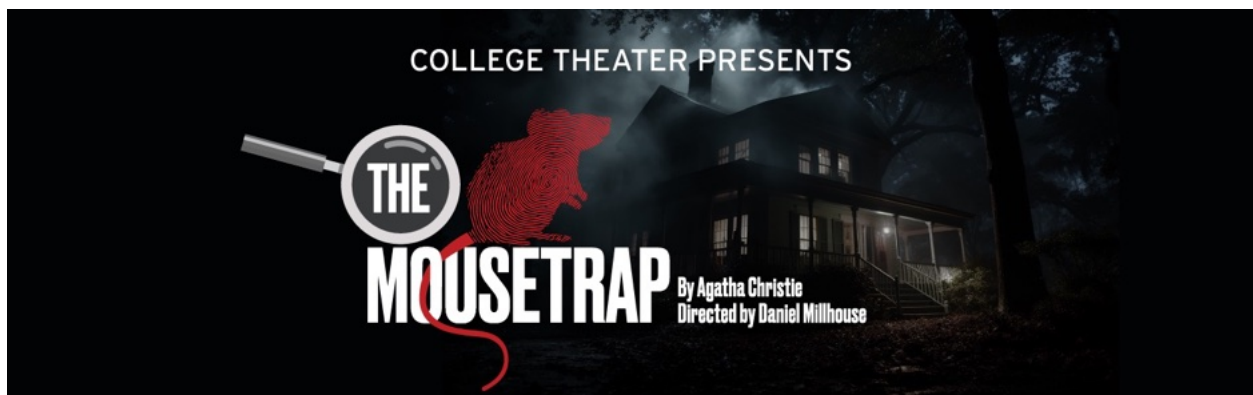


College of DuPage Theater Department

Presents

The Mousetrap

By Agatha Christie



Directed by Daniel Millhouse

The College Theater Department sincerely thanks the library for research support, for classes studying the script and production, as well as for the cast, director, and production team working on the project.

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Play/Production Information

Brief Synopsis

As news spreads of a murder in London, a group of seven strangers find themselves snowed in at a remote countryside guesthouse. When a police sergeant arrives, the guests discover – to their horror – that a killer is in their midst! One by one, the suspicious characters reveal their sordid pasts. Which one is the murderer? Who will be their next victim?

Time and Place

The entire action of the play takes place in the Great Hall at Monkswell Manor in Berkshire, England

Time: Mid 1950's

Act I: Scene I - The Great Hall at Monkswell Manor. Late afternoon

Act I: Scene II - The same. The following day after lunch

Act II - The same. Ten minutes later.

Characters (In Order of Appearance)

Mollie Ralston

Giles Ralston

Christopher Wren

Mrs. Boyle

Major Metcalf

Miss Casewell

Mr. Paravicini

Detective Sergeant Trotter

Note: Contains adult themes and language

***The Mousetrap* Director's Note**

Fall 2024

Are you ready for a night full of twists, turns, and secrets? Welcome to *The Mousetrap*, where nothing (and no one) is quite what it seems!

As we gather to experience Agatha Christie's enduring classic, I am reminded of how this play continues to resonate with contemporary audiences. At its heart, *The Mousetrap* is a mystery that thrives on tension, secrets, and unexpected revelations. Yet, beyond the suspense, it investigates much deeper themes of identity, isolation, and the lasting consequences of our past choices.

In our increasingly connected world, it is ironic how isolated we often feel. The characters in *The Mousetrap* are physically trapped by a snowstorm, but today we can feel similarly cut off in a digital landscape that often fosters mistrust and carefully curated personas. This production emphasizes that sense of isolation, both external and internal, highlighting how our efforts to conceal our true selves or our past inevitably lead to suspicion and unease.

The play also speaks to the present moment's grappling with justice, morality, and historical reckoning. Are we ever truly able to escape the consequences of our actions, or do they linger, demanding resolution? In a time when society faces complex questions about accountability, *The Mousetrap* offers a reflection on the human desire for closure, truth, and redemption.

We hope this production keeps you on the edge of your seat, not only with its clever twists but also by engaging your thoughts on trust, deception, and the power of the past. Just as these characters must confront their hidden truths, perhaps we too will reflect on the masks we wear and the histories we carry.

I invite you to sit back, enjoy the ride, and maybe, just maybe, crack the case before the final curtain falls!



