “There are very few tricks that will get past you, Sir Lawrence. You know, if you won’t be offended at my saying so, you’re my fancy.”⁴⁰⁰ In light of his role as the young hero and Vera’s lover, Lombard is made into a tamer, more likable and less objectionable character in the play.

In the novel, as a former soldier and a gun for hire, Lombard embodies another common Christie type: the “wartime hero, peacetime killer.”⁴⁰¹ His backstory is made slightly more ambiguous in the play: although he remains a self-confessed ex-military man, the stage directions and characters tend to refer to him as an “adventurer”⁴⁰² and his current profession and standing are unclear.⁴⁰³

Both works use animal imagery to paint the last four characters standing, subsequently comparing the whole island and its inhabitants to a “zoo,” as mentioned in the eighth verse of the nursery rhyme.⁴⁰⁴

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 160. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 198–199.

³⁹⁹ Lombard tends to take initiative, mainly in the various hunts across the island and the house – first searching for Mr Owen, then looking for the missing Dr Armstrong. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 74, 148. Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 164, 195.

⁴⁰⁰ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 187.

⁴⁰¹ Seasoned military men with no place for their skill in the post-war society represent yet more scathing commentary on society, war and exploitation. As Bowles explains, wartime military service offers a unique opportunity and environment for violent men to excel using skills, methods, and techniques which, in a civilian context, would undoubtedly be deemed criminal. Bowles, “Christie’s Wartime Hero: Peacetime Killer,” 37.

⁴⁰² Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 121, 134, 169.

⁴⁰³ The character of Isaac Morris, who originally approached Lombard in his capacity as a gun for hire, is cut from the adaptation. Thus, Lombard’s reason for bringing the revolver is now a simple “I have been in some tight places, you know.” Moreover, Lombard’s friendship with Johnny Brewer, the millionaire ex-owner of Indian Island, constitutes a sizable upgrade on him being “literally down to his last square meal” in the novel. Ibid., 122, 165. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 8.

⁴⁰⁴ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 155. With regards to the play, Bernthal notes: “Staged in 1943–44, amidst continuous bomb threats, ‘And Then There Were None’ reflects a

From the first, the novel specifically stresses the dangerous, predatory traits of Philip Lombard, continuously casting him into the role of a beast of prey: he has a “curious, wolf-like smile,” moves “like a panther, smoothly and noiselessly” and, in the final face-off, Vera perceives his whole countenance as that of a “wolf” with a “snarl” for voice.⁴⁰⁵ In turn, Lombard himself refers to the unknown killer as “the big bad wolf,” proclaiming that he is not afraid of him.⁴⁰⁶

In the end, however, Wargrave’s dominance in the novel is palpable: utterly unmatched in his knowledge of human nature and psychology, he emerges victorious, while the life of Blore, a plodding bovine,⁴⁰⁷ is cut short by an inanimate marble bear,⁴⁰⁸ and Lombard as the “less bad wolf” finds himself bested by the deceptively “frail and birdlike” Vera Claythorne,⁴⁰⁹ whom Wargrave himself never underestimated.⁴¹⁰

Lombard’s wolf-like character arguably incongruent with his romantic interest and his innocence, he instead becomes an apex predator in the play, foiled by Blore as the lesser, ever-guzzling beast.⁴¹¹

The novel emphasizes Lombard’s position as the silent, deadly type, determined, like the others, to live at all costs, but seemingly much better equipped to actually do so: “Philip Lombard’s face went hard and dangerous. He said: ‘I’ve a pretty good imagination of my own. I’ve been in tight places before now and got out of them! I think – I won’t say more than that but I *think*

complete break from the structures of normality as the characters become corpses before each other’s and the audience’s eyes, and the survivors become increasingly animalistic. Finally, the heroine announces: “We’re [in a] zoo. Last night we were barely human any more.” Bernthal, “When She Eats She Will Die,” 90.

