

The Narrative Discourse Coherence of *And Then There Were None*: Based on the Textual Logic Analysis of Detective Fiction

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Abstract. This study explores the narrative discourse coherence in Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* by integrating literary narrative strategies and linguistic coherence theories. The analysis shows that the novel stays organised by using a setting that is closed off and a nursery rhyme structure, which helps connect the events together. Lexical cohesion, such as repeated references to "island" and "murder", reinforces thematic continuity. Rhetorical Structure Theory highlights how character secrets serve as satellites to elaborate the plot's nuclei of sequential deaths. Cognitively, Christie's use of shifting perspectives creates cognitive dissonance, prompting readers to reconcile unreliable narratives. The revelation of the murderer as a seemingly dead character disrupts causal expectations, engaging readers in retroactive sense-making. Discourse modes—narrative, descriptive, and argument—blend to balance sensory detail with ethical themes. The entity grid model confirms coherence through recurring entities like "the judge," demonstrating how setting restriction and genre subversion create a unified mystery. This interdisciplinary approach enriches understandings of how narrative strategies and coherence mechanisms interact in detective fiction.

Keywords: Detective Fiction Narrative; Discourse Coherence Theory; Agatha Christie; Narrative Perspective.

1. Introduction

Research on detective stories, especially Agatha Christie's work, looks at how writers change views, build plots, and follow genre rules. Meanwhile, recent studies on how writing remains cohesive have made significant progress in demonstrating how the components of a text interconnect. These two areas are both important. Storytelling research shows how detective fiction works, and language studies show how writing stays clear and meaningful. But there is still a space between these two fields. Not many studies look at how story tricks in detective fiction use language tools that keep things connected. Putting them together helps both sides. It helps us see how story links create surprise and tension. Additionally, it demonstrates how detective stories can uniquely test language theories by incorporating logical puzzles that maintain reader interest. By joining story studies and language connection research, this paper builds a new method. It shows how Christie's *And Then There Were None* uses story tools and language devices to work together. This helps us better understand how detective fiction is written, and also offers good examples that help develop theories on how writing stays connected.

2. Literature Review

This part looks at studies on storytelling and text connection in detective fiction, focusing on *And Then There Were None* by Agatha Christie. It uses ideas from language, mind science, and literature to show how language tools help build suspense and keep readers involved.

Detective stories often use planned story moves to trick readers and create tension. Rabinowitz talks about "rules of configuration", where writers play with what readers expect to surprise them[1]. In *And Then There Were None*, Christie uses the "least likely person" trick[2], where the killer looks like a victim, confusing cause and effect. Scholars also talk about how she uses setting and perspective. The island cuts off outside help and traps the story inside, making readers focus on how characters act[3]. Li says the nursery rhyme acts like a frame, where each death matches a verse, but later that

idea is broken when the killer is revealed to be someone thought dead[4]. Christie uses many points of view, like those of Vera and Lombard, to confuse readers[5]. This matches Li Mengyuan's idea of "open suspense", where readers need to guess and connect facts as they read[6].

Story structure theories help explain how detective fiction stays whole. Rumelhart says stories follow a plan: first the setting (arrival on the island), then events (the deaths), then the end (the judge's confession)[7]. Kehler talks about different types of links in stories: cause-effect, similarity, and closeness—all of which appear in Christie's work[8]. The rhyme creates a cause-effect link (each death follows the rhyme), and the island links events to the setting. In detective fiction, solving the crime is key to keeping the story clear. Jurafsky & Martin use Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) to show that genres like mystery use "question-answer" patterns: clues raise questions, and final clues give answers[9]. In this novel, letters and diary entries help by adding extra details[10]. Hunter & Thompson say that stories change depending on context[11], and Rohde et al. show that both clear and hidden story links keep readers interested by mixing things they expect with surprises[12].

In this story, three tools help keep it connected. First, the judge faking his death breaks the usual cause-effect pattern, which matches Rabinowitz's idea that broken expectations keep readers interested[1]. Second, unclear speech and different views create similarity links, where many suspects seem alike[2]. Vera's guilt also makes her seem unreliable, like Widdowson says, where meaning depends on what characters really mean[13]. Third, Sinclair's idea of "encapsulation" and "prospection" shows how each clue hides some meaning and hints at what's next[14]. This creates a process of story connection, where clues guide readers toward the truth[15].