Publicity Photo for College of DuPage's College Theater's Fall 2024 Production of *The Mousetrap*
Costume Design by Kim Morris
Pictured (from Left to Right): Will Lech as Detective Sergeant Trotter and Nick Washington as Giles Ralston

About the Author: Agatha Christie

Agatha Christie, known as the "Queen of Crime," is one of the most prolific and celebrated authors of all time. Born in 1890 in Torquay, England, Christie became a household name for her ingenious and intricately plotted detective stories. Over the course of her career, she penned 66 detective novels, 14 short story collections, and the world's longest-running play, *The Mousetrap*. Her works have sold over two billion copies worldwide, making her the best-selling novelist in history, second only to Shakespeare and the Bible.

Christie is best known for creating two of literature's most iconic detectives: the meticulous Belgian sleuth Hercule Poirot, and the sharp-witted, unassuming Miss Marple. These characters, along with her brilliantly constructed puzzles, helped define the modern detective genre. In her works, Christie combined cunning plots with deep psychological insights into human nature, weaving stories that continue to captivate audiences.

Christie's writing career was not without its own mysteries. In 1926, she famously disappeared for 11 days, sparking a nationwide search. While she was found safe, she never fully explained the incident, leaving it as one of the greatest unsolved mysteries surrounding her personal life. What sets Christie apart from other mystery writers is not just her mastery of the genre, but her ability to create complex, multi-layered characters and suspenseful narratives that delve into themes like guilt, justice, and the dark side of human nature. Her influence on the mystery genre is undeniable, and her works continue to be adapted into films, television series, and stage plays.

Agatha Christie passed away in 1976, but her legacy endures. Whether through the continued performances of *The Mousetrap* or the timeless appeal of her novels, Christie's mysteries remain as gripping and beloved today as they were when she first wrote them.



Articles for your Consideration

Trapped in Time: Exploring Isolation in *The Mousetrap* and Our Modern World

In Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*, isolation is not just a plot device - it is a core theme that shapes both the mystery and the psychological tension of the play. Set in a snowed-in guesthouse, Monkswell Manor, the characters find themselves physically cut off from the outside world. No communication, no escape. It is the perfect setting for a classic murder mystery, where the tension builds as suspicions rise. But Christie's portrayal of isolation goes beyond the physical barriers created by a snowstorm. The real intrigue lies in how emotionally and psychologically isolated the characters are from one another and even from themselves.

Each character in *The Mousetrap* arrives at Monkswell Manor with a hidden past. They are strangers not only to one another, but in many ways, to themselves. They have secrets they would rather keep buried, personas they have carefully crafted, and truths they refuse to confront. The storm outside may be keeping them trapped together, but their own fear and mistrust are what truly isolate them.

The Power of Physical Isolation

In the world of *The Mousetrap*, the physical isolation of being snowed in serves as the catalyst for the unraveling of the mystery. Without the ability to leave, each character must confront their surroundings and, more importantly, the others around them. It is the classic "locked room" scenario, where the tension is heightened precisely because there is no way out. The physical setting strips away distractions, forcing the characters (and the audience) to focus on the immediate and dangerous situation at hand.

In Christie's time, this kind of isolation had a visceral power. Cut off from the outside world, the characters have no choice but to face their inner fears, guilt, and suspicions. The same can be said for contemporary audiences - when we are isolated or forced to confront difficult situations, it strips away the noise of daily life and brings out our truest selves.

Modern-Day Isolation: The Emotional and Psychological Lockdown

Though *The Mousetrap* was written decades ago, its themes of isolation feel incredibly relevant today. In our modern, hyper-connected world, physical isolation is not necessarily something we experience in the same way. Thanks to technology, we can video chat, message, or call anyone around the globe in an instant. Yet, ironically, many people feel more isolated than ever before.

Our social media presence, for example, creates the illusion of connection while actually fostering emotional distance. We carefully curate the image we present to the world, choosing what we share, what we hide, and how we appear to others. In a way, we are all playing the same game as the characters in *The Mousetrap*: hiding behind masks, maintaining control over our narratives, and distancing ourselves from our true selves. But beneath these "ideal" versions of ourselves lies a deeper emotional isolation, where we feel unknown and unseen.

In the play, this emotional isolation plays a key role in how the characters interact. Without knowing who they can trust, they withdraw into their suspicions, mistrusting not only each other but their own instincts. And the more they isolate themselves emotionally, the more vulnerable they become because the real threat, as always, lies within.

The Consequences of Secrets and Self-Isolation

One of the central questions posed by *The Mousetrap* is this: How well do we really know the people around us? It is a question that resonates even more strongly today, when we often communicate more online than in person. The characters in the play are brought together by chance, but it is their secrets, what they choose to hide, that shape their isolation and lead to conflict.

