LET’S STUDY A PLAY TOGETHER

THE MOUSETRAP
By Agatha Christie
The Mousetrap

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Read a play together – a fun group exercise

- Learn about the history of the play, the genre, the playwright, the background, etc., as time permits

- Discuss the play, e.g., the humor, the suspense, the stage effects, the characters

- Enjoy the reading, the class and our analysis of the play
Instructors will assign roles weekly in an e-mail attachment.

Each person will have one or more roles to read each week – please try to read in advance (except for the last few pages of Act II, where we learn whodunit!)

Roles will shift before each class, depending on class absences – we need to cover all the characters.
We will read a scene or an act per week.

Each week the roles will rotate among class members – equal reading times for everyone.

Please let the instructors know ASAP of any planned or unplanned absences.
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CLASS LOGISTICS (CONT.)

- We will have a short lecture to start each class

- Class members will read aloud the assigned scene(s) or act

- We (all of us) will discuss what we see/read/hear and ask or answer questions
CLASS LOGISTICS (CONT.)

- Are there any questions so far as to our class procedure?

- Does everyone have a copy of the script?

- Now to explain the role assignments:
  - To give everyone an opportunity to read a part, we have arbitrarily split up the scene into “chunks”
  - Scene I has five “chunks”, so five assignments
DISCLAIMER

- This class is not Readers Theater, because:
  - We read, rather than act (no British accents required)
  - Everyone reads at every class meeting
  - We don’t rehearse
  - We don’t critique the readers’ technique
  - We read an entire play from start to finish
  - We study the play in context
  - We are multi-media, e.g., we watch video clips, listen to music, etc.
Why was this play chosen?

- Longest running play ever in London
- More contemporary than the previous plays we have studied – written in 1952
- Different genre (mystery) than we have considered before
- Entertaining, light-hearted
- Characters fun to act out
- Lots of video clips available
The Mousetrap

- Has anyone seen this play on the stage?
- Is there anyone in class who has never read an Agatha Christie story?
- Never seen one on TV?
- Never heard one on the radio?
- Never read a “cozy” mystery?
- Never wanted to live in a small English village?
- Never wondered about the person living in the house or cottage next to you?
- Never wondered about the person sitting next to you?
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- Some references – English terminology and Mousetrap-specific explanations
  - Stoke the Aga: built up the fire
  - Paddington: railroad station
  - Benares brass: Indian metalwork
  - Etc. (also see next page)

- (If only the British would learn to speak the English language as well as we do, they could understand us! And we them.)
• **Canterbury**: a piece of portable, occasional furniture, consisting of an open-topped rack with slatted compartments for sheet music, music books, magazines or newspapers and often a drawer underneath as well; rests on four legs, which are typically on casters; developed in the 1780s in England (reputedly deriving its name from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who commissioned one), it grew increasingly ornate throughout the 19th century: Victorian pieces often have an upper galleried shelf, and panels shaped like lyres or treble clefs
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Video Clips:

- [Video Clip Intro. to the Characters](#)
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Characters
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Molly Ralston
The Mousetrap

Giles Ralston
The Mousetrap

Christopher Wren
The Mousetrap

Mrs. Boyle
The Mousetrap

Major Metcalf
The Mousetrap

Miss Casewell
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Mr. Paravicini
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Detective Sergeant Trotter
Agatha Awards

- Does everyone know about the “Agatha” awards?
- The Agatha Awards are given annually for materials first published in the United States by a living author during the calendar year, either in hardcover, as a paperback original, or e-published by an e-publishing firm.
- The Agatha Awards honor the "traditional mystery“, i.e., books best typified by the works of Agatha Christie, as well as others. This genre is loosely defined as mysteries that:
  - are in a closed setting
  - Include an amateur detective
  - contain no explicit sex
  - contain no excessive gore or gratuitous violence
  - Materials generally classified as "hard-boiled" are not appropriate.
Agatha Awards (cont.)

- Agatha Awards are handed out in six categories: Best Novel; Best First Mystery; Best Historical Novel; Best Short Story; Best Non-Fiction; Best Children's/Young Adult Mystery.

- Additionally, in some years the Poirot award is presented to honor individuals other than writers who have made outstanding contributions to the mystery genre, but it is not an annual award.

- FYI: In 2011, the winner of the Best Novel Agatha Award was Margaret Maron, who coincidentally is the subject of another OLLI class this term.
Cozy Mysteries Genre:

- Most cozy mysteries take place in a small, picturesque town or village, with characters who could be neighbors or friends.
- Note that there exists a web site: www.cozy-mystery.com, for those who love this sort of thing.
- Mousetrap is a play, not a novel, but may fall into the cozy mystery genre – let’s see what we think once we read it.
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Video Clips:

- Monty Python Spoof