⁴⁰⁵ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 28, 112, 163.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁴⁰⁷ “Ex-Inspector Blore looked coarser and clumsier in build. His walk was that of a slow padding animal. His eyes were bloodshot. There was a look of mingled ferocity and stupidity about him. He was like a beast at bay ready to charge its pursuers.” *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁴⁰⁹ “Vera Claythorne was very quiet. She sat most of the time huddled in a chair. Her eyes stared ahead of her into space. She looked dazed. She was like a bird that has dashed its head against glass and that has been picked up by a human hand. It crouches there, terrified, unable to move, hoping to save itself by its immobility.” *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴¹⁰ Wargrave notes in his Manuscript: “From my window I saw Vera Claythorne shoot Lombard. A daring and resourceful young woman. I always thought she was a match for him and more.” *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴¹¹ Bernthal, “When She Eats She Will Die,” 90.

I'll get out of this one."⁴¹² He strives to play his cards close to his vest, but deprive others of this advantage – as demonstrated by his tendency to gather secret intelligence, making Blore and Vera confess to him in private.⁴¹³ He himself, together with Marston, is the only character who has made no secret of his past crime: "Philip Lombard grinned. 'Story's quite true! I left [those natives to die]! Matter of self-preservation."⁴¹⁴

The play, once again, reverses this: instead of gaining information, Lombard feeds others unserious claims, jokingly admitting to being responsible for the deaths of the African tribesmen which he, contrary to his novel version, actually tried to save.⁴¹⁵

Needless to say, silent qualities seem to be a hard sell onstage. The play has injected Lombard with a stronger inclination to crack jokes overall, sometimes just this side of insolence. Time and time again, various characters, including the stoic Wargrave, become upset with him: "VERA: Mr. Blore's a long time. LOMBARD: I expect the big bad wolf has got him. WARGRAVE: I have asked you once before to try and restrain your rather peculiar sense of humour, Captain Lombard. LOMBARD: Sorry, sir. It must be a form of nervousness."⁴¹⁶

As alluded to above, Lombard's likeability is further reinforced by the fact that he becomes the lover of the heroine, and thus the conventional protagonist of the piece. That makes him, yet again, a survivor, albeit this time he is not shielded by his wartime experience, but by "plot armor" – the lover gets the girl, not a bullet.⁴¹⁷

Worth noting is the fact that his heroic role in the play also protects Lombard from being punished for any of his moral misgivings. Not only does he lie about his guilt; in the final scene of the play, when he ends Wargrave's life,

⁴¹² Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 118.

⁴¹³ Lombard extracts the confessions of Blore and Vera. *Ibid.*, 117–118, 159.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴¹⁵ VERA: Do you expect me to believe that [you are innocent]? Why, you actually admitted the whole thing. LOMBARD: I know. I got such a kick out of watching their faces." Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 202.

⁴¹⁶ "VERA: Things seem to have been disappearing. Miss Brent lost a skein of knitting wool. LOMBARD: So the murderer, whoever he or she is, is a kleptomaniac too." *Ibid.*, 188–189.

⁴¹⁷ LaBorde, "Form and Formula in Detective Drama," 98.

he becomes a confirmed killer.⁴¹⁸ None of his innocence, however, is lost by this deed; instead, he implicitly gains the title of a vindicated manslayer representing Justice, the very position held by Wargrave in the novel.⁴¹⁹

The novel version of Lombard does not get this type of vindication. However, in an undeniably heroic fashion, he fights for his life right up to the last moment, trying to wrestle his revolver from Vera: “All his life Lombard had taken the risky way. He took it now. He spoke slowly, argumentatively: ‘Now look here, my dear girl, you just listen –’ And then he sprang. Quick as a panther – as any other feline creature...” Not succeeding, he is killed on the cliffs by a single bullet into the heart: “*One got frizzled up, and then there was One.*”⁴²⁰

2.5.10 Vera Claythorne: the governess

Vera Claythorne is a character who has, arguably, suffered the most by her translation onto the stage. A layered protagonist in the novel, she becomes the undisputed heroine of the play, losing much of her agency in the process.