This emotional distance is something we experience today in a variety of forms. We have all been in situations where we hide parts of ourselves (our vulnerabilities, our pasts) out of fear of judgment or rejection. And, like in the play, when we hide these truths, it creates a divide. That distance can become fertile ground for mistrust, whether in friendships, family dynamics, or even online communities.

In *The Mousetrap*, the characters' secrets ultimately come to the surface, exposing their true identities and forcing them to confront not only the mystery at hand but their own choices. It is a reminder that no matter how hard we try to conceal our past or project a certain image, the truth always finds a way out. And when it does, the consequences can be devastating.

What *The Mousetrap* Reveals About Today's Society

As you watch *The Mousetrap*, it is fascinating to consider how isolation—both physical and emotional—drives the suspense. The snowstorm may trap the characters inside Monkswell Manor, but their real prison is the isolation they have created within themselves. And just like in real life, that isolation can lead to fear, paranoia, and the erosion of trust.

In today's society, where misinformation and online personas are rampant, *The Mousetrap* feels more relevant than ever. We are surrounded by information, yet we often feel more disconnected from each other than before. The play asks us to reflect on our own relationships and connections: How much do we really know about the people we interact with daily? And more importantly, how much do we truly reveal about ourselves?

Isolation, whether imposed by circumstance or self-inflicted through emotional barriers, is at the heart of both *The Mousetrap* and our current societal landscape. The characters' inability to trust one another mirrors the modern-day struggle with authenticity and vulnerability in a world where we are constantly performing.

Conclusion: A Reflection on Trust and Connection

As you leave the theater after experiencing *The Mousetrap*, consider the layers of isolation you have witnessed, not just the snowbound setting but the emotional distances that divide the characters. The play reminds us that, even in today's interconnected world, isolation can creep into our lives in unexpected ways. Whether it is through the facades we create or the secrets we hold close, we are all grappling with the tension between connection and isolation.

And perhaps, that is the greatest mystery of all: how we can bridge the gap between who we are and who we appear to be, both in the world of *The Mousetrap* and in our own lives.

Command Performance

BY CHRISTINE FREZZA

Source: Frezza, Christine. "Command Performance." *Utah Shakespeare Festival*, www.bard.org/study-guides/command-performance/.

By 1947, Agatha Christie was a much-published writer of mysteries and an occasional playwright, with two productions to her credit. Ira Levin, in his introduction to *The Mousetrap and Other Plays*, said that Christie felt other playwrights who adapted her novels made the mistake of "following the books too closely" (*Agatha Christie*, 1978, p. viii). She felt that "a detective story is particularly unlike a play. . . . It has such an intricate plot, and usually so many characters and false clues, that the thing is bound to be confusing. . . . What was wanted was simplification" (viii). Feeling she understood the genre, when the BBC called her with the request that she write a brief radio drama, she readily accepted, especially after learning that the request originated with the Dowager Queen Mary.

Christie quickly produced "a little radio sketch" called *Three Blind Mice* which was so well received that requests came in for her to turn it into a short story. However, pleased with her previous forays into playwriting, she thought of turning it into a stage play instead, and expanded it from the twenty-minute sketch into a full three acts. "It wanted a couple of extra characters, a fuller background and plot, and a slow working up to the climax" (*Agatha Christie, An Autobiography*, 1977, p. 498). Christie gives credit for the title to her son-in-law; the change was made because another play called *Three Blind Mice* already existed.

On November 25, 1952, *The Mousetrap* opened at the Ambassador Theatre, starring Richard Attenborough and his wife, Sheila Sim. At this point, one usually writes, "The production closed on . . ." but this time the date must be left blank, as *The Mousetrap* is still running more than fifty-four years later.

Statistics abound about the show, including: three entries in the *Guinness Book of World Records*; longest-running theatrical show in the world; complete cast, set, curtains, and theatre change—the only piece remaining from the original is a clock on the mantelpiece (*An Autobiography*, 498).

More interesting than the numbers is its truly universal appeal, having been presented in forty-one countries, and translated into twenty-one languages, the play speaks to some qualities we all possess.

Christie herself modestly attributed its success to luck and "there is a bit of something in it for almost everybody. . . . Young people enjoy it, elderly people enjoy it" (*An Autobiography*, 499). She then repeats her initial belief that having a skeleton of the radio sketch to work with, means the play is well constructed. "The thing unfolds so that you want to know what happens next, and you can't quite see where the next few minutes will lead you" (Dick Riley, and Pam McAllister, eds., *The New Bedside, Bathtub, and Armchair Companion to Agatha Christie*, 2nd ed., 1986, p. 203).

