

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes the research background, research questions, research objective, research significance, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

#### 1.1 Research Background

Locked Room Mysteries are a subgenre of detective fiction that have captivated readers for years with their intricate plots and unexpected endings. This subgenre is often defined by crimes that appear unsolvable, occurring in confined spaces with no clear suspects, and has been a significant part of mystery literature since the early 20th century. Despite the genre's evolution, one of the most compelling contemporary examples is *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* (2022) by Rian Johnson. This film, a sequel to *Knives Out* (2019), reintroduces the renowned investigator Benoit Blanc as he investigates the murder of a wealthy businessman at a luxurious retreat. *Glass Onion* offers a modern take on the locked room genre, blending classic elements with contemporary themes such as privilege, power, and deception.

The locked-room formula was first introduced by Edgar Allan Poe in his short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, published in 1841. This story features the first fictional detective, C. Auguste Dupin, who investigates the double murder of a mother and daughter in an apartment locked from the inside. The uniqueness of this tale lies in the crime's apparent impossibility, as there is no obvious exit from the room. Poe introduced deductive reasoning in solving the case, which later became foundational for many subsequent detective stories.

In 1907, French author Gaston Leroux published *Le Mystère de la Chambre Jaune* (*The Mystery of the Yellow Room*), considered one of the early examples of

the locked room mystery genre. In this novel, a woman is attacked in a room locked from the inside, and young detective Joseph Rouletabille attempts to uncover how the crime occurred. Leroux provides detailed diagrams and floor plans to demonstrate that it was impossible for anyone to have entered or exited the room.

John Dickson Carr, known as a master of the locked room mystery genre, published *The Hollow Man (The Three Coffins)* in 1935, featuring detective Dr. Gideon Fell. Carr presents a "locked room lecture" in Chapter 17, where Dr. Fell explains various ways murders can be committed in seemingly impossible situations. This novel is often regarded as one of the best examples of the locked room mystery genre. Another of Carr's works, *The House at Satan's Elbow* (1965), features Dr. Fell investigating a series of strange events in a remote house, employing locked room elements such as the disappearance of important documents and ghostly apparitions to create a tense atmosphere.

In 1892, English author Israel Zangwill published *The Big Bow Mystery*, one of the early examples of the locked room mystery genre. In this story, a man is found dead in a locked room, and a detective attempts to uncover how the crime occurred. Zangwill is known for using misdirection techniques, providing misleading clues to confuse readers and characters within the story.

These works demonstrate how the locked room formula has been applied and developed by various authors to create challenging and engaging mystery stories. Each of these works offers a unique approach to the locked room mystery genre, maintaining classic elements while introducing new innovations.

Film Adaptations of the Locked Room Formula, In addition to literary works, several films have adapted the locked room formula:

*Cube* (1997) by Vincenzo Natali: This film tells the story of a group of individuals who wake up inside a large cube filled with deadly traps. They must work together to find a way out while uncovering the mystery behind their confinement. *Cube* combines elements of the locked room mystery with psychological horror and science fiction, creating a tense and enigmatic atmosphere.

*Fermat's Room* (2007) by Luis Piedrahita and Rodrigo Sopeña: This film follows four mathematicians invited to a remote house to solve a great enigma. However, they are soon trapped in a room with walls that slowly close, forcing them to solve puzzles to survive. The film combines elements of the locked room mystery with logic puzzles and psychological tension.

*Your Vice Is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* (1972) by Sergio Martino: This Italian film is a loose adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's story *The Black Cat*. It tells the tale of a writer involved in a series of mysterious murders in his isolated home. The film's title itself refers to the locked room mystery concept, where crimes occur in seemingly sealed spaces.

*The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (1919) by Émile Chautard: This film adaptation of Gaston Leroux's novel depicts a woman who is attacked in a locked room. Young detective Joseph Rouletabille is called to solve the mystery. The film is considered one of the early examples of the locked room mystery genre in cinema.

*The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* (1927) by Alfred Hitchcock: This silent film tells the story of a mysterious man who lodges with a family in London, coinciding with a series of murders in the area. The film features locked room mystery elements with Hitchcock's characteristic tense atmosphere.

These films illustrate how the locked room formula can be adapted across various contexts and genres, from psychological horror to classic detective drama. Each film offers a unique approach to the locked room mystery, providing a deep and puzzling viewing experience.