In the novel, Vera is, more than most, defined by her past crime which constantly haunts her thoughts.⁴²¹ Her cold-blooded plan to murder her ward Cyril, so that his uncle Hugo would inherit his money and be able to marry her, has horrifyingly backfired: in the legal sense, Vera got away with her crime, only to be left with Hugo’s unsatisfying silence – “Had Hugo *known*? Was that why he had gone off after the inquest so hurriedly? He hadn’t answered the one letter she had written to him...” – and having difficulty finding a decent job on account of the inquest.⁴²²

A games mistress, she holds true to her type in the Christie canon: a physically able, energetic woman whose physical prowess can lead to dangerous outcomes.⁴²³ Indeed, Vera’s scheme of allowing Cyril, “a puny child,” to swim across perilous waters, then putting on a great pretense of saving him and

⁴¹⁸ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 204.

⁴¹⁹ See section 2.5.11 Lawrence Wargrave: the judge.

⁴²⁰ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 165.

⁴²¹ The name of her lost lover, Hugo, appears thirty-four times in the novel.

⁴²² Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 7, 55, 142–143.

⁴²³ Compare with Miss Springer (*Cat Among the Pigeons*) and Christine Redfern (*Evil Under the Sun*).

almost drowning too,⁴²⁴ could not be accomplished without considerable callousness and physical strength.

In terms of character, however, Vera is an amalgamation of conflicting traits and attitudes. First appalled by Lombard's casual confession to having killed a score of tribesmen, she later defends him in front of Emily Brent.⁴²⁵ She is frequently described as sensible, cold-blooded even, yet, as the pressure mounts, is the only one to suffer an outright fit of hysterics.⁴²⁶ And, in the final face-off, she holds her ground and kills Lombard, her former ally and a formidable opponent, only to willingly hang herself moments later: "She climbed up on the chair, her eyes staring in front of her like a sleepwalker's... She adjusted the noose round her neck. Hugo was there to see she did what she had to do. She kicked away the chair..."⁴²⁷

Her last feat is largely attributable to Wargrave's skillful manipulation: "As soon as that [Vera Claythorne shot Lombard dead] I set the stage in her bedroom. It was an interesting psychological experiment. Would the consciousness of her own guilt, the state of nervous tension consequent on having just shot a man, be sufficient, together with the hypnotic suggestion of the surroundings, to cause her to take her own life? I thought it would. I was right. Vera Claythorne hanged herself before my eyes where I stood in the shadow of the wardrobe."⁴²⁸

Interestingly enough, the novel borrows elements of the frightwig melodrama, a popular dramatic genre of the day where "the criminal deliberately tries to frighten the heroine," who is, at that point, the only one left alive, by subjecting her to "a rapid succession of situations of extreme horror." Terrifying the heroine is, in fact, "more important than the quiet, unobtrusive elimination of the victim."⁴²⁹

Although the chilling premise of the frightwig melodrama could, even more conceivably, provide a basis for the stage adaptation as well, Vera's character in the play has a completely different arc than her novel counterpart.

⁴²⁴ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 55, 142–143.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 43–44, 68.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 115–116.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 165–168.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴²⁹ Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 26.

Described as a “*good-looking girl of twenty-five*”⁴³⁰ at the beginning of Act One, Vera becomes the object of multiple men’s desire, be it the early-dispatched Tony Marston who thinks her a “wizard girl,” Philip Lombard, who constantly flirts with her and proposes to her at the climax of the piece, or, loosely speaking, General Mackenzie, who mistakes her for his considerably younger, “pretty and gay,” now long deceased wife.⁴³¹

From the start, Vera is also painted as a much merrier and light-hearted person: “VERA: This is exciting! (*Goes below sofa to up Centre.*) LOMBARD: What? VERA: All this. The smell of the sea – the gulls – the beach and this lovely house. I am going to enjoy myself.”⁴³² To the reader savvy of the source material, Vera’s innocence in this version of the story immediately becomes clear – as, instead of loathing the sound and smell of the sea,⁴³³ her play version repeatedly gushes over its loveliness.