Much of the charm of the piece comes from Christie's skill at developing character. Everyone in *The Mousetrap* has a secret, some of which are innocent, but Christie gives us the possibility of each person being the villain, without ever caricaturing any of them. The recognizable types: the "masculine" woman, the disapproving elder lady, the "suspicious" foreigner, are all present but all made human through their brief displays of weaknesses or good humor.

Credit must also be given to the setting, a country house which has been turned into a genteel hotel. This type of British detective story is known as a “cozy” to avid mystery readers; its comfortable and familiar furnishings, its sense of being shielded from the hustle and bustle of urban life, help the reader (in this case the viewer) focus more easily on plot developments. In the case of *The Mousetrap*, urban life is completely shut off: the hotel is cut off from all outside interference by a snowstorm which conveniently also downs the phone, but not the power lines. Although our minds tell us we should pay attention to the radio announcement of a local murder, it is much more tempting to sink back in one of the comfortable armchairs without which no country house is complete, and contemplate our fellow travelers, even as more and more of them are revealed as possible murderers.

Christie makes the audience part of the world of the play by revealing nothing to them before the characters learn it. Every clue and every red herring are given equal time, as the final revelation is prepared. To reveal the conclusion of the play would be to ruin it for everyone; indeed, at each London performance, the audience is requested to keep the ending secret so as not to spoil the pleasure of those (surely by now!) very few who don't know “who done it.”

One such was of royal blood. On November 26, 2002, Queen Elizabeth II, granddaughter of Queen Mary, attended another “command performance,” the fiftieth anniversary of the show, and its 20,807th performance. Both had been running for fifty years, since this was also the monarch's Golden Jubilee year, and according to CNN, the Queen was a first-time viewer: “‘She doesn't know whodunit,’ a spokeswoman said. ‘So, yes, she's looking forward to seeing it.’” Presumably Her Majesty has kept the secret of the ending to herself.



A scene from *The Mousetrap* at Utah Shakespeare Festival, 2007

The Masks We Wear: Identity and Deception in Agatha Christie's Classic

Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* is not just a masterclass in suspense; it also delves into the complexities of identity and deception, elements that resonate deeply in our contemporary world. As we navigate through the lives of the characters trapped in Monkswell Manor, we uncover the intricate ways they construct their identities, revealing a parallel to the curated personas we often adopt, particularly on social media.

The Art of Persona

In *The Mousetrap*, each character arrives with a backstory that is as multifaceted as their motives. From the seemingly innocent Mollie Ralston to the enigmatic Major Metcalf, every individual presents a façade, carefully crafted to disguise their true selves. This art of persona-making mirrors how we often curate our identities online, presenting polished versions of ourselves while hiding behind filters and selected narratives. Just as the characters in the play navigate trust and suspicion, we too must consider who we reveal to the world and who remains hidden.

Authenticity vs. Deception

The tension between authenticity and deception is palpable in *The Mousetrap*. Characters frequently grapple with their true identities and the roles they feel compelled to play. For instance, as secrets unravel, the audience is invited to question the reliability of each character. Who can be trusted? Is anyone truly who they claim to be? This same questioning permeates our digital lives, where the lines between reality and representation can blur. In our quest for validation, we may exaggerate aspects of our lives, crafting an identity that aligns with societal expectations or personal aspirations.

The Consequences of Deception

Christie masterfully illustrates the consequences of these crafted identities. As the plot unfolds, the deception becomes a catalyst for tension and conflict, leading to dire repercussions. In our own lives, while a carefully curated persona can offer a sense of control and acceptance, it can also lead to isolation and anxiety. The more we hide behind our masks, the harder it can become to connect with others on a genuine level. Christie's characters remind us that the truth, no matter how messy or unflattering, often holds more power than the deception we cling to.

A Mirror to Our Society

Ultimately, *The Mousetrap* serves as a mirror reflecting our own societal behaviors. The masks we wear, whether in the realm of theater or social media, compel us to confront our motivations for hiding behind them. Are we protecting ourselves, or are we simply afraid of what lies beneath? As we engage with Christie's narrative, we are invited to ponder not only the identities of the characters but also our own. In a world where authenticity can feel elusive, perhaps it is time to reconsider the masks we choose to wear.



Solving the Puzzle: The Timeless Thrill of Mystery

Mystery stories have an enduring allure, captivating audiences for centuries with their intricate plots and tantalizing clues. Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* exemplifies this genre, weaving a tale that not only entertains but also invites audiences to become active participants in the puzzle. From the moment the curtain rises, suspense grips the audience, creating an atmosphere that keeps viewers on the edge of their seats.

