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Locked Rooms and Interpreting Readers: The Role of Embedded Texts in the Locked-Room Mysteries of Poe, Leroux, and Christie

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LOCKED ROOMS AND INTERPRETING READERS: THE ROLE OF EMBEDDED
TEXTS IN THE LOCKED-ROOM MYSTERIES OF
POE, LEROUX, AND CHRISTIE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

By

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Carolyn Elizabeth Stoermer ENTITLED Locked Rooms and Interpreting Readers: The Role of Embedded Texts in the Locked-Room Mysteries of Poe, Leroux, and Christie BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts.

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Abstract

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As closed narratives, locked-room mysteries risk the sense of interpretive play for which the larger detective genre is known. To mitigate this risk, writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Gaston Leroux, and Agatha Christie incorporate embedded texts into their locked-room stories. These recreated documents encourage readers' involvement by eliciting culturally specific interpretive reactions. Studying how these authors' embedded texts simultaneously innovate and conserve within the locked-room subgenre brings critics closer to understanding exactly how the detective story earned its reputation as one of the most engaging forms of fiction.

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As part of a genre that focuses more on structuring a narrative puzzle than on creating what is aesthetically pleasing, locked-room detective stories must actively develop and sustain readers' participation and interest to a degree that other narratives do not (Dove, The Reader 2-3). The use of embedded texts is one method by which detective fiction writers maintain this participation. These documents, often newspaper articles, partially destroyed letters, maps, or ciphers are recreated visually for readers as texts independent from the larger narrative within which they appear, providing an entry point through which readers may not only participate in their interpretation but also connect to the entire mystery's solution. Since these texts engage readers most successfully if they speak to the story's particular audience, an examination of the embedded texts within locked-room mysteries of different eras and cultures should indicate how various authors perceived their readers' interpretive expectations.

Although critics examine detective fiction through a variety of theoretical lenses, the genre's strong emphasis on reader participation is widely acknowledged (Dove 26; Grossvogel 16; Kermode 180; Roth 181; Sweeney 8). As the detective and the criminal are paired in an interpretive

game, so, too, are the reader and writer, and while the latter relationship may be characterized as either combative or collaborative, imbalanced or equivalent, depending on the critic, its presence, as reader-reception theorist Wolfgang Iser explains, is critical to the development of the text's "aesthetic object," or meaning (92). According to Iser's The Act of Reading, reading is an active experience during which the author's creation, the text, forces interaction from the reader (qtd. in Dove 26). As George Dove explains, Iser's true contribution to the field of reader-oriented theory as it pertains to detective fiction lies in his understanding of the "gaps and blanks" or, as Iser calls them, "areas of indeterminacy" within a text that "stimulate in the reader a process of ideation that results in interpretation, the creation of the aesthetic object, that is, the meaning of the text" (26). Dove describes these blanks as passages that "raise more questions than they answer," encouraging the reader to "bridge [the gaps] with projections" of his or her own (26). As the reader interacts with the text's "gaps" by making interpretations and predictions, his or her individual experience shapes the text itself. Since for Iser this aesthetic object varies "in accordance with the social and cultural code of the individual reader," the

nature of the collaboration between reader and writer varies depending upon the particular cultural moment for which the story is written (93). The ties between culture and the narrative structures of popular detective stories offer insight into these collaborative relationships, but they are not particularly well explored in contemporary criticism.

While the entire detective genre involves this interdependent reader-writer relationship to some degree, it is particularly necessary within the locked-room mystery. Stories in this sub-genre are overt in their focus on interpretive processes; S.E. Sweeney explains that "with its streamlined structure, its emphasis on interpretation at all levels of plot and narration, and its peculiar focus on the relationship between writer and reader," the locked-room mystery exemplifies the most striking aspects of detective fiction and thus "represents narrativity in its purest form" (3). The locked room physically represents the puzzle-like nature of detective fiction through an ostensibly unsolvable, spatial riddle. By definition, such impossible scenarios present insufficient opportunity through which readers might engage with the text; the detective is compelled to tackle the mystery in the first place because no one else can meaningfully interpret the

available information. Like the locked room itself, the locked-room mystery narrative is sealed, and such a closed narrative risks striking readers as one huge, impassable interpretive "gap."

The difficulty of this daunting structure is not that readers cannot solve it but that they cannot engage with it. As Dove points out

...what most readers want is not the ability to reach the solution early (and thus spoil the fun) but a means of *interpreting* the problem in the special sense in which detective-fiction problems must be interpreted. (The Reader 20)

Defined as they are by their apparent impossibility, locked-room mysteries show that the nature of the exchange between the story's creator and his or her audience is of paramount concern; if the writer does not provide a specific opportunity or "gap" through which readers can feasibly engage with the text, he or she risks losing their interpretive involvement completely. Through these negotiations, locked-room mysteries supply prime examples of the fair-play rules that direct the interpretive transactions between readers and writers of detective fiction. Authors must compensate for the locked-room mystery's daunting impossibility by encouraging the

reader's interpretive involvement elsewhere in the text, and thus the binding role of embedded texts becomes especially vital. While Sweeney treats them primarily as yet another narrative layer, these texts, which, as already noted, often appear in the form of partially destroyed letters or ciphers, newspaper accounts, or spatial diagrams and maps, also bind the reader to his or her role in the aesthetic object's creation in ways particular to the story's cultural context.

As detective fiction in concentrated form, then, the locked-room mystery walks a fine line between engaging puzzle and closed narrative and must actively court readers' involvement. The trope of the embedded text is thus frequently crucial to locked-room mysteries' success: the presentation of such visual and spatial clues provide smaller, more easily navigated "gaps" through which readers may participate in the solution of a puzzle otherwise too tightly designed for significant interpretive involvement (Iser 169; Dove 26).

Since, as Iser explains, the aesthetic object's development depends upon the individual reader's cultural background, it follows that embedded texts will work differently to ensnare readers of different cultures and time periods. Following the guidelines set forth by Edgar

Allan Poe's influential "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," subsequent writers of locked-room mysteries reuse and renovate past narrative structures, manipulating embedded texts in both form and function to establish more concrete connections between their particular audiences and the interpretive moments encouraged by their stories. Gaston Leroux and Agatha Christie, for example, while employing embedded texts to a similar end in their locked-room mysteries, do so in subtly different ways as they work to establish themselves as innovative within a microcosm of the conservative detective genre. These similarities and differences can be read as reflections of the interpretive expectations of readers' cultures and experiences with the genre as a whole.

Generally understood as one of the first detective stories (Sweeney 1; Creswell 38), Edgar Allan Poe's locked-room mystery "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" emphasizes the usefulness of audience-specific embedded texts even as it establishes many of the detective genre's conventions. Poe presents the newspaper account that informs the two main characters--C. August Dupin and his anonymous, narrating friend--as an enticingly interpretable text; despite the story's hermetic design, readers are able to gain an

interpretive foothold by examining the embedded document concurrently with the characters.

