



INDIANA
REPERTORY
THEATRE

Indiana Repertory Theatre 140 W. Washington Street Indianapolis, IN 46204

The Mousetrap

by Agatha Christie

Study Guide

The Mousetrap:

The scene is rural England, a large, rather elegant country manor house in Berkshire County, not far from London; the time is the late 1930's. A young couple, Giles and Mollie Ralston, are opening their house, Monkswell Manor, as an inn, just in time for the Christmas holidays. Their first guest is a curious youth, named Christopher Wren. Before the evening is over he will be joined by a finnicky matron, Mrs. Boyle; a shady woman from Majorca, Miss Casewell; a man of questionable nationality, Mr. Paravicini; a retired army officer from India, Major Metcalf, and a policeman, Detective Trotter, who arrives on skis with news of a murder in London which has been linked to someone staying at Monkswell Manor.

Outside a blizzard rages, cutting these eight characters completely off from the outside world. The phone is conveniently out of order.

Another murder takes place, and the mystery begins.



Program cover for the original production in London

*Three blind mice, three blind mice,
See how they run, see how they run,
They all ran after the farmer's wife
Who cut off their tails with a carving knife,
Have you ever seen such a sight in your life,
As three blind mice?*

Agatha Christie often uses nursery rhymes as clues in her mysteries. Can you think how this rhyme might fit into THE MOUSETRAP?

The Story

This is the classic beginning of a whodunnit—that special kind of mystery story in which all the clues are laid out in front of the audience, but without the key information needed to link them up, we remain blissfully ignorant of who the murderer is until the final unveiling. In many of Agatha Christie's hundreds of mystery stories, novels, plays and movies, one of her famous amateur sleuths pieces the clues together and exposes the murderer. Her two most famous sleuths are: Hercule Poirot, a Belgian with a pencil mustache, and Miss Marple, a kindly English matron who solves crimes much the way Agatha Christie might herself.

The Mousetrap features neither of these famous Christie sleuths: instead the killer reveals himself—or herself—in a brilliant plot twist at the climax of the play. Of course we can't give you any hints—you'll have to come to the play and collect the clues for yourself—but justice is served, and all is set to rights in time for Christmas!



Miss Jane Marple and Mr. Hercule Poirot are Agatha Christie's amateur detective characters. In addition to appearing in many of her novels and short stories, they are featured in many of her play and movies. Margaret Rutherford (left) played Miss Marple in *Murder She Said*, *Murder at a Gallop*, *Murder Most Foul*, and *Murder Ahoy!* Albert Finney played Hercule Poirot in *Murder on the Orient Express*.

INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

Playwright's Biography: Agatha Christie, First Lady Of Crime



Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller Christie Mallowan was born Sept. 15, 1890, at Ashfield, her family's home in the seaside resort of Torquay, Devon, in England. She was the youngest child of Frederick Miller, a wealthy American, and his British wife, Clarissa. Agatha was educated at home by her mother and father.

Agatha's father died in 1901, leaving his family relatively poor. During Agatha's youth her mother would periodically rent out their family home and take her children to Europe, where travel and living were inexpensive.

Agatha attended finishing school in Paris beginning in 1906, where she showed particular talent as a singer and pianist. She considered a musical career, but eventually decided that her shyness in public would be a difficult barrier to overcome in a concert career. In 1914 she married a young Army officer, Archibald Christie. They were separated for most of World War I, when Christie was serving abroad and Agatha was working as a volunteer nurse. After the war, Christie went into business in London and a child, Rosalind, was born in 1919.

Agatha began her writing career in 1916, with a mystery titled *The Mysterious Affair of Styles*, but she was unable to find a publisher for this book until 1920. She published one or more books a year almost every year for the next 55 years, making her one of the most

prolific of all writers. Her book often came out just in time for the Christmas sales.

In 1926, Mrs. Christie disappeared for 10 days--this much-publicized occurrence may have been a stunt to boost sales of her latest book, but was, most likely, a protest against her husband's wayward behavior. In any event, the Christie's were divorced the following year.

In 1930, while on a vacation to the Middle East, Agatha met Max Mallowan, an archaeologist 14 years her junior, and they were married soon after. The following years found the famous Mrs. Christie splitting her time between writing in England, and travelling with her new husband on archaeological expeditions. Later, Mr. Mallowan was knighted by the Queen for his achievements.

After World War II, Agatha launched her second career--as a playwright. The success of her novels and short stories encouraged her to try her hand on the stage and several mystery plays were the result: *Black Coffee*, *Witness for the Prosecution*, and *The Mousetrap* were the most famous. *The Mousetrap* was to become the world's longest running play.

In the 1960's and 70's, Agatha became best known for her movie mysteries: *Murder on the Nile*, and *Murder on the Orient Express*. She was awarded the title Dame of the British Empire in 1971.