Christie expertly constructs tension through character interactions and the isolated setting of Monkswell Manor. Each new arrival heightens intrigue, and as secrets are hinted at, the audience is drawn into a web of suspicion. The diverse cast of characters, each with their own quirks and motivations, adds layers to the mystery. Viewers find themselves questioning not only the identities of the characters but also their potential motives for murder. This ambiguity is a hallmark of Christie's work, inviting the audience to engage in the classic game of "whodunit."

One of the most satisfying aspects of *The Mousetrap* is the interactive experience it offers. The audience is encouraged to think critically, to piece together clues, and to draw their own conclusions before the final reveal. This participatory element transforms passive spectators into active participants, fueling a shared sense of excitement as we race against the unfolding action. The thrill of possibly solving the mystery before the characters do adds an exhilarating dimension to the experience. As the plot thickens, viewers mentally catalog alibis and motives, finding themselves immersed in the challenge.

The resolution of a well-crafted mystery is immensely rewarding. Christie's knack for plot twists and clever misdirection ensures that when the truth is finally revealed, it is both surprising and satisfying. The audience experiences a sense of closure, having navigated the labyrinth of clues alongside the characters. This satisfaction keeps us returning to mystery stories, as the resolution feels like a triumph, validating our deductive reasoning skills. Each twist and turn in the narrative builds anticipation, leading to a climax that is often as shocking as it is gratifying.

Beyond the thrill of the puzzle, mysteries often explore deeper themes such as human nature, morality, and the complexity of truth. In *The Mousetrap*, characters' motivations are intricately tied to their pasts, prompting audiences to reflect on the choices we make and the consequences they carry. The play raises questions about guilt and innocence, challenging viewers to consider the nuances of each character's backstory. This exploration of identity, coupled with the excitement of solving a mystery, ensures that such stories remain relevant across generations.

Moreover, the setting of *The Mousetrap* plays a crucial role in enhancing its suspenseful atmosphere. The isolation of Monkswell Manor creates an intimate yet claustrophobic environment, heightening the sense of danger. The storm outside mirrors the turmoil within the characters, amplifying the tension as they confront their secrets. This carefully crafted setting reinforces the idea that, in a world where danger lurks around every corner, the truth may be more elusive than it seems.

In a world filled with uncertainties, the clarity that comes from solving a mystery is a comforting escape. The genre allows us to explore the darker sides of human nature while ultimately leading us to a resolution. *The Mousetrap* stands as a testament to the timeless appeal of the genre, reminding us of the joy found in unraveling a well-spun tale. As we engage with Christie's masterpiece, we celebrate not only the craft of storytelling but also the thrill of the chase, the joy of participation, and the universal quest for truth.

This enduring fascination with mystery reflects our innate desire to seek answers and make sense of the chaos around us. In our everyday lives, we often grapple with uncertainty, making mysteries not just a form of entertainment but also a way to confront our own questions about morality, justice, and human behavior. Christie's work continues to resonate because it taps into these universal themes, allowing us to explore the complexities of life through the lens of intrigue and suspense.

As we gather to experience *The Mousetrap*, we are reminded that the journey to uncover the truth is as important as the destination itself. The play invites us to engage our minds and challenge our assumptions, ultimately leading to a deeper appreciation for the art of storytelling and the enduring thrill of mystery.

Justice or Retribution? Morality and Consequences in *The Mousetrap*

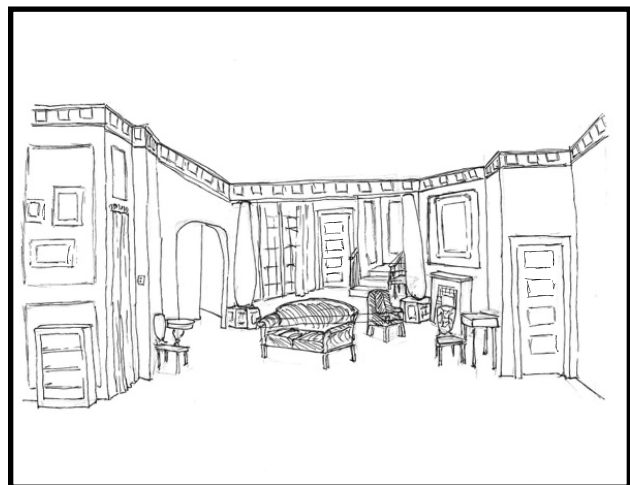
Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* captivates audiences not only with its suspenseful plot but also with its profound exploration of morality, guilt, and the inescapable nature of consequences. Set within the confines of Monkswell Manor, the play introduces characters whose past actions and hidden secrets intertwine, prompting vital questions about justice and retribution that resonate deeply in today's society.