Her newly acquired morality comes through mostly in her interactions with Emily Brent, whom Vera sees, and does not hesitate to call out, for what she is: “VERA: I was just remarking that you don’t like young people. EMILY: (*Rises; moves up Left*) And is there any reason why I should, pray? VERA: Oh, no – (*Pauses*) but it seems to me that you must miss an awful lot. EMILY: You’re very impertinent. VERA: (*Quietly*) I’m sorry, but that’s just what I think.”⁴³⁴ Moreover, Vera is endowed with “maternal instincts,”⁴³⁵ and, after the death of both servants, she is the one to make and bring everyone coffee.⁴³⁶

In light of her experience with her former lover Hugh, who, in the play, was responsible for the death of his nephew and tried to physically stop Vera from trying to save him, Vera also displays a shocking amount of naivete: “BLORE: So what does [Rogers] do? He drops a nice little dollop of something into a nice cup of tea, and when she’s had it, he washes up the cup and saucer and tells

⁴³⁰ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 121.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 128, 158, 167, 204–205.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴³³ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 30, 134.

⁴³⁴ Christie, “And Then There Were None” (play), 134.

⁴³⁵ She continuously urges Lombard to change out of his wet clothes: “VERA: Oh, do go and change, please! LOMBARD: I’m going my sweet, I’m going. The maternal instinct I think it’s called. VERA: Don’t be ridiculous –” *Ibid.*, 178–179.

⁴³⁶ In the novel, food plays a comparatively smaller role, and Vera is assisted in making breakfast by Emily Brent. *Ibid.*, 176–178. Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 116.

the doctor she ain't had nothing. VERA: Oh, no. That's impossible. A man wouldn't do that—not to his wife. (*Rises; goes up Left.*) BLORE: You'd be surprised, Miss Claythorne, what some husbands would do."⁴³⁷

It is, however, the very ending of the play that strikes a deadly blow to Vera's agency.

Together with the equally innocent Lombard, she first loses her agency as a murderer. Then, after believing she had shot him, Judge Wargrave appears and, in a highly sexist moment, manhandles her while simultaneously lauding her as the deadly "female of the species." Unable to sway the Judge by her innocence, Vera is almost induced to hang herself, when a resurrected Lombard saves her by shooting Wargrave on the spot.⁴³⁸

After attributing his miraculous revival to the fact that "women can't shoot [straight enough]," Lombard proposes to Vera in a way which is more a statement of fact – "You know there's another ending to that Ten Little Indian rhyme: 'One little Indian boy left all alone, We got married—and then there were none!'" – and the sound of the motorboat hooter lets the audience know that the couple will soon be rescued.⁴³⁹

2.5.11 Lawrence Wargrave: the judge

A number of scholars have tried to reconcile the paradoxical aspects of Wargrave's character: the mad, the just and the justified.⁴⁴⁰

Treating the novel as an standalone text usually means denying Wargrave any sense whatsoever, dismissing his "mission" on Indian Island as the work of a highly individualistic, methodical madman.^{441, 442} This is a very tempting

⁴³⁷ Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 162, 200–201.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 200–204.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 204–205.

⁴⁴⁰ "More threateningly, [Christie's war novels feature] a methodical, logical insanity, in which the crimes seem perfectly justified by a specific, extreme, rationale." Bright, "Writing through War," 57.

⁴⁴¹ Brad Friedman calls *And Then There Were None* "a brilliant novel and its culprit [Christie's] most accomplished madman" who "is totally aware of his madness – indeed, he revels in it." Brad Friedman, "Crack'd from Side to Side: Madness in Christie," *Ah Sweet Mystery*, November 7, 2022. <https://ahsweetmystery.com/2022/05/07/crackd-from-side-to-side-madness-in-christie/>.

⁴⁴² Bright considers Wargrave's madness in light of other insane murderers in Christie's works, calling attention to the same blueprint: "The murderous madness, in each case, is prompted

viewpoint, as insane murderers were a common theme of the day, and, in virtually every Christie novel with a high body count, the killer will fall into said category.⁴⁴³

A comparison of the climax of the novel and the play, however, leads to the emergence of an important moral distinction.

