

Justice Beyond the Law: Negotiating Moral Ambiguity in Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None*

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Abstract:

Detective fiction has traditionally been regarded as a literary genre that restores social order by identifying the criminal and reaffirming the authority of the law. Agatha Christie, however, complicates this convention by presenting narratives in which legal justice and moral justice frequently diverge. This paper examines the ethical complexities of justice in *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *And Then There Were None* (1939), arguing that Christie challenges the assumption that the legal system is the sole arbiter of justice. Employing Ethical Literary Criticism as the primary theoretical framework, supplemented by Narrative Theory, the study analyses how Christie constructs morally ambiguous situations that compel both detectives and readers to negotiate competing notions of guilt, responsibility and punishment. Through close textual analysis, the paper explores the ethical dilemmas surrounding vigilantism, collective retribution and extra-legal justice, demonstrating how Christie's narratives blur the boundaries between crime and righteousness. Hercule Poirot's moral decision in *Murder on the Orient Express* and Justice Wargrave's self-appointed mission in *And Then There Were None* reveal that justice in Christie's fiction extends beyond legal procedure into the realm of individual conscience and ethical judgment. The study argues that Christie transforms detective fiction from a genre concerned solely with solving crimes into one that critically interrogates the nature of justice, morality and human responsibility. By foregrounding the tension between legal authority and ethical conviction, this paper contributes to contemporary scholarship on detective fiction and highlights the enduring relevance of Christie's works in discussions of law, morality and literary ethics.

Keywords: Agatha Christie; Detective Fiction; Ethical Literary Criticism; Justice and Morality; Extra-Legal Justice

Introduction

Detective fiction has long occupied a significant position in modern literature for its unique ability to combine intellectual engagement with social and ethical inquiry. Traditionally, the genre follows a recognisable pattern: a crime disrupts social

order, an investigator uncovers the truth through logical reasoning, and justice is restored by exposing and punishing the offender. This conventional structure, established by writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and later refined during the Golden Age of detective fiction, reinforces the belief that rational investigation ultimately triumphs over crime and chaos. Within this tradition, detective fiction has often been regarded as a literary form that affirms the authority of law and the restoration of moral order.

Among the writers who shaped the Golden Age of detective fiction, Agatha Christie occupies a distinctive place for her innovative narrative techniques, psychological insight, and complex ethical concerns. While Christie is widely celebrated for her ingenious plots, carefully concealed clues, and memorable detectives, her fiction also raises profound questions about justice, morality, and the limitations of legal institutions. Rather than presenting crime merely as a puzzle to be solved, Christie frequently constructs situations in which legal justice and moral justice are not synonymous. Her novels encourage readers to reconsider whether the law is always capable of delivering justice and whether moral responsibility may, in certain circumstances, extend beyond legal definitions of guilt and punishment.

This ethical complexity is particularly evident in *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *And Then There Were None* (1939), two of Christie's most critically acclaimed novels. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, the murder of Samuel Ratchett—revealed to be the criminal responsible for the kidnapping and murder of Daisy Armstrong—is carried out collectively by individuals seeking justice for a crime that the legal system failed to punish. Hercule Poirot, after uncovering the truth, faces an extraordinary moral dilemma: whether to uphold legal authority by exposing the perpetrators or to acknowledge the ethical legitimacy of their actions by allowing them to escape prosecution. In *And Then There Were None*, Justice Lawrence Wargrave orchestrates the deaths of ten individuals whom he believes have escaped legal punishment for their past crimes. Acting simultaneously as judge, jury, and executioner, Wargrave establishes his own system of justice, thereby challenging the boundaries between lawful authority, personal morality, and vigilantism.

These narratives reveal that Christie is less concerned with simply identifying the criminal than with examining the moral consequences of crime and punishment. The central question is not only who committed the murder but also whether the act can be ethically justified when formal legal institutions fail to protect the innocent or punish the guilty. Such questions transform detective fiction from a genre of logical deduction into a space for philosophical reflection on justice, responsibility, and human conscience. Christie's novels therefore invite readers to participate in ethical judgment, requiring them to evaluate not only evidence but also competing moral perspectives.