At the heart of *The Mousetrap* lies the theme of guilt. Each character arrives with a history that threatens to surface, revealing layers of complexity that add depth to the narrative. Christie skillfully portrays the burden of guilt and its capacity to shape behavior, driving individuals toward desperate measures. As the story unfolds, the audience witnesses how the characters grapple with their pasts and the moral implications of their actions. The tension between who these characters are and who they pretend to be creates a rich psychological landscape that encourages viewers to reflect on their own moral compasses.

As the plot thickens, the distinction between justice and retribution emerges as a central conflict. Characters seek not only to uncover the truth but also to navigate their own moral dilemmas. Is justice merely about punishing the guilty, or does it also involve understanding and addressing the underlying issues that led to their actions? In *The Mousetrap*, the question of whether anyone can truly escape the consequences of their past looms large. Christie's narrative suggests that while individuals may evade immediate repercussions, their pasts ultimately shape their destinies. The notion that one's actions reverberate through time is a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of human experiences.

The characters in *The Mousetrap* reveal the complexities of human nature and the moral ambiguities inherent in our choices. As secrets are unveiled, the moral fabric of their lives begins to unravel, highlighting the precarious balance between right and wrong. The act of uncovering the truth serves both as a means of justice and as a catalyst for personal reckoning. Christie's adept plotting ensures that as the audience learns more about each character, the stakes rise, leading to a climax that challenges our perceptions of guilt and innocence. Ultimately, the resolution raises haunting questions: does the punishment fit the crime, and who possesses the authority to decide?

These themes of morality and accountability resonate far beyond the confines of the play, reflecting broader societal issues. Today, discussions around justice often focus on accountability, rehabilitation, and punishment, mirroring the moral dilemmas faced by Christie's characters. As we confront complex issues related to crime and punishment, *The Mousetrap* offers a lens through which to examine our values and the intricacies of justice. It prompts us to consider whether true justice can be achieved if it focuses solely on retribution, or whether it must encompass understanding and redemption.



Set Rendering by Scenic/Lighting Designer: Rick Arnold

In a society where actions carry far-reaching consequences, *The Mousetrap* challenges us to confront the weight of our decisions and the moral implications that accompany them. The exploration of guilt, justice, and the potential for redemption encourages a deeper understanding of human nature. As we engage with Christie's narrative, we are reminded that while we may seek justice, the path to true understanding often requires us to confront the shadows of our past.

Ultimately, *The Mousetrap* serves as a microcosm for broader discussions about morality and justice in our world. The characters' experiences resonate with contemporary dilemmas, urging us to reflect on the nature of accountability and the complexities of human behavior. In a time where the pursuit of justice can feel fraught with ambiguity, Christie's work invites us to explore the multifaceted layers of morality and the consequences of our actions.

As we delve into this timeless tale, we confront not only the mysteries presented on stage but also our own ethical dilemmas and the enduring question of what it means to seek justice in an imperfect world. *The Mousetrap* ultimately reminds us that the quest for truth is a journey marked by moral complexity, urging us to consider the consequences of our choices as we navigate the intricate tapestry of human existence.



Character Rendering of Miss Casewell by Costume Designer: Kim Morris



Character Rendering of Detective Trotter by Costume Designer: Kim Morris

Other Reviews

‘The Mousetrap’ is Updated at Court Theatre for a ‘Knives Out’ Generation

BY CHRIS JONES

Source: Jones, Chris. "Review: ‘The Mousetrap’ is Updated at Court Theatre for a ‘Knives Out’ Generation." *Chicago Tribune (Online)* Tribune Publishing Company, LLC, 2020. ProQuest, <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/review-mousetrap-is-updated-at-court-theatre/docview/2350920191/se-2>.

Agatha Christie’s *The Mousetrap* has been playing in London’s West End for more than 67 years, making it far and away the longest running show in history. When you think how much the culture has changed within that era, it’s a stunning feat. Of course, British detective whodunnits as a whole have never been more popular. Even on the way to the Court Theatre in Hyde Park on Saturday night, my car radio was probing the appeal of the genre and listing what to do if you want to stay alive in a small English village.

(Pro tip: Avoid gargoyles, statuary, vicars, gardeners and beekeepers.)

But on this side of the pond, the murderous doings at the Monkswell Manor guesthouse crop up around town around every five years. I’ve seen this show several times, beginning when I was a kid; I somehow have programmed myself to forget the details of the plot until next time, even if I find I start all my reviews the same way. But I’ll say this: “The Mousetrap” is much harder to do than theater people tend to think.