In the novel, Wargrave drily walks the reader through the mechanics of his moral compass, explaining that, once positively satisfied as to the guilt of everyone on the island,⁴⁴⁴ he used the nursery rhyme to punish the gravest offenders the longest. His Swan Song complete, he now intends to join the Ten Little Indians in death.⁴⁴⁵ The preceding epilogue constitutes at least a partial confirmation of his claim never to have taken an innocent life: Edward Seton, Wargrave's "victim from the past," was, beyond a shadow of a doubt, a murderer.⁴⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the play dispenses with all of Wargrave's morality and a part of his shrewdness – having invited, and very nearly pushed over the edge, two innocent people. In a semi-coherent rambling monologue, he treats Vera and the audience to his obsession with "punishing the guilty," only to adamantly insist on murdering Vera despite finally recognizing her innocence.⁴⁴⁷ The moral dimension of the rhyme, Seton's guilt and Wargrave's intention of killing himself are not addressed in the play.⁴⁴⁸

In light of the killings of an undeniably mad killer, the idea of the novel's abstract justice, from which the Judge himself is not exempt, suddenly appears bearable, even admirable. Thus, knowledge of the stage adaptation will often

by an event that serves as adequate 'motive', but in each case, the criminal is someone who has, knowingly or not, nurtured a seed of insanity since youth." Bright, "Writing through War," 57.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ "I may say that I watched the faces of my guests closely during [the gramophone] indictment and I had no doubt whatever, after my long court experience, that one and all were guilty." Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 182–183.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 178–187.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 172.

⁴⁴⁷ At least her innocence of the past crime. The fact that she shot Lombard only moments ago (or so the characters believe) is, similarly to Lombard, not taken into account at all. Christie, "And Then There Were None" (play), 202–204.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid..

lead to a more benevolent reading of Wargrave's character, as featured in the source material.⁴⁴⁹

A further comparison of *And Then There Were None* with the last case of Hercule Poirot, *Curtain* (written in the 1940s but published in 1975),⁴⁵⁰ throws into sharp relief how the perception of a character as a hero can influence the reader's perception of the morality of said character's actions.

As summed up by R. A. York, both *Curtain* and *And Then There Were None* feature "someone who puts to death people who have caused the death of others in ways not open to legal punishment and who then commits suicide, recording his strategy in a posthumous document."⁴⁵¹

In the case of *Curtain*, however, it is Hercule Poirot, the Great Detective himself, who takes justice into his own hands and kills "X," a dangerous murderer by proxy who delights in playing mind games and driving other people to killing.⁴⁵² Through the lens of his detective genius and the fine moral compass he had exhibited in his previous cases, Poirot's killing of X is never seen as mad – rather, it is commonly viewed as justified and dutiful, and his final act of leaving his own survival in the hands of God is considered a touching end to his life dedicated to rooting out crime.^{453, 454}

⁴⁴⁹ A view propounded by Hesse, who also saliently sums up all the key differences: "In the novel, the murderer is terminally ill, and he relentlessly proceeds to dispense justice according to degree of guilt, finally killing himself, and branding his forehead with the mark of Cain. In the play, he is not ill but mad, and Vera's protestations of her innocence do not move him, since he has planned out the various deaths schematically and insists that he cannot let her spoil his 'lovely little rhyme.'" Hesse, *The English Crime Play*, 204.

⁴⁵⁰ Curran, *Agatha Christie's Complete Secret Notebooks*, 685.

⁴⁵¹ York, *Agatha Christie: Power and Illusion*, 161.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, 158–159.

⁴⁵³ A sentimental reading of the novel is practically omnipresent.

John Curran openly admits that *Curtain* is "a nostalgic swan song" which "plays with our emotional reaction to the decline, and eventual demise, of one of the world's great detective creations." Curran, *Agatha Christie's Complete Secret Notebooks*, 684.

David Suchet describes the novel as "a delicate but strong story, which sees Poirot confront one of the most evil, and audacious, murderers of his career," clearly not viewing Poirot as the guilty party at all. David Suchet, *Poirot and Me* (London: Headline Publishing Group, 2014), 317.

Anne Hart concludes her account of *Curtain* admiringly: "And what of X? 'In the duel between Poirot and X, X had won,' Hastings had concluded bitterly, completely forgetting [...] one of the last smiles of Hercule Poirot and his words: 'But you and I, Hastings, go on, working underground, like moles. And, sooner or later, we get X.' And so they did. Such style, Poirot." Anne Hart, *Hercule Poirot: The Life and Times of Hercule Poirot* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2019), 294.