#### Application of Poe's Locked Room Formula in Modern Cinema

This study utilizes Edgar Allan Poe's 1895 locked room formula theory, which provides a foundational framework for evaluating the locked room mystery genre. Poe is often regarded as the creator of the modern locked room mystery genre, particularly with works like *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) and *The Purloined Letter* (1844). Poe's locked room techniques include key elements such as an unsolved crime in a confined space with no exit. The crime scene is often sealed, leaving a mystery that seems unsolvable. The investigator is depicted as an

innovative and logical thinker who uses deductive reasoning to solve the case. The resolution sometimes includes a clever twist, revealing how the crime was committed despite seeming

While Edgar Allan Poe's locked-room formula serves as a structural foundation for this analysis, Character-Based Narrative Theory examines how the characters in the film contribute to the locked-room mystery. This theory posits that characters' motivations, secrets, and interactions are pivotal drivers in storytelling, particularly in detective fiction. The complex characters and hidden motivations in *Glass Onion* play a crucial role in the development of the mystery. By evaluating the roles of characters such as Miles Bron, Benoit Blanc, and the other guests, we can gain a deeper understanding of how their actions, backgrounds, and personalities contribute to the locked-room mystery. Character-Based Narrative Theory enables an exploration of the psychological depth of the suspects and how their actions are used to weave a web of clues and traps that complicate the mystery's resolution.

Integrating Edgar Allan Poe's Locked-Room Formula with Character-Based Narrative Theory provides a dual approach to understanding how *Glass Onion* constructs its locked-room mystery. Poe's formula offers a structural analysis of the genre, allowing us to see how the film adheres to or deviates from traditional locked-room conventions. Meanwhile, Character-Based Narrative Theory provides insights into how the characters in the film play significant roles in the development of the mystery, with their motivations and actions influencing the plot's progression.

Several previous studies have presented analyses of locked-room mysteries in modern detective fiction. Harris (2020) and Martin (2019) have conducted studies on the evolution of locked-room mysteries in modern detective fiction. Harris argues that contemporary films often use this formula to address social issues, while Martin (2019) analyzes character-based plots in *Knives Out* and *Glass Onion*. However, these studies do not specifically focus on *Glass Onion* or its characters, leaving a gap in understanding how the character-driven mystery in this film builds its locked-room elements. Smith (2021) provides a comprehensive review of locked-room mysteries in cinema, focusing on classic films and

comparing them with recent adaptations. Its gap lies in the lack of in-depth analysis of how *Glass Onion* adheres to or deviates from traditional locked-room conventions, particularly concerning setting, character roles, and narrative structure.

This study investigates how the characters in *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* contribute to the locked-room mystery aspect of the film. The focus is on the roles these characters play in creating the impression of an unsolvable mystery and how their interactions, motivations, and backgrounds influence the narrative. Additionally, this study analyzes how *Glass Onion* adheres to the established formula in locked-room detective fiction, which is typically defined by a confined setting, a crime that appears impossible to commit, and a resolution that cleverly reveals how the crime was carried out

## 1.2 Research questions

This research focuses on the "Lockedroom in *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mustery* (2022) by Rian Johnson" and examines the elements in the film that relate to Edgar Allan Poe's locked room detective formula. Poe, a pioneer of this genre in modern literature, introduced the concept of a locked room mystery through his works, which have existed in folk tales and legends. The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do the detective contribute to constructing the locked room mystery elements in *Rian Johnson's Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mustery* (2022)?
2. How are the Locked-room formula aspects applied to *Rian Johnson's Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mustery* (2022)?

## 1.3 Research objective

Based on the research questions, the research purposes for this study can be formulated as follows:

1. To analyze how the main characters in *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mustery* (2022) contribute to the construction of the locked room mystery elements, focusing on their motivations, interactions, and roles in shaping the narrative.
2. To examine how the aspects of the locked room formula, as defined by Edgar Allan Poe, are applied in *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mustery* (2022), particularly in relation to the impossible crime, limited access, the detective's role, and the logical resolution of the mystery.

#### **1.4 Research significances**

This research holds theoretical and practical significance in literature studies, particularly detective fiction analysis. It contributes to understanding detective fiction evolution, particularly in contemporary works' locked room mystery formula. Analyzing *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mustery* (2022) expands the understanding of how classic structures are adapted to modern narratives, settings, and characterizations. The study also adds to the limited scholarship on character dynamics in constructing the illusion of the "impossible crime" within locked room mysteries. This new perspective integrates character analysis into the study of detective fiction formulas. This research provides valuable insights for students, researchers, and writers in detective fiction, mystery writing, and literature analysis. It explains how traditional literary formulas can adapt to contemporary contexts through character development and modern narrative techniques. It offers practical examples for crafting engaging locked-room mysteries using character interactions, settings, and layered plots. Balancing classical logical structures with modern themes and technological realities is essential for creating compelling detective stories.

### 1.5 Conceptual framework

This study uses Edgar Allan Poe's Locked Room Formula and Character-Driven Narrative Theory. It examines how the main characters in *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* contribute to constructing the locked-room mystery elements. It also sees how the film adheres to or reinvents the locked-room detective fiction formula. Combining these two approaches, the study tries to discover how old locked-room conventions are used in a modern setting and how character interaction drives the story and leads to the mystery's conclusion.