The cast of *The Mousetrap* directed by Sean Graney at Court Theatre
Photo: Michael Brosilow

The Mousetrap of course, is a masterpiece of misdirection. Thriller writers are like magicians and mind readers; the best of them constantly persuade you to look in the wrong direction, to think about anything but the actual logic of the plot. Of all the stage versions of Christie's books, *The Mousetrap* is by far the best, perhaps because of its genesis as a radio play. Unlike *And Then There None*, you don't watch a succession of murders and follow an ever-narrowing group of suspects. With one exception, the cast of characters in *The Mousetrap* stay alive.

Director Sean Graney's new production at Court, a theater better known for Sophocles than Christie, is broadly played and comic, sometimes to the point of intentional subversion. How you feel about the show, which features such droll character actors as David Cerda, Carolyn Ann Hoerdemann and Alex Goodrich will depend on how old school you like your Christie. If you are a traditionalist and see these works as psychological thrillers, grounded in truth and regular human behavior, you might, like me, resist some of the theatrical flourishes on the grounds that they threaten belief. The performances are all scaled differently and that means it is hard to see a consistent world of normalcy. This production wants to be as a satirical comedy as much as a thriller.

On the other hand, if you were a fan of the movie *Knives Out* and see tweedy old Christie as in need of some shaking up for a new moment, you'll likely have similar fun here, watching everyone cavort around Arnel Sancianco's amusing set. We didn't really need some of the pretty terrible English accents.

The three core performances, though, come from Kate Fry, Allen Gilmore and Erik Hellman and this trio has palpable respect for the quality of the material and they sufficiently anchor the show in actual behavior and insecurity to allow the all-important plot to do its thing. And the actress Tina Muñoz Pandya, playing one of the more enigmatic characters, adds a lot of life to that mix.

The work generally deepens in Act 2, as Christie sends you off down her signature garden path, far away from the real truth. She has been much copied, hasn't she?



The cast of *The Mousetrap* directed by Sean Graney at Court Theatre
Photo: Michael Brosilow

The World's Longest-Running Play Gets New Life in Australia

BY JASON BLAKE

Source: Blake, Jason. "The Mousetrap Review – the World's Longest-Running Play Gets New Life in Australia." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 11 Oct. 2022, www.theguardian.com/books/2022/oct/11/the-mousetrap-review-the-worlds-longest-running-play-gets-new-life-in-australia.

Some of Australia's leading artistic directors have recently suggested that, in these post lockdown times, it's the familiar that audiences crave. After three years during which the world itself became strange, we are in no mood for anything remotely "novel".

Producer John Frost is putting that theory to the test with this production of Agatha Christie's classic whodunit *The Mousetrap*. The only thing more comforting you could put on a stage would be a packet of malted milk biscuits.

The *Mousetrap* opened in 1952 in the Ambassadors in London and, were it not for a global pandemic, would have celebrated an unbroken 70-year West End run this year – seven decades during which this elegant little mystery became a "must-see" to be ticked off on a list with Buckingham Palace and Madame Tussauds.

The Mousetrap's reputation waned and by the early 1980s, when I first saw it, it was something of a stale joke on the moribund state of Britain and its theatre – a dusty trap for cheese sandwich-munching tourists on rainy afternoons. And was there an amateur dramatic stage in the English-speaking world on which *The Mousetrap* was not *itself* murdered at some point? I think not.

But the play's reputation has been revived, its formal elegance lauded. Though the play never changes, we've begun to see more in it: a depiction of a class system melting at the edges; the sympathetic rendering of identifiably queer characters; an embedded warning regarding the trustworthiness of those claiming authority.

And now more than ever, perhaps, we can see *The Mousetrap* as a story about the persistence of, and damage caused by, unacknowledged trauma.

A rich red curtain rises on the imposing drawing room of Monkswell Manor. It is winter 1952. Snow is falling, drifts are forming.

In a sign of changing times, Monkswell has become a guest house run by an energetic young couple, the Ralstons – Mollie (played here by Anna O'Byrne) and Giles (Alex Rathgeber). Tonight is their launch event, the first time they've welcomed guests to this bucolic, albeit freezing, corner of Berkshire.

And what guests they are: the prickly, fault-finding Mrs Boyle (Geraldine Turner); Christopher Wren (Laurence Boxhall), a flamboyant trainee architect; the retired Major Metcalf (Adam Murphy); and the unconventionally dashing Ms. Casewell (Charlotte Friels), who has lived most of her life abroad.