The embedded text's appearance in "Rue Morgue" is not the only indication that Poe recognizes the importance of courting reader negotiation, however; Poe first alerts readers to the tale's focus on interpretation in his essay-like introduction. Here the narrator explores the differences between "concentrative" attention, as is frequently demonstrated during games of chess, and analytic observation, which one might employ while evaluating the faces of opponents during a card game (142). He also makes a distinction between analytic skill and creative "ingenuity," arguing that between the two "there exists a difference far greater, indeed, than that between the fancy and the imagination, but of a character very strictly analogous" and claiming ultimately "that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the *truly* imaginative never otherwise than analytic" (143). The introductory section ends with the pairing of these two "very strictly analogous" abilities, a move that stresses their importance throughout the subsequent narrative.

This introductory essay also exemplifies Poe's frequent habit of blending genres, and although this habit may stem from a desire to capture as broad a readership as

possible, it also has some curious effects on the reader. Brett Zimmerman argues that Poe often uses the instructive essay for his stories' introductions as a rhetorical device with which to "'soften up,' to *condition*, his audience" and to "prepare the audience to understand the specific cases to follow by illuminating the theories first" (36). "'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,'" he explains, "commences with an essay on certain mental skills before we hear about their display by... Dupin" (37). The story's narrator himself highlights the functional quality of the introduction when he states that "The narrative which follows will appear to the reader somewhat in light of a commentary on the propositions just advanced" (143).

But the essay-introduction presented in "Rue Morgue" does much more than simply foreground Dupin's amazing, creatively analytical skills; its emphasis on gameplay, both as a recreational activity and as a metaphor for real-life interpretation, prepares readers to participate actively in the interpretive game Poe later provides with the embedded text. As the narrator outlines the various observational or analytic skills needed to succeed at "chess," "draughts," and "whist," he pays particular attention to the relationships between the players, noting

the usefulness of being able to project oneself into another's mind:

Deprived of ordinary resources, the analyst throws himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith, and not unfrequently sees thus, at a glance, the sole methods (sometimes indeed absurdly simple ones) by which he may seduce into error or hurry into miscalculation. (142)

The type of analytic activity advocated here is not detached or passive; instead of simply observing from a safe distance, the analyst must actively "throw" himself into his opponent's position and compete in order to find the game's solution. This Romantic notion of an imagination that "throws" itself beyond typical limits would have been well known to readers of Poe's time (Bowra 180; Griffith 72). The speaker further explains that the ability to maintain active and complete observational attention, both to the games themselves and to the subtle tells of all opponents, "implies capacity for success in all these more important undertakings where mind struggles with mind" (142). A player who can succeed at whist in the manner described, therefore, has the advantage in real-life interpretive activities.

While the introduction's examples certainly illustrate themes prevalent throughout Dupin's resolution of the Rue Morgue murders, they also seem to do somewhat more: the introduction trains readers to think of recreational analysis as an active interpretational exercise and to value that activeness for its applicability to "more important undertakings" in their daily lives. In this sense, the introduction in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" does not "*condition*" readers simply to notice Dupin's stunning abilities; it also encourages them to strive to demonstrate and hone those abilities themselves. Poe highlights the necessity of readers' engagement with the text by emphasizing games and the game-like quality of all interactions "where mind struggles with mind," and his focus on interactive games here also reflects critics' frequent characterization of the detective genre as "play transformed into art" (Dove, "Detection Formula" 5). George Dove outlines the "apparent paradox" that "people read detective fiction for recreation, but they also read it for intellectual stimulation" (3). This "contradiction," he argues, is resolved for most critics by "the limited structure of the genre," which imposes rules upon the interaction between author and reader and thus transforms the typical narrative exchange into a type of "complicated

and extended puzzle" (3). Elaborating an idea first conveyed by Willard Huntington Wright, Dove compares the reader's interaction with classical detective fiction to solving a crossword puzzle: "both the crossword puzzle and the detective novel are free of stress, each offers the reader a task or set of related tasks, both are shaped by convention, and neither has any goal beyond itself" (3). The collaborative arrangement between reader and writer thus depends upon the promise of a solution. For readers to enjoy the intellectual stimulation afforded to them by a crossword puzzle "free of stress," they must be able to trust that each column or row contains the appropriate number of blanks for the answer; in other words, they must be able to trust that the puzzle's author is following the rules. Similarly, readers and writers of detective fiction participate in a contract of trust regarding a story's construction: as Dove explains, "A writer writes (and a reader reads) with an understanding of what is acceptable within the limits of the literary form" (4). The author's preservation of these fair-play rules, and the participatory opportunity those rules afford readers, is intrinsic to readers' successful enjoyment of a detective story, and Poe's emphasis on game-play in his introduction

suggests he recognizes the interactive, game-like quality of his own narrative.

Poe's own preservation of fair-play rules manifests in the presentation of an embedded text. When readers are finally presented with this interpretive gap, they have been fully prepared by the introduction to engage actively with the content of that text as if it were a game. They are attuned to the need to "observe," "examine," "consider," and "note"; they are aware that "the necessary knowledge is that of *what* to observe," and that skill lies "not so much in the validity of the inference as in the quality of the observation" (Poe 142). In order to flex their interpretive muscles, however, readers must be given a "gap" with which to engage, and a simple straight narrative, like the introductory essay, will not fulfill their needs as active analyzers nearly as well as one rife with interpretive opportunity. Here Poe inserts his embedded text, a newspaper account full of contradictory and "peculiar" information that readers are encouraged to sort out along with the characters (Poe 155). This embedded text's presentation triggers the training accomplished by the introductory section, and as the narrative progresses and the murders' impossibility is revealed, this text's

ability to occupy readers' active analysis becomes even more important.

The murders for which the story is named, two puzzlingly violent murders committed in a locked room, are first presented to Poe's readers through a sensational Parisian newspaper account read by Dupin and his anonymous, "Watson-like" companion (Zimmerman 37). The incongruity of the newspaper article's representation is striking; this text-within-a-text demonstrates a format, perspective, and tone not found in the rest of Poe's narrative, and these differences, compounded by the narrative's early focus on analytical observation, invite readers to examine the newspaper account as a text independent from Poe's own. Although its lack of substantial evidence precludes readers from using the newspaper account to solve the crime themselves, Poe's employment of this device provides readers with an interpretive activity, and no matter how futile, this activity encourages a sense of participation in the crime's solution that Poe's readers found, and still find, exhilarating.