Although Agatha Christie's detective fiction has generated extensive scholarly attention, much of the existing criticism has focused on her narrative craftsmanship, puzzle construction, characterization, and contribution to the development of the detective genre. Studies frequently analyse her manipulation of clues, narrative deception, and the intellectual satisfaction produced by the resolution of mystery. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to the ethical dimensions of justice that underlie many of her most celebrated novels. In particular, the conflict between legal justice and moral justice, and the role of the detective as a moral decision-maker rather than merely an investigator, remains insufficiently explored through an integrated ethical and narratological perspective. This study seeks to address that gap by examining how Christie complicates conventional notions of justice through morally ambiguous characters, extra-legal punishment, and ethically challenging narrative resolutions.

The present study employs Ethical Literary Criticism as its primary theoretical framework, supported by Narrative Theory. Ethical Literary Criticism provides a framework for analysing the moral conflicts, ethical choices, and questions of responsibility embedded within literary texts, while Narrative Theory facilitates an examination of the structural techniques through which Christie shapes readers' perceptions of guilt, innocence, and justice. Together, these approaches enable a comprehensive understanding of how narrative form and ethical inquiry interact in Christie's detective fiction.

The paper argues that *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None* deliberately challenge the conventional association between justice and legality by presenting situations in which extra-legal actions appear morally persuasive despite violating legal norms. Christie does not offer definitive answers to these ethical dilemmas; instead, she encourages readers to negotiate the tensions between law, conscience, revenge, and responsibility. Consequently, justice in her fiction emerges not as a fixed legal principle but as a contested moral concept shaped by human experience, social values, and individual judgment.

By examining Christie's representation of moral ambiguity through close textual analysis, this paper demonstrates that her detective fiction extends beyond the boundaries of entertainment and intellectual puzzle-solving. It offers a sophisticated exploration of ethical responsibility, the limitations of legal institutions, and the enduring complexity of justice. In doing so, the study contributes to contemporary scholarship by highlighting the philosophical and ethical dimensions of Christie's work and reaffirming the relevance of detective fiction as a significant field of literary inquiry.

Literature Review

Agatha Christie remains one of the most extensively studied writers in detective fiction, with scholars examining her contributions from diverse perspectives, including narrative structure, genre conventions, psychology, ethics, gender, and reader response. Earlier criticism primarily celebrated her mastery of the puzzle plot, emphasizing the logical construction of mysteries and the intellectual engagement offered by her detective narratives. Foundational studies of detective fiction by critics such as Tzvetan Todorov, John G. Cawelti, Stephen Knight, and Martin Priestman established Christie as a defining figure of the Golden Age, highlighting her ability to balance suspense, fair-play clueing, and logical deduction. These studies largely viewed detective fiction as a genre that restores social order through rational investigation and the eventual triumph of justice.

More recent scholarship, however, has moved beyond this formalist approach to examine Christie's works as texts that engage with broader philosophical, social, and ethical questions. Contemporary critics argue that Christie's fiction should not be understood merely as recreational literature but as narratives that explore human psychology, moral responsibility, and the complexities of justice. Gill Plain, for instance, demonstrates that Christie's novels address issues of power, deception, morality, and social change, challenging the long-standing assumption that her works are limited to ingenious puzzle-solving. Rather than treating detective fiction as escapist entertainment, Plain situates Christie within wider literary and cultural debates, emphasizing the ethical concerns embedded in her narratives.

Another significant direction in Christie studies concerns narrative technique and reader participation. Scholars have shown how Christie manipulates perspective, chronology, and the distribution of clues to encourage readers to become active participants in the investigative process. Narrative deception, unreliable testimony, and strategic concealment create intellectual engagement while simultaneously influencing readers' moral judgments. Instead of merely identifying the criminal, readers are invited to evaluate motives, intentions, and ethical responsibility. Such studies suggest that Christie's detective fiction functions not only as a logical puzzle but also as an exploration of how narrative shapes perceptions of guilt and innocence. Recent criticism further argues that Christie transforms the detective story into a dialogue between author and reader, where interpretation itself becomes an ethical act.

Questions of justice and morality have also received increasing scholarly attention, particularly in relation to *Murder on the Orient Express*. Existing studies generally focus on the conflict between legal justice and retributive justice, examining how the collective murder of Ratchett complicates conventional distinctions between criminality and righteousness. Scholars have argued that the conspirators perceive themselves as agents of justice after the legal system fails to punish the perpetrator of

the Armstrong tragedy. Poirot's decision to conceal the truth has therefore been interpreted as an acknowledgment that moral justice may, under exceptional circumstances, outweigh legal obligation. Recent analyses have further explored the suspects as morally ambiguous characters whose actions are shaped by grief, loyalty, and collective responsibility rather than individual criminal intent. These studies demonstrate that Christie deliberately blurs the boundaries between legality and morality, encouraging readers to question whether justice can always be achieved through formal legal institutions.