There are also two unexpected guests: the first is Mr. Paravicini (Gerry Connolly), who arrives claiming to have overturned his Rolls-Royce in a snowdrift; the second is Det. Sgt. Trotter (Tom Conroy), who arrives on skis and climbs through a window to inform us that all assembled are now suspects in a murder case and that one or more of them will die tonight. “One of you is a killer,” he announces. But which one?

With the telephone wire cut and bad weather preventing escape (and the arrival of Trotter’s backup), people who seemed merely odd begin to assume a guilty aspect. Is Paravicini really wearing makeup? Why was the Major exploring the cellar? Why does Giles have a copy of a London newspaper in his pocket despite claiming he hadn’t gone to town?

Directed by Robyn Nevin, this *Mousetrap* is springy and efficient. Even at this early stage of its development, ahead of a national tour, there’s a sense of ease in the staging, the elasticity that comes with confidence. The pace is cracking, the timing excellent, the characterizations warm and full.

O’Byrne (whom we more usually see on musical theatre stages) is a crisply delightful Mollie and very capably partnered by Rathgeber. Boxhall brings a touch of Hugh Grant daffiness to Wren (and a dash of hot feeling for Trotter). Friels’s long-striding Ms. Casewell is impeccable, and Connolly is a playful, mischievous Paravicini. Conroy’s intriguing Trotter blends forelock-tugging deference to his social “betters” with a disdain for their foibles and a dogged determination to expose the killer.

The relatively tight stage of the Theatre Royal accommodates Isabel Hudson’s set just about perfectly. The small details are nicely done, right down to the period-perfect RP of the radio newsreader who opens the play. The twist, when it comes, packs an appreciable punch.



‘The pace is cracking, the timing excellent, the characterizations warm and full.’
Photograph: Brian Geach

Analysis Tools

Things to Think About Prior to Performance

- What do you know about Agatha Christie as a playwright and author?
- What are your expectations for a murder mystery play? How do you define suspense in storytelling? What elements do you think create it?
- How do you feel about the concept of justice vs. retribution? How might this theme appear in the play?
- How might the theatricality of seeing a live performance rather than a movie enhance your experience as an audience member? What aspects of live performance do you think will contribute to the overall enjoyment of the play?
- What do you think about the role of the audience in a mystery play? How active do you think you will be in trying to solve the mystery?
- How do you think Christie uses red herrings in her storytelling?
- What emotions do you expect to experience during the performance?
- What do you think makes a character a reliable or unreliable narrator?

Things to Watch For in Performance

- Was there any casting that you thought was especially appropriate or inappropriate? Why?
- Was there a good, motivated relationship between the set and the action of the play?
- Were there levels on the stage for variety? If so, did they heighten the story?
- How does the color scheme and costume design heighten the show?
- There are a ton of props used in this play. Do these props help further the plot or character development? How?
- How is the passage of time conveyed through design?
- How does the sound design help heighten the story?
- How does the theatricality of the play contribute to its comedic and dramatic elements?

Things to Think About After the Performance

- What do you think the core value and then the theme is of this play?
- Why is this play still significant in the American Theater?
- How did the production's staging and set design contribute to the overall atmosphere?
- What role did humor play in the unfolding drama? Did it enhance or detract from the tension?
- What moral questions were raised, and how do you feel about their implications?
- How do the relationships between the characters change throughout the show?
- How effective was the pacing of the story? Did it keep you engaged throughout?
- How did the play explore the concepts of guilt and innocence? What did the play have to say about identity?
- Consider the contrasts between appearances and reality within the play. How do characters present themselves versus who they truly are?
- Did the ending provide a satisfying resolution? Why or why not?

Other Analysis Tools

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, what happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is “about”? In a nutshell, how does the playwright drive their point(s) home?
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwright decide that this was the most quintessential title for this work?

Additional Information

The running time for this production is approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes, which includes one 15 minute intermission.

Please join us for a pre-show discussion Thursday, October 3 at 6:45pm in MAC 140 preceding the preview performance. Note that the pre-show discussions will include the director and designers and will be a discussion on the approach to this production.

There will also be a post-show discussion following the Friday, October 11 performance. The post-show will be with the director, cast, and crew, and we will be fielding questions from the audience.

Please join us!



Publicity Photo for College of DuPage's College Theater's Fall 2024 Production of *The Mousetrap*
Costume Design by Kim Morris

Pictured (from Left to Right): Nick Washington as Giles Ralston, Jamiya Haynes as Mollie Ralston, and Will Lech as Detective Sergeant Trotter