Poe identifies the newspaper account as an independent text embedded within his own in several ways. First, the newspaper account is bracketed off from the main narrative by several visual indicators:

'EXTRAORDINARY MURDERS.—This morning, about three o'clock, the inhabitants of the Quartier St. Roch were roused from sleep by a succession of terrific shrieks, issuing, apparently, from the fourth story of a house in the Rue Morgue....' (147)

By capitalizing, and later italicizing, the account's headers and offsetting its main text with dashes, Poe visually recreates traditional newspaper article format and encourages readers to think of this recreated article as a text different in form and function than his own narrative. Poe gives the newspaper account further separation by delineating it as a quotation: the article appears as a third voice in the story, one apart from those of Dupin's anonymous companion, who narrates events to a general audience, and Dupin himself, who speaks primarily to the narrator.

The visual differences between embedded article and surrounding narrative are also reflected tonally. The embedded text of the newspaper reports the results of police depositions in meandering verb tenses and often resorts to incomplete, journalistic sentences:

'Jules Mignaud, banker, of the firm Mignaud et Fils, Rue Deloraine. Is the elder Mignaud. Madame L'Espanaye had some property. Had opened an

account with his banking house in the spring of the year ---(eight years previously). Made frequent deposits in small sums.' (150)

The fragmentation of these deposition reports contrasts sharply with the voice of Dupin's companion, whose narration throughout the story unfolds in a linear manner: "Retracing our steps we came again to the front of the dwelling, rang, and, having shown our credentials, were admitted by the agents in charge" (153). These tonal disparities help to identify the existence of two very different texts: the newspaper, through which information about the crime is provided, and the narration itself, which eventually recounts the interpretation of this information.

By presenting a text that exists apart from his own, Poe creates a "gap" that readers can work to fill on their own and thus provides readers with an opening into interpretive play. The newspaper account offers no narrative guidance; it reports information regarding the crime and does not seek to explain what that information means. Readers of this embedded text, whether within or outside the story, must work to negotiate that information's meaning on their own, and in this regard characters and readers are placed on curiously equal

interpretive footing. The newspaper account exists independently from the surrounding narrative, so Dupin and his companion do not mediate the article's information; instead, readers absorb and digest the crime's information at the same time, presumably, as do the characters.

In addition to withholding mediation, characters also delay their own interpretive efforts, further encouraging Poe's readers to fill interpretive gaps themselves. After the newspaper account ends and the narrator paraphrases subsequent follow-up reports, he notes that Dupin falls silent: "Dupin seemed singularly interested in the progress of this affair--at least, so I judged from his manner, for he made no comments" (152). Dupin's interpretive hesitation spurs readers into action. If they want to make sense of the article's many "clew[s]," they must do so themselves (152).

Dupin's encouragement and the narrator's peculiarly mute replies work with the independent text to create gaps and promote readers' interpretational participation. Critics often read Poe's first-person narrator in the Dupin stories as a stand-in for his readers, following the observations first made by Brander Matthews in 1907 (174). These readings contend that Dupin's patient encouragement of the narrator's analytical skills are, in reality,

directed at the reader (Zimmerman 37). Warren Hill Kelly explains that this "first person narrator stands for us, Poe's readers, receiving the facts regarding each crime, responding predictably to them, and then absorbing the corrections Dupin makes to the restricted logic" (79). "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" certainly conforms to this reading. The narrator explains that "[Dupin] asked me my opinion respecting the murders" during his silent interlude after the newspaper account's presentation, but "predictably," Kelly would argue, the narrator is unable to respond to Dupin's questions with his own analysis; instead, he admits to Dupin that he "saw no means by which it would be possible to trace the murderer" (Poe 152). Kelly maintains that the narrator's inability to read the newspaper's information originally reflects Poe's pessimistic views of his readership's interpretive skills, and he supports this claim by identifying several texts in which Poe evaluates his contemporary readers as "uninquisitive, trend-abiding collectives" (84, 78).

While Kelly's reading is sound overall, it nevertheless minimizes the significance of the narrator's lack of voice when he responds to Dupin's encouraging questions. Instead of replying directly to Dupin, the narrator paraphrases the article's summary, explaining, "I

could merely agree with all of Paris in considering [the murders] an insoluble mystery" (152). While the narrator's position may echo the position of the readers, he does not speak for them; in fact, he does not speak at all. What he does instead is respond generally and noncommittally, echoing the messages first delivered by the embedded text and leaving ample opportunity for reader interruption and participation. By not speaking, the narrator invites readers to question his limited appraisal of the newspaper account's significance and fill the interpretive gap themselves. The narrator thus acts as a placeholder for readers, widening the gap through which they may enter into interpretive play, but he does put words in their mouths. Indeed, since Poe's emphasis of the embedded article as an independent text highlights its interpretive potential, one cannot readily imagine readers, once so engaged, suddenly dismissing all interpretive possibility simply because the narrator finds the task daunting, especially when he has already admitted his intellectual limitations earlier in the tale.

Poe continues to stress this narrative absence in subsequent sections. Dupin repeatedly calls the embedded text's content to the narrator's attention, and the narrator's indirect response echoes earlier conversations:

"...Let me now advert—not to the whole testimony respecting these voices—but to what was *peculiar* in that testimony. Did you observe any thing peculiar about it?"

I remarked that, while all the witnesses agreed in supposing the gruff voice to be that of a Frenchman, there was much disagreement in regard to the shrill, or as one individual termed it, the harsh voice.

"That was the evidence itself," said Dupin, "but it was not the peculiarity of the evidence. You have observed nothing distinctive. Yet there was something to be observed." (155)

The narrative absence formed here by the narrator's lack of a direct reply provides readers with opportunity to jump into play. Had Poe framed the narrator's reply as a direct quote, as he has no difficulty doing in other sections, the reader would function more as an observer of conversational exchange and less as an interpretive participant. By instead omitting the narrator's voice in this section, Poe allows readers room to ponder their own response to Dupin's question. The narrator's inability to observe "any thing peculiar" when there "[is] something to be observed," then, does not reflect Poe's unfavorable perception of his

readers' interpretive potential, as Kelly argues; instead, the narrator's inability shows Poe providing readers with opportunity to interject their own replies. In these moments we see Poe encouraging readers' interpretive involvement, not deriding their incapacity for it.

In fact, Poe emphasizes these narrative absences so often as to make the readers' engagement with the embedded text's information almost painfully obligatory. One can imagine cursory readers overlooking one opportunity to answer Dupin's question for themselves, or perhaps even two, but Dupin's direct encouragements, and the narrator's silent inability to meet them, occur frequently throughout "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Dupin pauses for a third time in his final explanation of the murders' solution to allow the narrator yet another chance to assemble the puzzle for himself:

"My immediate purpose is to lead you to place in juxtaposition, that *very unusual* activity of which I have just spoken, with that *very peculiar* shrill (or harsh) and *unequal* voice, about whose nationality no two persons could be found to agree, and in whose utterance no syllabification could be detected." (159).