Mrs. Christie died in 1976; her book sales were estimated at 400 millions copies worldwide.

Evolution of THE MOUSETRAP

Agatha Christie was the queen of the murder mystery novel long before she topped her own highly successful career with the phenomenal hit play, THE MOUSETRAP. But it was in 1947, five years prior to the play's premiere, that the saga of the world's longest-running play began.

The British Broadcasting Company contacted Mrs. Christie at the request of Queen Mary. A special radio program was being produced in honor of the Queen's eightieth birthday, and the Queen desired to have something from Mrs. Christie included. The Queen, who was a Christie fan, wanted Agatha to try her hand at a radio play. Agatha wrote a forty-five minute radio play entitled THREE BLIND MICE, based on an idea which she had been saving up for a short story. Queen Mary and the radio audience liked it. And so THE MOUSETRAP was sprung.

Agatha could have very well left the radio play there. But something compelled her to expand it, to try her hand at turning it into a stage play: "The more I thought of THREE BLIND MICE, the more I felt that it might expand from a radio play to a three-act thriller," Mrs. Christie wrote in her autobiography. "It needed a couple of extra characters, a fuller background and plot, and a slow working up to the climax."

Mrs. Christie expanded her radio play, now known to the world as THE



Agatha Christie with her grandson Mathew and husband Max as they leave for Christmas in Tripoli in 1955, shortly after Christie had made Mathew the recipient of all THE MOUSETRAP royalties.



The original stage design for *The Mousetrap*. In 30 years the cast has worn out 4 sets of furniture.

MOUSETRAP. The new play for the stage was written in the autumn of 1951 and called, naturally enough, *THREE BLIND MICE*. But *THREE BLIND MICE* would not remain in Christie's hands for very long. She had other plans for it—plans which involved her long-time friend and stager of eleven of her plays, Peter Saunders.

Shortly after Christmas in 1951, Agatha Christie asked Saunders to lunch. "Over the coffee she handed me a brown paper parcel," Saunders recalled later in the book *THE LIFE AND CRIMES OF AGATHA CHRISTIE*, and said, "This is a little present for you. Don't unwrap it until you get back to your office!" The present was the script of *THREE BLIND MICE*.

Saunders liked the play but thought that the script, which included two sets and a cast of ten, was rather too much for his resources at the Ambassadors Theatre. After Saunders aired his opinion to Mrs. Christie, she returned the next day with the script rewritten, and one of the sets and two of the actors deleted. Meanwhile, she postponed publishing *THREE BLIND MICE* in its short story form so as not to reveal the ending of the plot to potential theatre-goers.

Now only one thing stood in the way of the play's success—its title. *THREE BLIND MICE* had been the name of another successful play in London, so a different title had to be found.

It was the author's son-in-law, Anthony Hicks, who made the suggestion that the title of a play mentioned in Shakespeare's *HAMLET* should be lifted out of context and bestowed upon *THREE BLIND MICE*. In Act III, scene ii of *HAMLET*, during the performance which Hamlet causes to be staged before Claudius and Gertrude, the King asks, "What do you call the play?" to which Hamlet replies, "The Mousetrap." The official title *THE MOUSETRAP* was adopted, and Christie's play was born.

What happened to the royalties of *THE MOUSETRAP*? When it opened in 1952, Agatha Christie gave all her rights in the play to her grandson, Mathew Prichard, who was then nine years old. Today, in 1986, he is in his forties, and the play has made him a millionaire. As his grandmother tartly observed in her autobiography: "Mathew, of course, was always the most lucky member of his family, and it *would* be Mathew's gift that turned out to be the big money winner. I didn't think the play would run more than eight months."

Mrs. Christie was often asked why *THE MOUSETRAP* has become the longest-running play. Her reply was that it was mostly luck, but also because the play had a little bit of something for everyone and each clue unfolds into the next, dragging the audience deeper and deeper into the mystery. In what was perhaps a stroke of long-sighted genius, Mrs. Christie provided in her contract that no Broadway production or film version of the play could occur until the London production was closed--consequently, neither eventuality has taken place, and the men who bought the film rights in 1952 have since died, leaving a lucrative legacy to their heirs, should the London production ever close, that is!

It is not surprising that, over the years, some performances of *THE MOUSETRAP* have produced some interesting side notes. One such story happened on March 15, 1959, when the cast of *THE MOUSETRAP* gave a performance



Agatha Christie, assisted by producer Peter Saunders, cuts the half-ton birthday cake made in the form of a giant mousetrap at the 10th birthday party of *THE MOUSETRAP* in 1962.

of the play at Wormwood Scrubs Prison in London. The set and furniture did not have to be transported to the prison, for they were constructed by the prisoners from designs supplied by Peter Saunders. An audience of three hundred prisoners, all men serving long sentences, enjoyed the play and applauded warmly at the end. Or rather, 298 of them applauded, for two had taken the opportunity to escape during Act II!