Scholars have likewise recognised the philosophical dimensions of Christie's detective fiction. Rather than portraying detectives solely as rational investigators, recent criticism argues that Christie transforms them into ethical interpreters who confront questions of conscience, punishment, and responsibility. Detective investigation thus becomes a means of exploring broader philosophical concerns regarding the nature of justice, guilt, and human choice. Such readings have contributed to a reassessment of Christie as a writer whose fiction combines suspense with moral and psychological inquiry, expanding the intellectual scope of detective fiction beyond its conventional generic boundaries.

Despite these important contributions, significant gaps remain in the existing scholarship. Much of the research concentrates on individual novels or isolated ethical issues, with *Murder on the Orient Express* receiving considerably greater critical attention than *And Then There Were None* in discussions of justice. Comparative studies that examine both novels through a unified ethical framework remain relatively limited. Moreover, previous research often privileges either narrative structure or moral philosophy without adequately exploring how Christie's narrative techniques actively shape readers' ethical interpretations. The relationship between narrative form and moral judgment has therefore not been examined in sufficient depth.

The present study addresses this gap by undertaking a comparative analysis of *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None* through the combined perspectives of Ethical Literary Criticism and Narrative Theory. By examining how Christie employs narrative strategies to complicate the relationship between legal justice and moral justice, this paper argues that her detective fiction transcends the conventional objective of identifying the criminal. Instead, Christie invites readers to participate in ethical deliberation, transforming detective fiction into a sustained exploration of law, conscience, responsibility, and the enduring ambiguity of justice.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs Ethical Literary Criticism as its primary theoretical framework, supported by Narrative Theory, to examine the representation of moral

ambiguity and justice in Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and *And Then There Were None* (1939). The integration of these approaches enables an analysis of both the ethical dilemmas embedded within the narratives and the narrative techniques through which Christie shapes readers' perceptions of justice, guilt, and responsibility.

Ethical Literary Criticism, developed systematically by the Chinese literary theorist Nie Zhenzhao, regards literature as a medium through which ethical values, moral choices, and human relationships are explored. Unlike approaches that focus primarily on aesthetic or ideological concerns, Ethical Literary Criticism emphasises literature's capacity to represent ethical conflicts and to examine the consequences of human decisions. According to Nie, literary works construct ethical environments in which characters are compelled to make choices between competing moral values, revealing the complexity of human behaviour and the tension between individual conscience and social norms. Literature, therefore, functions not only as artistic expression but also as a reflection on ethical responsibility and moral judgment.

This framework is particularly relevant to Christie's detective fiction because her novels frequently move beyond the conventional objective of identifying the criminal to interrogate the ethical legitimacy of punishment itself. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, the collective murder of Samuel Ratchett challenges the distinction between legal guilt and moral righteousness. Although the conspirators commit homicide, their actions arise from a desire to punish a man who escaped legal accountability for the murder of Daisy Armstrong. Similarly, in *And Then There Were None*, Justice Lawrence Wargrave assumes the roles of investigator, judge, and executioner by orchestrating the deaths of individuals whom he believes have evaded legal punishment. These narratives raise fundamental ethical questions concerning justice, revenge, responsibility, and the authority to determine guilt. Ethical Literary Criticism provides an effective framework for evaluating these moral dilemmas without reducing them to simple legal binaries of innocence and culpability.

While Ethical Literary Criticism explains the moral dimensions of Christie's fiction, Narrative Theory illuminates the structural techniques through which these ethical questions are communicated. Detective fiction relies upon carefully controlled narration, selective disclosure of information, manipulation of perspective, and the gradual revelation of truth. Tzvetan Todorov's influential distinction between the "story of the crime" and the "story of the investigation" demonstrates that detective fiction operates simultaneously on two narrative levels: the hidden sequence of criminal events and the detective's reconstruction of those events. This dual narrative structure allows Christie to delay moral judgment by restricting both the detective's and the reader's access to complete information.

Furthermore, Gérard Genette's concepts of narrative order, duration, and focalization explain how Christie manipulates chronology and perspective to sustain suspense while influencing readers' ethical responses. Through fragmented testimony, misleading clues, strategic omissions, and controlled shifts in perspective, Christie encourages readers to participate actively in the investigative process. As new evidence emerges, readers are repeatedly required to reassess their assumptions regarding guilt, innocence, and justice. Narrative therefore functions not merely as a vehicle for storytelling but as a mechanism for shaping ethical interpretation.