Having led his narrator halfway to the puzzle's solution by emphasizing the "very peculiar" nature of the newspaper's information and encouraging to the "juxtaposition" of seemingly unrelated information, Dupin pauses to permit him to make his own connections. Again, however, the narrator is unequal to the task:

At these words a vague and half-formed conception of the meaning of Dupin flitted over my mind. I seemed to be upon the verge of comprehension, without power to comprehend—as men, at times, find themselves upon the brink of remembrance, without being able, in the end, to remember.

Here, too, Poe silences the narrator, allowing him only to paraphrase his frustrated efforts to connect the clues Dupin provides. Readers are again encouraged to place themselves in the narrator's interpretive position; this narrative absence creates a tension not typically present in other, more passive reading experiences. Here readers are forced to participate actively, seeking to visualize the connections between Dupin's clues that the narrator is unable to recognize. The repetition of these moments and their even dispersal throughout the tale show Poe's emphasis on readers' participation. While one such moment might well be overlooked, the existence of three forces

readers' attentions to the task at hand: to interpret actively the information in the embedded text alongside, but not with, the narrator.

By emphasizing the embedded text's importance in these ways, Poe engages readers in an interpretive process of mystery solving from which they would otherwise be excluded by the story's design as a locked-room mystery. The murders are first characterized by the embedded text's lengthy description of the crime's physical arrangement and the apparent unfeasibility of the murderer's escape (Poe 150-51): "That fourth-floor apartment in the Rue Morgue, its doors doubly locked and its windows nailed shut, represents in one simple architectural paradigm all of the insoluble conundrums and ingenious solutions of detective fiction" (Sweeney 1-2). Poe bypasses the inherent difficulties of these "insoluble conundrums" by using an embedded text to focus readers' attention on the active interpretation of "peculiar" details.

Ironically, though, while Poe encourages readers' interpretive efforts by emphasizing the embedded text's independence and the importance of these "peculiar" details, the newspaper account does not contain sufficient information with which to solve the crime. Dupin builds from the "peculiar" inconsistencies in the newspaper

article, but to solve the crime he must return to the crime scene to "enter into some examinations" of his own (Poe 153). These "examinations" reveal the ways in which Poe structures his embedded text for a particular audience, since Dupin demonstrates the same unlikely combination of disparate skills in his investigation of the crime scene that readers have been encouraged to employ in their interpretations of the embedded text: diligent, almost mathematically precise observation combined with the creative powers afforded by unrestrained imagination.

Dupin's mathematical prowess helps him to see past "coincidences" and use "the theory of probabilities" to determine that the motive of theft did not contribute to the murders (Poe 160). By applying this skill, Dupin interprets possibilities where others see only a locked room (143). Unlike the police, whose "perceptions had been hermetically sealed" by the crime's apparent impossibility, Dupin is capable of thinking, quite literally, outside the box; through "inductions," he reasons that if the murderer's only available escape route is a locked window, the window must not be as locked as it appears, a conclusion that bears out in the story's resolution (Poe 158). Indeed, Dupin's keen, mathematically honed observational skills serve him well; his abilities allow

him to determine not only how the murderer escaped but also to find several clues--two different locks of hair, an inhumanly large handprint, and a ribbon with a sailor's knot tied in it--missed by the Parisian police (161-63).

Dupin's discoveries put him closer to the crime's solution, but he is able to interpret this evidence correctly only when he combines his "vivid freshness of imagination" with his methodic observations (143). Even these new clues do little to clarify who killed the women within the framework established by the Parisian police; as Dupin repeatedly stresses, the murders were committed in a "very *unusual*" and "excessively *outré*" manner, and many of the clues thus seem equally outside the norm (159, 160). When Dupin applies his imagination and conceives of a similarly "outré" solution, however, everything falls into line; his newly obtained clues suddenly mesh with his theory, and the interpretive picture is made whole.

Since Poe devotes so much time and effort to presenting the embedded newspaper account and encouraging its interpretation, readers might naturally feel disappointed by its small role in the mystery's solution. The continuity of the interpretive skill-set in question, however, mitigates much of that disappointment; the manner in which Dupin ultimately obtains the solution to the crime

conforms to the pattern set forth by the story's essay-like introduction and thus does little more than reinforce Poe's original assumption that readers value "success in all these more important undertakings where mind struggles with mind" (142). By showing that Dupin's success stems from his ability to combine mathematical and methodic observation with imaginative analysis, Poe recreates his detective as a mythic Romantic hero, capable of combining disparate skills and making the leap beyond ordinary reason into the *outré*.

Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is generally regarded as the first locked-room mystery and is often cited as one of the most influential models for the subgenre as a whole. Elements from the story are frequently adapted in works by later mystery authors like Arthur Conan Doyle, whose famous detecting pair Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson share many similarities, structurally and functionally, with Poe's Dupin and his narrating friend (Silverman 174; Matthews 174-75). But in terms of directly affecting the development of the locked-room subgenre, nowhere did Poe's story resound more forcefully than in France, where critics lauded "the philosophic, analytic attitude he brought to fiction" (Silverman 320). Charles Baudelaire, an avid fan of Poe's work, catapulted Poe's writing into popularity by translating many of his stories

into French, and as a result "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" plays an influential role in the development of France's own detective genre (Platten 254).

Gaston Leroux's "The Mystery of the Yellow Room," like Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," is frequently declared one of the keystones of the locked-room subgenre, and Poe's influence is apparent in the story's use of embedded texts. Originally published in 1907 as "*Le Mystère de la Chambre Jaune*," Leroux's story describes the investigations of Joseph Rouletabille, a young journalist whose work is followed closely by his narrating friend, a lawyer named Sainclair. Rouletabille is called to investigate a seemingly insoluble mystery: Mlle. Stangerson, the daughter and assistant of a prominent French scientist, is attacked while sleeping in her doubly-locked and well secured bedroom and suffers a near-fatal blow to the head. While she is recovering, the criminal tries to attack again, this time while Rouletabille, Sainclair, and others stage a seemingly infallible trap in an adjoining hallway. Again, however, the attacker avoids capture and disappears as if into thin air.

In addition to echoes in narrative structure, plot, and use of embedded texts, Leroux also shows Poe's influence through his focus on scientific inquiry and

method. While the solution to Poe's puzzle relies soundly on the possession of a Romantic imagination, elements of his tale edge into concerns of the scientific age that was soon to come. David Platten argues that French readers were "enraptured by the way that Poe smuggled this kind of pseudo-mathematical logic into his literary scenario" and provided "truthful explanations" through science of what otherwise appeared only to be the "violent manifestation of a supernatural evil" (255). Written in the more scientifically driven literary world of early-twentieth-century France, Leroux's story reflects a preoccupation with science and scientific inquiry that trumps even Poe's, and the pervasiveness of science in Leroux's story structures his embedded texts and readers' engagement with them. Andrea Goulet explains that "As with so many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century detective novels, [The] Mystery of the Yellow Room embeds its criminal investigation plot in the broader semantic universe of scientific investigation" (27). Goulet argues that Leroux accomplishes this "embedding" by positioning the crime near the Stangerson's place of research, an adjoining laboratory. By placing his narrative in this environment, Leroux calls readers' attentions to scientific methods of inquiry, a ploy that he will later exploit to encourage

their interpretive participation.