3. Studies on Detective Fiction Narrative

Detective fiction often plays with normal story patterns to guide readers and then trick them. Rabinowitz's idea of "rules of configuration" shows how writers set up what readers expect and then change it to surprise them. In *And Then There Were None*, Christie uses the "least likely person" idea, where the killer is made to look like a victim, which goes against cause and effect[2]. This way, readers have to think again about who is guilty and what their reasons are.

The story also uses a closed setting, like the island in this book. This limits outside news, so readers have to look at what happens between the people stuck there[3]. This makes the story tenser because everyone is trapped, and the mystery has to be solved inside this small place. The closed setting also makes sure that no outside clues change what happens, so everything must be figured out from within. The use of many different character points of view adds even more suspense. Christie switches between people like Vera and Lombard[5]. These changes show only part of the truth and make it harder to trust any one story. Readers must figure things out on their own, using many points of view that don't always match. This shows how detective fiction often gives only small pieces at a time, and readers need to put them together.

Chinese scholars say Christie uses a three-layer story style—main story, side story, and hidden meanings. These layers include letters or notes that may support or go against the main story[5]. They hide secrets and false clues in each level. This structure helps readers slowly find the truth and stay curious. The nursery rhyme in *And Then There Were None* acts like a guide for the story. Each line points to how a character will die[4]. This sets up a rhythm that builds tension while also hiding who the real killer is. As seen in the coincidence of Mrs. Rogers' death aligning with "Nine little boys went to bed..." to exemplify Kong Huiyu's theory of coincidences as suspense triggers[16]. The rhyme repeats, keeping the pace of the story and increasing fear each time something happens. Christie's skill in hiding the truth with fake clues, odd points of view, and breaking normal rules shows how detective fiction can be both a puzzle and a test of readers' thinking. The story of people being killed one by one in a locked place forms a chain of events[17]. Each death provides a clue, pushing the story forward. As more people die, the pace speeds up and readers feel a growing need to solve the case. Christie adds dramatic irony, where readers may know more than some of the characters. She uses many tricks—different views, settings, rhymes, and timings—to hold attention. Her careful

control of time and facts keeps the story sharp and captivating, showing how detective fiction uses clever story building to fool and excite readers.

4. Narrative Discourse Coherence Theories

4.1 Theoretical Foundations: Coherence as Meaning and Use in Context

The idea of coherence comes from how meaning and context come together to make a full story. Halliday and Hasan asserted that coherence is built through repeated words and grammar links that help meaning stay on track[18]. For instance, in *The Gift of the Magi*, phrases such as "Della's long hair" and "Jim's gold watch" are repeated multiple times. Also, words like "but" and "and" help show order and reasons. Van Dijk added that coherence also means the whole story needs to follow a clear line[19]. It needs to make sense step by step and have a larger message. For instance, the way Della sells her hair in steps and the overall idea of love and giving keep the story connected. Certain concepts emphasize the reader's comprehension of the text. Widdowson said that readers need to understand the meaning behind what people say, like when a narrator uses irony to show a message[13]. Brown and Yule said that world knowledge, like knowing that people give gifts at Christmas, helps readers connect the events[20]. Zhang Delu noted that closed settings, like in *And Then There Were None*, help a story feel complete and focused, like how *The Gift of the Magi* stays within a small home setting[21].

4.2 Cognitive Models: Mental Images and Thinking Steps

Cognitive views of coherence say that people make mental maps while they read. Kintsch and van Dijk said that readers match story facts with their own guesses to create meaning[22]. For example, Della's saving money and her worry add up to show how much she cares. Centering Theory says that stories stay smooth by repeating key names or things[23]. Words such as "Jim" and "comb" in *The Gift of the Magi* help maintain reader focus on the appropriate individuals and concepts. Barzilay and Lapata built a model that checks how often main people or items show up[24]. In the story, the watch chain and the combs come up many times, showing how the couple gives up something important. Brain studies say that when a story makes sense, it lights up parts of the brain that handle memory and feelings[25]. Kehler said stories work by building links like cause and result (Della sells hair → buys chain) or by contrast (their gifts don't match but show love)[26].

4.3 Story Types and How They Build Structure

Stories use different types of writing to guide readers. Smith said stories have modes like telling what happens, giving details, or sharing opinions[27]. In *The Gift of the Magi*, the action is when Della goes to cut her hair, the details are in how the combs look, and the opinion is in the final message from the narrator. RST shows how small parts of the story add meaning to bigger parts[10]. For example, "Della counted her money" adds to "She had \$1.87", showing how poor she is. The Penn Discourse Treebank (PDTB) gives names to story links, like "cause" or "contrast". Computer models today test how well stories follow one idea by checking how closely the meaning in each sentence matches the one before[28]. Therefore, effective story flow comes from repeated words, how people understand things, and writing styles that tie everything together. These ideas are beneficial both for reading stories and for machines that need to make sense of or compelling good texts.