The integration of Ethical Literary Criticism and Narrative Theory offers a comprehensive analytical framework for the present study. Ethical Literary Criticism facilitates an examination of the moral conflicts experienced by Christie's characters and the competing concepts of legal and moral justice that emerge within the narratives. Narrative Theory complements this analysis by demonstrating how Christie's narrative strategies guide readers toward increasingly complex ethical judgments. Rather than presenting justice as an objective legal principle, Christie constructs narratives in which truth is gradually uncovered, moral certainty remains elusive, and readers themselves become participants in evaluating ethical responsibility.

By combining these theoretical perspectives, this study argues that Christie's detective fiction transforms the traditional detective novel into a sophisticated exploration of justice, conscience, and moral ambiguity. The detective's task is not merely to identify the perpetrator but to negotiate the difficult relationship between law, morality, and human compassion. Consequently, Christie's novels reveal that justice cannot always be measured solely through legal institutions but must also be understood through the ethical complexities of individual circumstances and human experience.

Analysis

Legal Justice versus Moral Justice

Agatha Christie challenges the conventional detective fiction ideal that justice is achieved through legal institutions. In both *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None*, she exposes the gap between legal justice and moral justice, demonstrating that the law often fails to punish the truly guilty. Through this ethical conflict, Christie transforms detective fiction into a reflection on justice, conscience and moral responsibility.

In *Murder on the Orient Express*, the Armstrong kidnapping case reveals the inadequacy of legal justice. Ratchett is exposed as Cassetti, the murderer of Daisy Armstrong, who had "escaped justice in America. There was no question as to his guilt" (200). The law's inability to punish an unquestionably guilty criminal undermines its moral authority and creates an ethical crisis. As a result, the twelve

conspirators collectively execute Casseti, believing that moral justice must prevail where legal justice has failed. Mrs. Hubbard explains that "Colonel Arbuthnot was very keen on having twelve of us. He seemed to think it made it more in order" (205). Their collective participation symbolically represents a jury delivering the justice denied by the courts. Rather than glorifying revenge, Christie presents the murder as an ethically complex response to institutional failure.

Poirot further complicates this dilemma by refusing to impose a purely legal solution. After reconstructing the crime, he presents two possible explanations and concludes, "Having placed my solution before you, I have the honour to retire from the case" (206). By leaving the final decision to others, Poirot acknowledges that justice cannot always be measured solely by legal standards. Christie thus redefines the detective as an ethical mediator who balances law with compassion.

A more radical critique of legal justice emerges in *And Then There Were None*. Justice Lawrence Wargrave believes that the legal system has repeatedly failed to punish those responsible for innocent deaths. In his confession, he admits, "Crime and its punishment has always fascinated me." (302) This confession reveals that his pursuit of justice is inseparable from a personal fascination with judgment and punishment. Wargrave further explains that he deliberately selected people "individuals for offences which the law cannot touch," (162), exposing the central ethical dilemma of the novel: when the law fails, does an individual have the moral right to administer justice? Christie refuses to offer a definitive answer. Although Wargrave exposes the shortcomings of the legal system, his transformation into judge, jury, and executioner demonstrates the dangers of replacing due process with personal morality.

The contrast between Poirot and Wargrave reveals Christie's balanced conception of justice. Both recognise the limitations of the legal system, yet their responses differ fundamentally. Poirot exercises restraint, treating the Armstrong case as an exceptional moral circumstance, whereas Wargrave elevates himself to absolute moral authority. Through this contrast, Christie distinguishes ethical judgment from moral absolutism, suggesting that justice requires compassion, humility, and ethical reflection rather than unquestioned obedience to either law or personal conviction.

Viewed through the framework of Ethical Literary Criticism, both novels demonstrate that justice cannot be confined to legal definitions alone. Christie neither glorifies vigilantism nor wholly endorses legal formalism. Instead, she presents justice as an ethical process shaped by the continual negotiation between law, conscience, and human responsibility. By compelling readers to confront these competing moral claims, Christie elevates detective fiction beyond the solution of a mystery into a profound exploration of ethical decision-making. I agree with your

observation. This section repeats ideas from *Legal Justice versus Moral Justice*, especially the discussion of Poirot's decision and Wargrave's vigilantism. For a journal article, each analytical section should have a distinct focus.