Although Leroux's story starts with the presentation of a seemingly insoluble mystery in much the same way as Poe's, "The Mystery of the Yellow Room" relies even more heavily upon embedded texts to stimulate readers' participation. As with Poe's Dupin, Rouletabille concerns himself with crimes that occur under impossible, locked-room-like circumstances that might normally exclude readers; unlike Poe's Dupin, however, Rouletabille works to solve a completely impossible crime. When Sainclair argues that the mystery of the Yellow Room is even more tightly designed than the crime Poe presents in "Rue Morgue," readers see Leroux grappling with Poe's literary shadow:

"The Yellow Room was as tightly shut as an iron safe."

"That," I said, "is why this mystery is the most surprising I know. Edgar Allan Poe, in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' invented nothing like it... there was that window through which the monkey, the perpetrator of the murder, could slip away! But here, there can be no question of an opening of any sort. The door was fastened, and through the window blinds, secure as they were, not even a fly could enter or get out." (42)

Here Leroux acknowledges both Poe's influence on the genre and his story's conscious place in that lineage, but he also stresses the newness of the crime he has created. The crime committed in the Yellow Room represents a new degree of impossibility in the locked-room mystery genre, and as such, it requires Leroux to work even harder to encourage readers' interpretive participation.

While the crime's degree of impossibility provides perhaps the clearest need for Leroux to promote readers' engagement, his use of embedded texts also helps to combat the story's novelistic inclinations and reorient the text as a detective novel. Since the story covers a significant span of time, numerous investigative discoveries, and the details of not one but eventually two "impossible" crimes, the story's embedded texts are key to encouraging and maintaining readers' interpretative engagement. Without these texts, Leroux risks losing readers' active participation not only to the puzzle's impossibility but also to the intricacies of his story's unfolding narrative. Unlike Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," which places the most narrative emphasis on the crime's description, provided by the newspaper, and Dupin's particular methods of interpreting that description, Leroux's story emphasizes the investigation itself along with all its missteps and

discoveries. In other words, Leroux focuses so much attention on his complex, developing plot that he jeopardizes the sense of interpretive engagement that so strongly characterizes detective fiction. The story's most prominent embedded texts, spatial diagrams of the interior spaces where the crimes are committed, offset this risk by providing readers with an opportunity to see and interpret the investigation's evidence directly.

Although the maps are perhaps the most effective example of Leroux's use of embedded texts, there are others scattered throughout the story as well. The newspaper account through which Leroux and Sainclair first learn of the mystery functions similarly to Poe's in that the characters' initial investigations build from the basic facts first presented therein. Leroux's newspaper account is not set apart from the surrounding text quite as distinctly as Poe's, but it is nevertheless introduced by dashes and a brief narrative contextualization, which provides the date of the information's publication and either the article's title or the name of the publishing newspaper (Leroux 2-4). These indicators set the information apart from the larger narrative, which until this point concerns itself largely with the narrator's heartfelt reassurance that he intends to "do nothing more

than transcribe facts" about "the mystery of The Yellow Room," "the most obscure [problem] that has ever challenged the perspicacity of the [French] police" (1).

Despite his promise to "do nothing more than transcribe," Sainclair's unsuccessful attempts to engage with this first embedded text demonstrate that he functions not only as a narrator but also as a stand-in for the reader. Like the anonymous narrator of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Sainclair's role is not to interpret or evaluate; instead, he serves as a conduit into the text through which readers are encouraged to engage the crime's facts on their own. By grappling unsuccessfully with the embedded texts' content, Sainclair encourages readers to assume the challenge themselves. Like Dupin with his narrating friend, when Rouletabille prompts Sainclair to consider the embedded text, he also prompts his readers:

"Well, my dear Sainclair,—have you read it?"

"The Glandier crime?"

"Yes; The Yellow Room!—What do you think of it?"

(10)

These direct questions echo Dupin's in that they elicit a response from readers as well as Sainclair; since until now Sainclair has done nothing but "transcribe facts," readers have had ample opportunity both to "read" the embedded

texts' information and to decide what they "think of it." The connection between readers and narrator is made stronger when Rouletabille critiques Sainclair's limited interpretive ability. When Sainclair jokes first that "the devil" must have committed the crime and then seriously posits that the elderly groundskeeper interviewed for the articles seems the most likely suspect, Rouletabille dismisses his initial conclusions and encourages him to try again by asking, "'Is there nothing in this article in the 'Matin' by which you were particularly struck?'" (11). Rouletabille's forthright urging directly echoes Dupin's in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and not surprisingly, just like Dupin's narrator, Sainclair is not up to the interpretive challenge: in response to Rouletabille's questions he finally admits, "'I don't understand,—or rather, I have never understood'" (11). Although Sainclair abandons all interpretive processes and finally consigns the role to Rouletabille, whose logical skills, it is apparent, far outstrip his own, readers are conditioned by this exchange to engage with the texts embedded within Leroux's story. When Rouletabille concludes assertively at the chapter's end that "'We shall make something out of you yet, my dear Sainclair,'" he speaks also of Leroux's readers' interpretive training, already in progress.

Since the information presented through the embedded newspaper articles constitutes all he knows of the crime, Rouletabille's investigations build from these accounts in much the same way as Dupin's, but one key difference prevents these texts from sustaining readers' involvement for an extended period: Rouletabille's successful efforts uncover new information at a startling rate, and these new facts quickly render the newspaper accounts moot as sources of interpretable fact. On the train to the Château du Glandier, Rouletabille interrogates the examining magistrate, who is also traveling to the crime scene. Although he does not wish to give up information, the magistrate inadvertently verifies several of Rouletabille's original suppositions and volunteers new details about the physical arrangement of the crime scene. The narrative's focus thus shifts from interpretations of those first embedded texts to the discoveries of the ongoing investigation. Readers are no longer solely concerned with making sense of the newspaper's information; they must now also consider the new facts, which come rapidly and in many ways supersede the newspaper account in terms of veracity.

Despite the swift arrival of Rouletabille's subsequent discoveries, the mystery remains seemingly insoluble; new facts contradict the old, and for all his

optimism and energy, Rouletabille is no closer to solving the mystery of the locked Yellow Room. Since the initial group of newspaper accounts is swiftly rendered obsolete, Leroux employs a second type of embedded text to allow his readers entrance into the story's various interpretative acts, but because his narrative develops at such a fast pace, traditional texts, like newspaper accounts, will not serve the purpose for long. For that reason, Leroux employs visual diagrams, or maps, of the physical space in and around the crime scene. These visual texts provide readers with a way to engage actively with an otherwise closed narrative, but they are also more dynamic than traditional texts because they supply a referential framework for later investigative developments. When Rouletabille uncovers a fresh fact, this new type of embedded text is not supplanted; instead, it provides readers with the opportunity to flip back to see how the new information alters what was understood before.