⁴⁵⁴ York's analysis constitutes a rare exception, but even he never considers the acts of Poirot as the acts of a madman: "[Poirot] resembles the judge in stepping over the line between

Meanwhile, Wargrave is not often given a pass for his actions, arguably due to the sheer scope of his murderous doing. Where X is the killer of many, Poirot kills only X and, even then, with some regret; where most of the Indians killed one,⁴⁵⁵ Wargrave murders them all without any qualms. Yet in a world where even one deliberate murder justifies the death penalty,⁴⁵⁶ such an argument does not hold: in the eyes of the law, Poirot deserves the same condemnation as Wargrave.

In the end, it is confidence and hubris that constitutes the main difference between the two men. Although Poirot leaves behind a letter of explanation to his good friend Hastings, it is his legacy as an unerring detective that he wishes to be remembered by.⁴⁵⁷ The unimpeachable judge, meanwhile, kills himself partly in order to leave behind an impenetrable mystery, solvable only through his own Manuscript: “When the sea goes down, there will come from the mainland boats and men. And they will find ten dead bodies and an unsolved problem on Indian Island.”⁴⁵⁸

Ultimately, the potency of *And Then There Were None* lies in the gray areas of Wargrave’s personality, and in the timeless questions on justice, justification and morality of murder which arise from it.

investigation and intervention, and in doing so he usurps the right to punish which is properly the responsibility of the legal apparatus of the state. [...] Legally, Poirot is a murderer and [X] is a victim. [...] Morally, the novel falls short of a condemnation of murder, and so of the sense of an unchallenged rule of justice. [...] The detective story approaches a justification of murder; and perhaps Christie may have reflected on how far the genre’s fascination with murder itself implies some sympathy for it.” York, *Agatha Christie: Power and Illusion*, 161–162.

⁴⁵⁵ Except for Lombard. See Section 2.5 Characters.

⁴⁵⁶ Allmendinger, “The Erasure of Race,” 62.

⁴⁵⁷ York, *Agatha Christie: Power and Illusion*, 161.

⁴⁵⁸ Christie, *And Then There Were None* (novel), 187.

Conclusion

In its introduction, this thesis has outlined a hypothesis to the effect that the adapted work should not be seen as a simple re-doing of the original work – rather, at least some of the newly-introduced elements should be considered concessions to the new genre or form and its formulas. In relation to the adaptation of the novel *And Then There Were None* into a play, this claim has been at least partially validated. Our comparison has not only pinpointed changes in the relaying of certain information, which are naturally accounted for by the translation from page to stage,⁴⁵⁹ but also revealed more fundamental differences that revise some of the core values of the source material.

While the novel does, in some ways, conform to the prototypical features of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, as outlined in the first part of the thesis, it can, in other respects, be viewed as revolutionary, having completely discarded or reversed the tradition upon which it is built, so as to forge a unique type of threefold character: the detective-cum-murderer-cum-avenger, a perilously compelling villain to many and a downright justified vigilante to others. In line with the “insane murderer” trope of the murder-house mystery, the adaptation has introduced a significant shift in the opinions, behavior and moral makeup of Justice Wargrave, so that the fine line between sanity and madness, aptly toed by the novel, has incontrovertibly been crossed. While this decision seems understandable in the context of the times and the expectations of the target audience, it is also a testament to the power held by the dramatic mode over the writer’s intentions.

Some of the more sensitive aspects of the original text, namely its racism, classism and commentary on female oppression, have been dealt with in three contrastive ways. Firstly, the play has resorted to greater stereotyping of its female characters, arguably due to the need to create a simple, well-ordered stage with readily recognizable types. This attitude has largely had a detrimental effect on the agency of the female protagonist, Vera Claythorne, who is made into a relatively conventional, bubbly and innocent heroine in need

⁴⁵⁹ Such as the play’s use of repetitive, quasi-meaningless dialogue as a substitute for the character’s harried inner monologues in the novel.

of saving by her male counterpart and love interest. Secondly, the antisemitism of the novel has been dispensed with altogether, cutting the highly stereotypically handled Jewish character, Isaac Morris. Lastly, the classism seeping through the guests' interactions with the servant couple, Mr and Mrs Rogers, has been amplified for the sake of the play, their banter and drinking habits offering both comic relief and additional fodder for analyzing the issue.