The Detective as Moral Arbiter

Agatha Christie redefines the detective as more than an investigator or problem solver; she presents the detective as a moral arbiter whose responsibility extends beyond discovering the truth to evaluating its ethical implications. In *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None*, Poirot and Justice Wargrave occupy positions of moral authority, yet they exercise that authority in fundamentally different ways. Through this contrast, Christie examines the ethical responsibilities and limitations of those entrusted with the administration of justice.

In *Murder on the Orient Express*, Poirot's investigation culminates not only in solving the mystery but also in confronting the moral circumstances that surround the crime. Having uncovered the collective responsibility of the passengers, he refrains from imposing a rigid legal judgment and instead withdraws after presenting the truth: "Having placed my solution before you, I have the honour to retire from the case" (206). His decision reflects ethical restraint rather than legal compromise. Poirot recognises that the detective's duty is not simply to expose guilt but also to consider the human suffering and moral complexities that underlie criminal actions. Christie therefore portrays him as an ethical mediator who balances truth with compassion.

Justice Wargrave represents the opposite model of moral authority. Believing that the legal system has repeatedly failed to punish the guilty, he assumes complete control over the process of justice by acting simultaneously as investigator, judge, jury, and executioner. Unlike Poirot, Wargrave does not acknowledge the ethical limits of his authority. His confidence in his own moral judgment transforms justice into an instrument of personal conviction, demonstrating how the pursuit of justice can become ethically problematic when detached from accountability and compassion.

The contrast between Poirot and Wargrave reveals two competing models of ethical judgment. Poirot exercises moral discretion while remaining conscious of the limitations of individual authority; Wargrave equates his personal convictions with absolute justice, allowing no space for doubt or mercy. Christie suggests that the legitimacy of ethical judgment depends not upon the possession of authority but upon the capacity for humility, empathy, and moral self-restraint.

Viewed through the framework of Ethical Literary Criticism, Christie ultimately reimagines the detective as an ethical interpreter rather than a mere enforcer of the law. By shifting the detective's role from solving crimes to evaluating

their moral significance, she demonstrates that justice involves not only the establishment of truth but also the careful negotiation of conscience, responsibility, and human values. Consequently, the detective becomes a figure through whom Christie interrogates the ethical foundations of justice itself.

Narrative Strategies and Ethical Judgment

Agatha Christie employs sophisticated narrative strategies that actively involve readers in ethical judgment rather than presenting morality as fixed or absolute. In *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None*, narrative structure, restricted perspective, delayed revelation, and psychological suspense challenge readers to evaluate competing moral claims. From the perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism, these techniques transform readers from passive observers into ethical participants who must continually reassess their judgments as new evidence emerges.

In *Murder on the Orient Express*, Christie constructs the investigation through fragmented testimonies, conflicting evidence, and multiple perspectives. Each passenger conceals part of the truth, creating a narrative that postpones moral certainty until the novel's conclusion. As Poirot remarks, "The impossible cannot have happened, therefore the impossible must be possible in spite of appearances" (118). This principle governs not only the detective's reasoning but also the reader's ethical engagement. Christie encourages readers to question appearances and suspend immediate moral judgment until the complete truth is revealed. The gradual disclosure of the Armstrong tragedy transforms readers' perception of the murder, shifting sympathy from the victim to the perpetrators and demonstrating that ethical judgment depends upon context rather than isolated actions.

Christie further strengthens this ethical complexity through the novel's dual solution. Instead of offering a single authoritative explanation, Poirot presents two competing versions of the crime before withdrawing from the final decision: "Having placed my solution before you, I have the honour to retire from the case" (206). By refusing to impose a definitive moral verdict, Christie transfers ethical responsibility to the readers themselves. They must decide whether the passengers' actions constitute criminal murder or justified moral retribution. The narrative thus resists simple distinctions between innocence and guilt, compelling readers to engage in ethical reflection rather than passive acceptance.

In *And Then There Were None*, Christie adopts an even more psychologically immersive narrative strategy. The isolated setting, shifting focalisation, and gradual elimination of characters create an atmosphere of uncertainty in which both characters and readers become increasingly distrustful. Since no detective is present to provide rational guidance, readers must independently interpret the motives and moral responsibility of each suspect. The recurring nursery rhyme structures the

narrative while simultaneously foreshadowing each death, reinforcing the inevitability of punishment and sustaining ethical tension throughout the novel.