The ways in which these diagrams encourage readers' active involvement are clear from the first one's introduction. After working with Rouletabille to examine the pavilion, the building that contains both the Yellow Room and the Stangerson's adjoining laboratory, Sainclair pauses his narration and inserts a labeled diagram of the

building and its immediate surroundings. Sainclair then explains:

Here is the ground plan of the pavilion. It had a ground-floor which was reached by a few steps, and above it was an attic, with which we need not concern ourselves. The plan of the ground floor only, sketched roughly, is what I here submit to the reader... The plan was drawn by Rouletabille, and I assured myself that there was not a line in it that was wanting to help to the solution of the problem then set before the police. With the lines of this plan and the description of its parts before them, my readers will know as much as Rouletabille knew when he entered the pavilion for the first time. With him they may now ask: How did the murderer escape from The Yellow Room?

(32)

The boldly drawn map contrasts sharply with the text around it, and as if the diagram's visual nature were not enough to identify it as a text separate from Leroux's, Sainclair treats its presence as a narrative interruption. The map's creation is not a part of Sainclair's narration; Rouletabille drew the plan well after the moment in the investigation in which Sainclair presents it, a fact made

apparent by Sainclair's need to assure himself that the map contains only "as much as Rouletabille knew" at that point in time. Because the map exists as a text outside Leroux's, the reader's attention is drawn to it as an unbiased source of interpretable fact: no matter what twists and turns the subsequent narrative takes, the map remains constant.

This same constancy also allows the map to function more dynamically than narrative-based embedded texts like newspaper articles. The map's blankness--it identifies rooms and doorways, but little more--marks it as a reliably constructed gap that readers may fill with information gleaned from the surrounding narrative. Sainclair's direct reference to his readers and the role played by the embedded text in their involvement highlights this activity. He "submit[s]" the plan "to the reader" directly and emphasizes that it contains everything they might need to obtain "the solution of the problem then set before the police." Having verified that the diagram contains everything necessary but nothing extraneous, he then encourages them to consider it "with" Rouletabille: "With him they may now ask: How did the murderer escape from The Yellow Room?" Such an introduction to the section that follows, in which Rouletabille gains access to the pavilion and the locked room itself, clarifies readers' interpretive

objectives and pushes them to read carefully for new information that can be joined with the embedded map to make sense of a nonsensical crime.

Over the next few pages, whenever Rouletabille addresses one of the many physical aspects of the crime scene and its spatial relation to objects represented on the plan, readers might well feel compelled to turn back to the diagram to orient themselves within the narrative and to see how any new information alters their interpretations of the spaces depicted. While discussing the significance of a possible weapon found at the scene, Rouletabille discovers that it was found "at the foot of the bed" and ponders carefully how it might have arrived there, and the specificity of his description sends readers back to the map to understand how the bed is oriented in The Yellow Room (33). Similarly, when Rouletabille discovers a drop of blood in the building's vestibule, readers are spurred by the preciseness of its location to fully understand of its position in relation to the other rooms and windows:

Rouletabille went down upon his knees again almost in front of a small lavatory at the back of the vestibule. In that position he remained for about a minute.

"Well?" I asked him when he got up.

"Oh! nothing very important, -- a drop of blood," he replied, turning towards Daddy Jacques as he spoke. "While you were washing the laboratory and this vestibule, was the vestibule window open?" he asked. (34)

Although at this point in Rouletabille's investigations he has not uncovered anything particularly groundbreaking, his small discoveries encourage readers to reacquaint themselves with the embedded text and orient new information within that framework. Wondering where the vestibule window is in relationship to the lavatory and the laboratory, for instance, might send a reader back to the diagram, where a few moments of study would not only clarify the crime scene's spatial layout but also suggest several possible solutions to the puzzle. In effect, readers are trained here to consider how any new fact alters past understanding of the mapped area, an engagement made possible by the map's blankness: as an open text, the map functions as one big interpretive gap that readers work to fill with subsequently delivered information.

Leroux employs another visual diagram as an embedded text during his novel's second half, this time as a prelude to a second locked-room-like mystery. When Mlle. Stangerson is threatened again by the man who attacked her,

Rouletabille lays a foolproof trap for him in the hallway outside the room in which she is recovering, blocking off all possible escape routes with agents of his own employ. As with the incident in The Yellow Room, however, the criminal miraculously avoids capture and vanishes as if into thin air. Before Rouletabille's own description of this incident, the narrator presents a diagram:

To enable the reader the better to understand the disposition of these parts of the dwelling, I annex a plan of the first floor of the right wing, drawn by Rouletabille the day after the extraordinary phenomenon occurred, the details of which I am about to relate. (90)

Again addressing readers directly, the narrator presents the diagram "to enable... understand[ing]," but while the map certainly makes the complex narrative that follows more understandable, it also allows readers to participate in the investigation's interpretations by reflecting visually the presumed impossibility of the attacker's second escape. On one hand, the map's detail seems to indicate that Rouletabille has left nothing out and has considered every possible solution, and consequently readers might be made to feel that there is nothing left to do but sit back and wait for the narrative to supply the solution. This diagram

is far more detailed than the one provided during the investigation of the Yellow Room mystery; every window, door, and staircase is clearly identified, and the various rooms, including the bathroom in Mlle. Stangerson's suite, are meticulously labeled. This same detail, however, also challenges readers to compare Rouletabille's unfolding story to his map and locate a possible escape route for the criminal; the first embedded text, after all, trained readers to engage actively with these diagrams. Readers are challenged, in effect, to find what Rouletabille missed.

The map's strange mix of overwhelming detail and heartening possibility continues in the numbered list that follows it. The placement of Rouletabille's associates and the first floor's physical layout seems to preclude a possible escape route for the murderer, but there are so many agents involved that a solution seems to suggest itself, especially in the key that follows the numbered diagram:

1. Position where Rouletabille placed Frederic Larson.
2. Position where Rouletabille placed Daddy Jacques...

5. Window found open by Rouletabille when he left the room. He re-closed it. All the other doors and windows were shut.... (90)

These details, supplied before Rouletabille explains the attacker's inexplicable escape, remains in readers' minds as they digest the subsequent story. When readers come back to the map, perhaps to see how certain facts from Rouletabille's story fit into the blank diagram, they must again take these listed facts into account and consider how they might alter past assumptions. In this way, readers test and retest theories about the criminal's disappearance along with Rouletabille and Sainclair. Readers are challenged by the degree of detail in both the diagram and the narrative that follows it to find a logically derived solution to the mystery.