Edgar Allan Poe's locked-room formula, introduced in works like *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Purloined Letter*, established the key structural elements that define the locked-room mystery genre. The primary components of this formula include an impossible crime, limited access to the crime scene, the role of the detective, and a logical resolution (Poe, 1895). Edgar Allan Poe's locked-room formula, first used in works such as *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Purloined Letter*, established the basic structural components that define the locked-room mystery genre. First, an impossible crime occurs in a closed or otherwise confined place, with no obvious way for the culprit to escape or enter. This creates a primary conundrum that the investigator must solve (Shiloh, 2011).

Second, limited access means the crime scene is generally sealed or isolated, preventing anyone from entering. This constraint creates an insoluble riddle (Mullen & O'Beirne, 2000). Third, the detective in Poe's formula is often portrayed as a sensible, logical thinker who uses deductive reasoning to solve the mystery. The detective must discover the nature of the crime and who is responsible (Jones & Crick, 2021). Lastly, logical resolution frequently includes a clever twist that demonstrates how the crime was committed despite the seeming impossibility. The detective must utilize logic, observation, and reasoning to pull together hidden clues to solve the case (Leitch, 2002).

Character-driven narrative theory by McKee (2021) is an idea that emphasizes the crucial role characters play in shaping a story's narrative. There are several key points in it. First, character motivations and secrets are central to the narrative. It is growing, driving actions driven by psychological forces. These

hidden motivations create tension and conflict as the audience uncovers the truth behind a character's behavior (Tobin, 2018). Moreover, interaction and relationships emphasize the importance of connections between characters, whether adversarial, romantic, or professional. These relationships shape the character's development and plot, providing subtle clues and introducing conflict, which propels the narrative and keeps the audience engaged (Mariani & Ciancia, 2019). Finally, the impact of characters on plot development brings all of these elements together. In character-driven stories, the storyline is not a separate force but is inextricably linked to the characters' actions (Mariani & Ciancia, 2019). Thus, based on intentions and relationships, every character's decision changes the story's direction.

In conclusion, the conceptual framework based on Edgar Allan Poe's Locked Room Formula and Character-Driven Narrative Theory offers a thorough lens through which to study *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mustery* (2022). This framework allows for a thorough examination of how the film adheres to and innovates on the classic locked room genre by focusing on the mystery's structural components and the characters' psychological depth. The film's limited setting, impossible crime, and intricate character interactions combine to produce a rich and layered tale that defies spectator expectations, transforming it into an interesting twist on the classic genre. Using this paradigm, the study reveals how Glass Onion honors and reinvents the locked room formula while emphasizing the importance of character dynamics in creating the mystery's outcome. The following figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of this study.

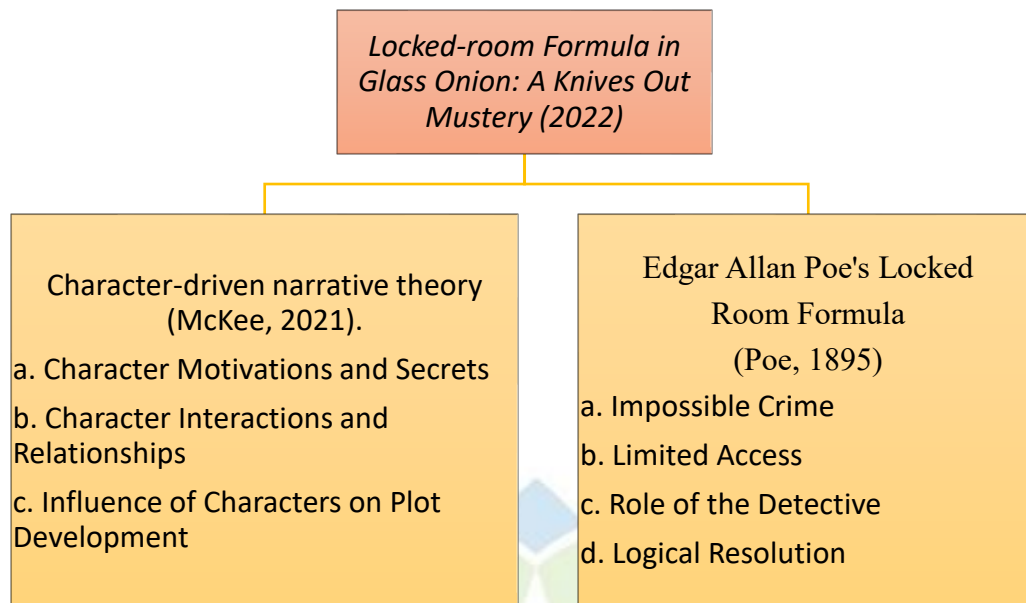


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## 1.6 Previous studies

Several studies have been conducted on locked room mysteries and detective fiction the First, Joseph B. Kadane – *Bayesian Thought in Early Modern Detective Stories* (2010) Kadane examines how early fictional detectives like C. Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes employed principles akin to Bayesian reasoning in their deductive processes, offering insights into the logic behind locked room mysteries.