The final confession fundamentally reshapes readers' understanding of the narrative. Wargrave reveals that he selected individuals "whose guilt was certain, whose crimes had unpunished" (207). His explanation forces readers to reconsider earlier assumptions about both justice and guilt. Yet Christie deliberately avoids presenting Wargrave as either a hero or a villain. Although his victims have escaped legal punishment, his carefully orchestrated murders expose the ethical dangers of assuming absolute moral authority. By delaying this revelation until the conclusion, Christie ensures that readers repeatedly revise their ethical judgments in light of new information.

Viewed through Ethical Literary Criticism, these narrative strategies demonstrate that ethical understanding develops through interpretation rather than immediate certainty. Christie repeatedly withholds complete knowledge, compelling readers to distinguish between appearance and reality, legal guilt and moral responsibility, justice and revenge. Ethical judgment therefore becomes an evolving intellectual and moral process rather than a predetermined conclusion.

By employing fragmented narration, delayed disclosure, psychological suspense, and open-ended moral resolution, Christie transforms detective fiction into an interactive ethical experience. Readers are not simply invited to identify the criminal; they are challenged to examine their own moral assumptions and participate in evaluating complex ethical dilemmas. Consequently, the narrative itself becomes a medium through which Christie explores the relationship between truth, justice, and human conscience, establishing detective fiction as a form of ethical inquiry rather than merely a genre of mystery and suspense.

Comparative Discussion

A comparative reading of *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None* demonstrates Agatha Christie's sustained exploration of the complex relationship between legal justice and moral justice. In both novels, the failure of legal institutions to punish the guilty creates ethical dilemmas that challenge conventional notions of justice. However, Christie offers contrasting responses to this failure. In *Murder on the Orient Express*, justice emerges as a collective and compassionate response to institutional inadequacy, where moral responsibility outweighs strict legal obligation. Poirot's decision to withhold the truth reflects his belief that justice must consider ethical circumstances rather than rely solely on legal procedure. Conversely, *And Then There Were None* presents a darker vision in which Justice Wargrave assumes absolute moral authority, exposing the dangers of allowing personal conviction to replace the rule of law.

The two novels also differ in their narrative strategies for engaging readers' ethical judgment. While *Murder on the Orient Express* offers an open-ended resolution that invites readers to evaluate competing claims of legal and moral justice, *And Then There Were None* delays its final revelation until Wargrave's confession, compelling readers to reassess earlier assumptions about guilt, punishment, and responsibility. These contrasting narrative approaches reinforce Christie's view that justice is not a fixed legal principle but a complex ethical process shaped by context, intention, and conscience.

Viewed through the framework of Ethical Literary Criticism, both novels transcend the conventional detective narrative by presenting crime not merely as a mystery to be solved but as a means of examining the ethical tensions between law, morality and human responsibility. In doing so, Christie redefines detective fiction as a powerful medium for ethical inquiry.

Conclusion

Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* and *And Then There Were None* demonstrate that detective fiction is not merely a genre concerned with solving crimes but a powerful medium for examining the ethical complexities of justice. By exposing the limitations of legal institutions and presenting situations in which moral responsibility conflicts with legal authority, Christie challenges the conventional assumption that the identification and punishment of the criminal necessarily restore justice. Instead, she portrays justice as a dynamic ethical process shaped by conscience, responsibility, compassion, and the ambiguities of human judgment.

Through the combined framework of Ethical Literary Criticism and Narrative Theory, this study has shown that Christie transforms the detective from a mere investigator into an ethical arbiter and employs narrative strategies that actively engage readers in moral evaluation. The ethical contrast between Hercule Poirot's compassionate discretion and Justice Wargrave's uncompromising moral absolutism illustrates two divergent responses to the failure of legal justice. While Poirot recognises the necessity of ethical restraint, Wargrave demonstrates the dangers of assuming unchecked moral authority, thereby revealing that justice requires not only the recognition of guilt but also an awareness of the ethical limits of judgment.

More significantly, Christie's novels challenge readers to move beyond binary distinctions such as legality and illegality, innocence and guilt, or justice and revenge. They instead foreground the ethical tensions that arise when legal systems fail to uphold moral responsibility. In doing so, Christie redefines detective fiction as a form of ethical inquiry that invites readers to participate in evaluating competing moral claims rather than merely witnessing the resolution of a mystery.

By bringing Ethical Literary Criticism into dialogue with Christie's detective fiction, this study offers a fresh perspective on her work and demonstrates that her novels remain remarkably relevant to contemporary debates on literary ethics, justice, and the moral responsibilities of individuals and institutions. Ultimately, Christie suggests that the most enduring mystery is not the identity of the criminal but the elusive and contested nature of justice itself.

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