Although, in comparing the aspects of the novel and the play which it had deemed most important, the thesis has accomplished its goal, many promising lines of thought have remained unexplored due to space constraints.

The chapters on space and times have only just cracked open the door on the dystopian quality of Indian Island that reflects the contemporary fears of totalitarian regimes and the darkness of human nature. Further inquiry could be made into the ways in which the two works tackle the need to address the dangers of modernity – one of the characters which bears a closer look being Anthony Marston, with his thinly veiled fascist aesthetics and futuristic worldview that puts the ideals of strength and speed over the more conventional values of goodness and compassion.

The issue of vigilante justice and its morality has been explored in some detail. Still, the topic certainly merits a more scrupulous analysis, especially in the view that it constitutes one of the most glaring changes made in the adaptation. An in-depth dive into the ethical and social implications of the killer's "mission" on Indian Island could, indeed, lead to the conclusion that there are two distinct worlds put forward by Agatha Christie: the world of the novel, in which the murder of a murderer is both viable and justifiable, and the contrasting world of the theater, in which a one-man pursuit of justice necessarily leads to his downfall.

Resumé

Bakalářská práce se věnuje srovnání románu *A pak nezbyl žádný* (původně *Deset malých černoušků*, 1939) anglické spisovatelky Agathy Christie a jeho divadelní adaptace z roku 1943, kterou zpracovala sama autorka původního textu.

Práce uvádí jak individuální, tak globální kontext obou děl. Věnuje se nejprve detektivní tvorbě autorky, kterou se především proslavila, a její dramatické tvorbě, jež zůstává poněkud ve stínu; dále také žánrovým pravidlům a očekáváním detektivního románu ve Zlatém věku anglické detektivky a detektivní hry v témže období; a do třetice hrubému nástinu vydání obou děl a jejich zasazení do kontextu autorčiny další tvorby.

Ve své druhé části práce přistupuje k podrobnějšímu srovnání románu a jeho adaptace, počínaje názvem a jeho změnou, jakož i změnou titulní říkanky – a to včetně důsledků, kterou tyto proměny mohou mít pro vyznění díla, pro jeho znepokojivost, ale také přijatelnost pro dobové a současné publikum, i s ohledem na dobové válečné trauma a současné využití „vojáčků“ v říkance. Prostor je rovněž věnován analýze syžetu a struktury příběhu, přičemž hra zde podle očekávání nabízí výrazně sevřenější linii. Její rozdělení do tří aktů, s tím, že k smrti první postavy dojde na samém konci aktu prvního, odpovídá dobovým očekáváním od tohoto dramatického žánru. Další prostorem pro srovnání obou děl je pak chronotop: prostorové relace jsou proti knižnímu zpracování opět redukovány, v tomto případě převážně na jedinou místnost v domě, což usnadňuje inscenaci a současně hru jednoznačněji staví do kontextu podobných dramát; otázka časového ukotvení je pak věnována především vlivu války a palčivým dobovým otázkám spravedlnosti a traumatu. Práci uzavírají dílčí medailony věnované jednotlivým postavám v románu a ve hře a proměnám jejich typizovanosti, přičemž od románové typizovanosti zdánlivé (stará panna, sekretářka, generál, lékař atd.) dochází k přechodu k ostřejší a jednoznačnější typizovanosti dramatické. Ta redukuje postavy na funkce, zároveň ale usnadňuje vnímání jejich interakcí a umožňuje vedení dramatu s větším počtem postav, které si vzájemně nebyly představeny.

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List of abbreviations

GAD (or the Golden Age) – The Golden Age of Detective Fiction

UK – United Kingdom

US – The United States of America

WWI – the First World War

WWII – the Second World War