5. Analysis of Narrative Discourse Coherence in And Then There Were None

5.1 Structural Coherence: Closed Setting and Rhetorical Connection

Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* shows strong structure by using a closed setting and careful story links. The island setting limits outside news and forces readers to focus on the events between the people stuck there[21]. This island becomes a central place that ties all the actions

together. Each death is a single event but also part of a bigger chain[19]. The nursery rhyme in the story (“Ten little soldier boys went out to dine...”) gives the plot a clear form. It acts like a road map, helping readers follow what will happen next. This rhyme makes a top-level structure that holds the events in order[10]. RST (Rhetorical Structure Theory) explains how parts of the story support each other. For example, the sentence “Each person hides a secret” helps explain the main idea “Their deaths follow the rhyme’s order.” This link shows that their past actions lead to punishment[10]. The story repeatedly employs words to reinforce its ideas. The story keeps bringing up “nursery rhyme”, “island”, and “murder”. These words make the reader stay focused on the main theme[18]. In PDTB (Penn Discourse Treebank), these links are called “Cause-Effect”. In this case, the cause is each person’s past crime, and the effect is their death. Another link type is “Contrast”, shown when people seem innocent but are actually guilty[29]. Computer models also support this structure. The entity grid model shows that key people and objects like “the judge” and “the revolver” show up again and again[24]. This builds a web of repeated things that keep the story tight. New AI tools can also find when parts of the story add more detail[28]. For example, the judge’s diary gives more meaning to what already happened. These tools show how the main story and extra parts work well together.

5.2 Cognitive Coherence: Many Views and Reader Thinking

Christie builds mental clarity in the story by showing things from different points of view. The story moves between people like Vera and Lombard. Each person sees events in their own way, which causes confusion and doubt[5]. As Yang notes, withholding key info to create suspense and force readers to seek coherence amid conflicting perspectives is exemplified in the judge's fake death, where misjudgments heighten the twist's impact[30]. This matches Centering Theory, where the focus stays on things that keep showing up, like the rhyme or the unseen host[23]. For example, when Vera talks about Cyril’s death, the reader has to decide if her version is true. This matches the idea that readers put together what they are told and what they guess[22].

Psychological studies say readers build pictures in their heads to understand stories. When the killer is shown to be someone who was thought dead, it breaks what readers expect. This is called “violated expectation”[26]. It makes readers stop and rethink all the past events. Brain research says this kind of twist makes the brain more active[25]. The parts that handle emotions and memory start working more when readers need to go back and connect earlier clues.

The story uses different ways of telling to help with understanding. The descriptive mode shows the setting (“the sea crashed against the rocks”), the narrative mode shows what happens next (each death), and the argument mode appears when the judge explains his own reasons for the killings[27]. These modes work together to mix sights, actions, and big ideas about right and wrong. That way, the story feels full and not just a list of events. Studies from other languages show that this style works in many places[31]. The closed space and cause chains are easy to follow and strong in all cultures. Also, computer tests show that the book stays on topic well because it repeats ideas like the rhyme and keeps the same key people in focus[28].

6. Conclusion

This study analyzes *And Then There Were None*’s narrative coherence. The closed-island setting forces readers to link events, while the nursery rhyme structures the plot and masks the killer’s identity. Lexical chains (“rhyme,” “island”) and RST-driven subplots enhance thematic unity. Christie uses shifting perspectives (Vera, Lombard) to fuel uncertainty, with Centering Theory highlighting how repeated entities (“judge”) maintain focus. The twist ending prompts retroactive sense-making. Computational models (entity grid) confirm high coherence via recurring themes. Cross-linguistic studies support the novel’s universal coherence strategies, rooted in setting and topic repetition.

The study possesses three weaknesses: the insufficient incorporation of interdisciplinary integration, the inadequate provision of cross-cultural comparison, and the omission of quantitative corroboration. There is a necessity to incorporate cognitive science theories to explain reader

inference, study translated versions to analyze cultural impacts, and utilize computational simulation as a provider of empirical corroboration. Future work can focus on genre subversion in postmodern detective narrative, multimodal coherence in adaptations, and reader-response experiments.

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