Tradition has it that those who have seen the play in London have made it a point not to reveal the identity of the killer to others who have not yet seen the play. But here is one recorded exception: a taxi-driver is said to have been so disgusted at the smallness of the tip he was given that he took his revenge at his patrons by shouting after them as they walked towards the entrance, '_____ did it!'

AMBASSADORS
THEATRE, 101 WEST STREET, CAMBRIDGE CIRCUS, W.C.2.
Manager: Peter Saunders. General Manager: W. O. Cotes. M. J. Major. Box Office: 4111.
Licensed by the Lord Chamberlain. Box Office: 4111. Tel: TEMple Bar 4111.
MONDAY to FRIDAY: 7.30. SATURDAY: 5.30 & 8.45. TUESDAY: 2.30
Stalls 15/-, 10/-, 8/-, 6/-, Dress Circle 15/-, 14/-, 8/-, 5/-, Pit (unreserved) 3/-
PETER SAUNDERS presents
RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH AND SHEILA SIM
THE MOUSETRAP
BY AGATHA CHRISTIE
JESSICA SPENCER
AUBREY DEXTER
MIGNON O'DELL
ALLAN CLELLAND
OPENING ON NOVEMBER 25th
IN PAUL AND MARTIN MILLER
Directed by PETER COTES
Decor by ROGER FURSE

Poster for the opening of the original production, 1952. And it's still running!

<p>Christie's husband, archeologist Max Mallowan, once wrote in comment upon his wife's most popular play, "Seeing THE MOUSETRAP became a part of The American Tour, as important as a glimpse of Buckingham Palace and a visit to The Tower of London."</p> <p>Agatha Christie's play, THE MOUSETRAP, which opened at the Ambassadors on November 26, 1952, and in 1974 transferred next door to the St. Martin's, is still running today. The play had been performed in at least forty-one countries, including several in Eastern Europe. It is becoming a three-generation legacy, not only within Christie's own family, but within its audiences as well, as audience members of the early years bring their children, and now their grandchildren to see London's oldest stage tradition.</p> <p>Anne M. Voegele</p>	<p>1908 The Circular Staircase Mary Roberts Rinehart The first "Had I But Known" suspense novel</p> <p>1912 The Silent Bullet Arthur B. Reeve The first science fiction detection</p> <p>1915 The Thirty-nine Steps John Buchan The spy novel as pure patriotism</p> <p>1920 The Mysterious Affair at Styles Agatha Christie The detective story as fair play with Hercule Poirot</p> <p>1927 The Snarl of the Beast Carroll John Daly The first hardboiled detective, Race Williams</p> <p>1928 Ashenden, or the British Agent W. Somerset Maugham The first realist spy tale</p> <p>1929 Red Harvest Dashiell Hammett The first arrival of Black Mask toughness</p> <p>1929 The Roman Hat Mystery Ellery Queen The first classic fair play novel, American style</p> <p>1930 Strong Poison Dorothy Sayers The first of the Lord Peter Wimsey detections</p> <p>1931 Malice Aforethought Frances Iles The first psychological crime novel</p>	<p>1933 The Strange Case of Peter the Lett Simenon The first Maigret novel</p> <p>1936 Death at the President's Lodging Michael Innes The first don detective</p> <p>1937 The Dark Frontier Eric Ambler The first non-patriotic spy novel</p> <p>1946 The Big Clock Kenneth Fearing The first remarkable novel of crime not detection</p> <p>1952 My Name is Michael Sibley John Bingham The first British crime story to say "Policemen are not so wonderful."</p> <p>1953 Casino Royale Ian Fleming The first James Bond novel, the spy tale as good fun</p> <p>1963 The Ipcress File Len Deighton The joint first anti-romantic spy novel</p> <p>1963 The Spy Who Came in From the Cold John Le Carre The joint first anti-romantic spy novel</p> <p>1968 The Man on the Balcony Wahloo and Sjowall The first philosophical crime novel, originally in Swedish</p>
<p>A Timeline of Achievement in Crime Writing</p> <p>1841 The Murders in the Rue Morgue Edgar Allan Poe The first detective story</p> <p>1870 The Mystery of Edwin Drood Charles Dickens his unfinished mystery</p> <p>1887 A Study in Scarlet Arthur Conan Doyle The advent of Sherlock Holmes</p> <p>1890 Guilty Bonds William LeQueux The first modern spy novel</p> <p>1907 The Red Thumb Mask R. Austin Freeman The first strictly scientific detection</p>	<p>1928</p> <p>1929</p> <p>1929</p> <p>1930</p> <p>1931</p>	<p>1953</p> <p>1963</p> <p>1963</p> <p>1968</p>