Leroux's embedded texts build from the preoccupation with science felt throughout The Mystery of the Yellow Room. The Stangersons' scientific experiments regarding "the dissociation of matter" provide an overarching theme to the narrative as a whole (70). Several characters suggest that the two seemingly impossible disappearances are the result of experiments gone awry in the adjoining laboratory, and when Rouletabille scrutinizes the space for

clues, the pervasiveness of science as a theme is made apparent by his detailed observations:

The whole of one side of the laboratory was taken up with a large chimney, crucibles, ovens, and such implements as are needed for chemical experiments; tables, loaded with phials, papers, reports, an electrical machine.... (36).

Leroux's embedded texts, with their painfully organized lists and visual diagrams, parallel the scientific "papers" and "reports" created by Stangerson and his unfortunate daughter and thus commandeer a degree of scientific authority: these texts, like Poe's newspaper article, are to be trusted as reliable gaps readers can fill through the scientific application of facts revealed later in the narrative. These dynamic embedded texts echo the story's scientific focus, but they engage readers interpretively only if those readers value the same scientific mindset demonstrated by Rouletabille's investigation and the Stangersons' research. As they evaluate subsequent information, readers must actively test and retest various developing theories by applying them to the open spatial diagrams.

While Poe's use of the Romantic imagination and Leroux's reliance on popular theories of scientific inquiry

characterize their readers' engagement with their stories' embedded texts, later writers of locked-room mysteries continued to rewrite the subgenre's conventions and adapt embedded texts to suit their particular audiences. As a writer of so-called Golden Age detective fiction, English writer Agatha Christie draws on her readership's growing awareness of global culture when she writes Murder on the Orient Express, a locked-room mystery set in a snowbound train outside Belgrade. Written in 1934, the novel falls between the two world wars and involves, perhaps not surprisingly, international concerns; the train's passengers are a polyglot mix of nationalities and socioeconomic positions, and the train itself is the famed pan-Asiatic Orient Express. The embedded texts Christie employs to engage her readers interpretively reflect that era's global interconnectedness and play on common concerns of cultural difference.

In Murder on the Orient Express, Christie builds from the detective genre's past successes. Stephen Knight claims, "It is not hard to see the main influences on Christie -- she had obviously read Doyle, from whom comes the initial model of detective and narrator, and Green's domestic dramas and Leroux's remarkable complications also seem obvious sources" (89). While Knight neglects to

acknowledge that Poe's detective and narrator pair predate Doyle's Holmes and Watson by almost half a century, his evaluation of Christie's literary lineage is not far off the mark; true to her genre's conservative tendency, Christie's stories recycle past themes and structures like embedded texts in new and innovative ways.

Unlike Poe's Dupin and Leroux's Rouletabille, Hercule Poirot has no narrating friend along for the ride, but he does work collaboratively with two passengers whose positions on the train exclude them from suspicion. These two characters, M. Bouc, the line's director, and Dr. Constantine, function at key points in Christie's story like the sidekick narrators who preceded them. During Poirot's interviews of the suspects, they jump to conclusions, most of which Poirot shoots down immediately, and they continually articulate confusion regarding the investigation's developments (Christie 237). In these ways Bouc and Constantine mirror Dupin and Rouletabille's narrating assistants: they stand in for readers during revelatory moments and consequently challenge readers to strive beyond their limited interpretations.

Nowhere do these characters work more prominently to challenge readers than in their consideration of the novel's embedded texts. Christie uses two primary embedded

texts to encourage readers' active interpretive participation: a diagram of the train carriage where the murder took place, and Poirot's investigative notes. Although Emile Gaboriau, the Frenchman who wrote L'Affaire Lerouge in 1866, is credited as the first detective fiction writer to include a map or diagram of his crime scene's interior space, the trend of embedding a text specifically to engage readers originates as early as Poe and continues through Leroux's writing and on into Christie's (Bargainnier 25). As with the floorplans in Leroux's The Mystery of the Yellow Room, Christie's labeled map of the train carriage allows readers to insert later clues into an open, trustworthy blank. Critics generally maintain that Christie's diagrams work primarily to further her overall concentration on setting and tone--Earl Bargainnier, for instance, argues that "the intent of such a map is to create greater verisimilitude" and to indicate that "the place exists in space"--but they also provide readers with an open, interpretable framework through which to engage at will with the story's many clues (25).

Stories like And Then There Were None, Death in the Clouds, and of course Murder on the Orient Express illustrate Christie's penchant for the closed interior spaces that make such diagrams not only possible but also

usefully engaging to readers. Bargainnier argues that these interior floorplans “‘help’ the reader see the action” and that “they are also used to puzzle or confuse him by indicating the apparent impossibility of the crime having been committed as it actually was” (25). The maps do more, however, than simply “puzzle” or “confuse”; they also encourage interpretive engagement. By placing her puzzling crimes in enclosed settings that can be diagrammed, Christie creates an effective trap for readers’ interest: her maps challenge readers to find a hidden truth in the “apparent impossibility” they display.

In Orient Express, this impossibility is not apparent until readers begin to fill in information gleaned from subsequent passages. Christie first shows the diagram to readers at the beginning of Poirot’s inquiries, during which he questions each passenger and train company employee: “In the restaurant car all was in readiness... On the table in front of Poirot was a plan of the Istanbul-Calais coach with the names of the passengers marked in red ink” (90). This plan, recreated for the reader on the next page, bears a striking resemblance to Leroux’s floorplans; a thick black line boldly delineates the exterior, and the doors and the individual berths’ interior features are clearly marked. The diagram is positioned immediately

before several chapters that relate the various occupants' alibis; as Poirot questions each person, a more complete picture of the crime develops, and specific references to the locked forward door and different passengers' cabins send readers back to the diagram to interpret fully how each new piece of information alters the meaning of the last. Despite the rapid flow of information, the picture painted by the various passengers suggests no probable solution: the murdered man's cabin door was locked from the inside and the train's remote, snowbound location precludes an escape by window. By applying the information Poirot gains through his interviews to the embedded text, readers comprehend the crime's "apparent impossibility," and this verification of the puzzle's impossibility highlights the diagram's necessity (Bargainnier 25): the act of filling in the trustworthy blanks supplied by the embedded text allows readers to enter interpretively into an otherwise closed narrative.

Although readers are encouraged to engage interpretively with the diagram most forcefully in these interview scenes--at one point, Poirot even models this behavior by "stud[ying] the plan in front of him thoughtfully" while questioning a suspect--the slow revelatory style of Christie's entire narrative makes

efficient use of the embedded text for a long time afterward (Christie 96). As usual in her works, Christie uses almost as much energy occluding the crime's solution through the various characters' misdirections as she does constructing its unveiling (Bargainnier 163). The sociological nature of this delay might well account for the diagram's longevity as an engaging text. R.A. York maintains that

Christie is obviously preoccupied throughout her career with a tension between a deductive structure based on clues—which she often reduces to a minimum or indeed to zero—and a structure based on social observation and psychological predictability. (105)

Poirot's investigative strategies in Murder on the Orient Express reflect this tension. "I am not one to rely upon the expert procedure," he explains to Dr. Constantine. "It is the psychology I seek, not the fingerprint or the cigarette ash" (Christie 77). By favoring psychological observations over physical facts, Poirot (and by extension Christie) destabilizes the certainty of any interpretations made within the diagram's framework. Tangible items like ash or fingerprints have a fixed meaning and can be positioned wholly within the context of the diagrammed

space and the crime's timeframe; psychological motives, however, depend upon variables that originate outside Christie's narrative, and in order for readers to draw reliable conclusions from this type of evidence, further background information is required. Poirot's preference for psychological evidence, then, means readers' interpretations will always be tentative: without direct confirmation from the suspect, or in this case, suspects, readers can derive no concrete interpretations with which to fill the gaps of the provided diagram.