Second, Michael Cook – *Narratives of Enclosure in Detective Fiction: The Locked Room Mystery* (2011) This study investigates how locked room mysteries became an archetypal form in popular detective fiction. Cook analyzes texts from Edgar Allan Poe to contemporary works, highlighting their impact on shaping the immensely popular detective genre.

Third, BBC News – *Why are locked room mysteries so popular?* (2012) This article discusses the allure of locked room mysteries, revealing how the genre continues to

captivate readers with seemingly impossible puzzles and clever solutions, as well as its relevance in modern detective literature.

Fourth, Mark Charan Newton – *Tips for Writing Locked-Room Mysteries* (2013) In this article, Newton shares his experiences and techniques in writing locked room mysteries, including the importance of reverse engineering and strategically placing clues to create tension and surprise in the narrative.

Fifth, The Bodies From The Library – *Seven Types of Locked Room Mystery* (2017) This article classifies various types of solutions in locked room mysteries, based on categories proposed by John Dickson Carr, including unbreakable alibis and seemingly impossible crimes, providing a structural understanding of the genre's formula.

Sixth, The Bodies From The Library – *Trends in Locked Room Mysteries* (2017) This article explores trends in locked room mysteries, highlighting the genre's golden age and how writers sought new and inventive solutions to engage readers.

Seventh, Wired – *S.S. Van Dine's twenty rules for writing detective stories* (2019) This article reviews the twenty rules proposed by S.S. Van Dine for writing detective stories, including principles of fairness and logical deduction, which serve as the foundation for many locked room mysteries in detective fiction.

Eighth, Gigi Pandian – *Locked-Room Mysteries: Modern Interest in the Classic Mystery Subgenre* (2022) Pandian discusses the resurgence of interest in locked room mysteries, particularly among young readers and contemporary writers. She highlights how technology and digital publishing have allowed both classic and new works in this genre to be rediscovered by a wider audience.

Ninth, Edirlei Soares de Lima et al. – *Characterizing the Investigative Methods of Fictional Detectives with Large Language Models* (2025) This study uses large language models to analyze the investigative methods of fictional detectives, including the unique characteristics of detectives in locked room mysteries, which can aid in understanding deductive approaches in this genre.

Tenth, Novel Suspects – *Captivating Tales: Why We Love Locked-Room Mysteries* (2022) This article reviews the history and appeal of locked room mysteries, highlighting classic works like *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Mystery of the Yellow Room*, as well as contributions from authors like John Dickson Carr in developing this genre.

Eleventh, A study by Nikolaeva in 2022 investigated the integration of technical and psychological barriers in locked room puzzles. She examined how these components modernize the genre. The study's emphasis on the use of these constraints in contemporary works like *Glass Onion* adds a modern nuance. Conversely, this study focuses on character roles and employs typical forms of locked room mysteries.

Twelfth, A study by Skupin in 2016 emphasized the collaborative aspect of locked room mysteries, where readers solve puzzles alongside protagonists. This study focuses on how characters in *Glass Onion* contribute to the locked room formula, particularly the detective's involvement in logical deduction, building on Skupin's insights into reader engagement.

Thirteenth, A study by Haining in 2017 explored the historical development of the locked room mystery genre. While this foundational study focused on earlier locked room works, it examines modern reinterpretations of these aspects in *Glass Onion*, including the use of modern technology and psychological complexity.

Fourteenth, A study by Fitzgerald in 2015 provided an extensive examination of tropes in the locked room mystery genre and their reliance on formulaic structures. This study differs by examining a specific film (*Glass Onion*) and how its characters and plot adhere to or adapt established formulas in a contemporary context.

Finally, Barker's research in 2019 examined broader patterns in detective literature, recognizing a shift towards more modern and unconventional locked room mysteries. This study specifically looks at *Glass Onion* and its adaptation of the locked room paradigm, focusing on character-driven contributions to the genre's development.

Overall, these studies provide a deep understanding of locked room mysteries, encompassing historical perspectives, genre standards, modern adaptations, and reader engagement. This study focuses on the locked room formula and *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* (2022), particularly its reinvention of the locked room formula through character roles and modern technological and psychological components in the film. Unlike previous studies that discuss broader trends or historical views, this study examines how the locked room mystery formula is utilized in a modern cinematic context.