The instability of interpretations made from social and psychological conclusions, however, does not prevent Christie from encouraging readers to make them. Cultural stereotypes permeate her character descriptions and make their nationalities clearly perceptible, especially to Poirot, who amuses himself on the first day of the journey by observing his fellow passengers:

Leaning back, he ran his eye thoughtfully round the dining car. There were thirteen people seated there and, as M. Bouc had said, of all classes and nationalities. He began to study them... A big swarthy Italian was picking his teeth with gusto. Opposite him a spare neat Englishman had the expressionless disapproving face of the well-

trained servant. Next to the Englishman was a big American in a loud suit.... (27)

These stereotypical characterizations so early in the story suggest the importance of each passenger's cultural background and psychology and encourage readers to filter whatever those characters say through a particular social lens. Poirot's own psychology-focused investigation considers seriously the somewhat dubious "facts" of cultural tendencies. After questioning Antonio Foscarelli, the "swarthy" Italian mentioned in the previous passage, Poirot's assisting friend feels they have found the murderer: "'He has been a long time in America,' said M. Bouc, 'and he is an Italian, and Italians use the knife! And they are great liars! I do not like Italians.'" When Poirot points out "'that there is absolutely no evidence against the man,'" Bouc reminds him of his earlier dedication to psychological evidence: "'And what about the psychology? Do Italians not stab?'" Poirot's response reveals much of what his own cultural lens has shown him:

"Assuredly," said Poirot. "Especially in the heat of a quarrel. But this--this is a different kind of crime. I have the little idea, my friend, that this is a crime very carefully planned and staged. It is a far-sighted, long-headed crime.

It is not--how shall I express it?--a *Latin* crime. It is a crime that shows traces of a cool, resourceful, deliberate brain--I think an Anglo-Saxon brain." (177)

By emphasizing cultural differences through Poirot's stereotypical characterizations, Christie encourages readers to consider what they "know" about other cultures as they work to fill in and interpret the gaps in her story's embedded texts. Poirot demonstrates a knowledge of cultural tendencies here, and Christie's readers would find that information valuable in their own shifting social environment as it promises a degree of predictability in both personal and international relationships.

Although readers can engage interpretively with the open diagram of the train carriage throughout most of the novel, Christie presents a new embedded text at the story's end, one designed specifically to encourage readers' own culturally derived interpretations. As Poirot, M. Bouc, and Dr. Constantine collaborate together, the detective presents his notes as a text apart from Christie's:

"I have made a list," [Poirot] said. "If you like to see it, it will perhaps refresh your memory."

The doctor and M. Bouc pored over the list together. It was written out neatly in a methodical manner in the order in which the passengers had been interviewed. (241)

The recreated notes follow, offset from the preceding text visually by white space and font differences. Christie's emphasis on cultural difference comes through loud and clear in this embedded text; nationality and class are the first pieces of information in every entry after the suspect's name, which are often culturally indicative themselves:

Hector MacQueen—American subject, Berth No. 6, Second Class.

Motive: Possibly arising out of association with dead man?

Alibi: From midnight to A.M (Midnight to 1.30 vouched for by Col. Arbuthnot, and 1.15 to 2 vouched for by conductor.)

Evidence against him: None.

Suspicious circumstances: None.

The list continues for four full pages and contains an entry for every passenger under suspicion. While this text does serve, as Poirot says, to "refresh" the memory, it also recalls to readers the suspects' diverse cultural and social backgrounds and encourages them to consider those

cultural differences in their interpretations. By posing questions within the embedded text itself, Poirot directs readers' interpretive attentions to a particular range of facts; what other information about MacQueen's background has come to light over the story's course, they might ask, that would indicate he had motive enough to kill his employer? Christie's focus here and throughout her text is on social and cultural difference; readers are encouraged to engage interpretively with Christie's story by filling the gaps in her embedded texts with their own knowledge of these cultural differences.

Whether they elicit readers' social knowledge, scientific mindset, or fascination with theories of transcendent imagination, embedded texts are a key component in the locked-room mysteries of Christie, Leroux, and Poe. The closed structure of the locked-room subgenre requires authors to work actively to engage their readers' interpretive interest; without an opening or gap through which readers may "enter" the text, locked-room mysteries risk losing the sense of interpretive play that so characterizes detective fiction as a whole. One way to provide these interpretive openings, as Poe, Leroux, and Christie demonstrate, is through embedded texts that connect with a specific characteristic of the target

audience and place that audience on equal interpretive footing with the story's characters.

By modifying the construction that allowed Poe's readers to engage interpretively with his locked-room mystery, later authors show an awareness of their particular audiences' genre expectations. Directed use of embedded texts permits Leroux and Christie to innovate within the locked-room subgenre without being unfaithful to detective fiction's puzzle-like function; while their embedded texts elicit interpretive responses in different ways, they do so as a way to uphold the larger genre's conservative traditions of reliable puzzle solving. Studying how these authors' embedded texts simultaneously innovate and conserve within the locked-room subgenre brings us closer to understanding exactly how the detective story earned its reputation as one of the most engaging forms of fiction.

Through its focus on fiction's ability to engage, reader-response criticism proves a useful lens through which to examine how embedded texts function in the locked-room mysteries of Poe, Leroux, and Christie. By highlighting embedded texts' inviting "gaps," these writers encourage readers to contribute to their stories' development as puzzles. Each author evokes a different type

of primary contribution from his or her readers, but the function fulfilled by the embedded texts remains fixed: whether readers attempt to fill "gaps" through application of the Romantic imagination, as they do with Poe, methods of scientific inquiry, like Leroux encourages, or social experience, as Christie promotes, they are nevertheless engaged interpretively. As Iser explains, "The fact that the reader's role can be fulfilled in different ways, according to historical or individual circumstances, is an indication that the structure of the text *allows* for different ways of fulfillment" (37). For Poe, Leroux, and Christie, that flexible "structure" is found in the trope of the audience-specific embedded text: by adapting embedded texts to suit the specific cultures for whom their stories are created, these writers help their readers contribute meaningfully and interpretively to detective fiction's puzzle-oriented tradition.

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