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Shades of Agatha Christie's Social Milieu on her Strong Female Characters

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Dedication

In profound gratitude and love, I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, siblings, and dear friends Asma, Fatna, Naima, Hind, and Khalil. Your unwavering support has been the foundation of my success.

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I extend my sincere gratitude to Dr. Mohammed Naoumi, my esteemed supervisor, for his invaluable guidance, support, and exceptional expertise throughout the entirety of this research endeavour. I would like to thank Mrs Selt and Mrs Bedrina for their mentorship and constructive feedback that have greatly contributed to the quality and success of my work.

Abstract

This dissertation aims at exploring the influence of Agatha Christie's social milieu on her portrayal of strong female characters. Incorporating biographical and feminist perspectives, a close reading of both her iconic and non-iconic female characters was used in this study. The latter reveals the significant impact of Christie's society on her character development, particularly in relation to women's empowerment and independence. Her female family members had impact on her personality, making her a powerful woman. Thus, as a writer, her characters mirror aspects of herself, including her own values and beliefs. Additionally, Christie adeptly incorporates the "New Woman" concept, offering a glimpse into the idealized position of women in her literary works. By portraying female characters that defy societal expectations and embrace their agency, she attempted to highlight the importance of women as they embrace various roles. By her narratives, Christie demonstrates the significance of women as central figures, challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for their active participation in society.

Keywords: Agatha Christie, Social Milieu, Strong Female Characters, Detective Novels, New Woman, Gender Roles.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

The inspiration for most compositions comes from life, which is a rich source in itself. Most authors are compelled to write on a particular subject or employ characters who remind them of the people in their immediate environment by the world that has shaped their personalities and experiences.

Considerably, Agatha Christie is one of the most successful and influential mystery writers of all time, with a career that spanned over six decades and a legacy that continues to captivate audiences to this day. She is known for her clever and surprising twists, her attention to detail, and her well-drawn characters. From the many memorable characters in Christie's works, her female characters stand out for their strength, independence, and intelligence.

Christie was one of the novelists, who grew up in a cultured, educated, and distinctive family, especially, by female family members. In many of her mystery story characters, such as Miss Marple, Agatha Christie sought to demonstrate how women could be wise, knowledgeable, and trustworthy. After certain readings and analysis, in such instance, it would seemed that her environment had an impact on her, which prompted us to learn more about these female characters and the attitudes Agatha tended to have about the New Women.

In the article *A Critical study of Agatha Christie's Women*, Athira Anilkumar (2021) analyzes Christie's contribution to feminist literature by highlighting her portrayal of strong independent female detectives, breaking away from traditional gender roles, and exploring feminist traits in her characters. However this article focuses more on the heroic characters such as Miss Marple and Tuppense Beresford, and neglects other notable characters. Despite the fact that her aim is to explore the feminist features in Christie's

women characters in general not only detectives and to show women's position in a male dominated world.

Another work worth mentioning is a dissertation by Eva Blazkova (2020) entitled, *The Portrait of English Society in Selected Novels of Agatha Christie*. It involves comparing the societal context and historical information with the fictional representation found in Christie's works, especially Women and women's issues. her work contributes in a valuable way to the field of detective fiction by setting the key themes and interpretations in the existing literature, yet, the limited number of selected novels discussed in the part of the women's issues, *Five Little Pigs* and *The secret Adversary* did not provide a comprehensive understanding about female characters throughout her work.

In Marty S. Knepper article, entitled Agatha Christie- feminist. Knepper mentioned the element used by Christie to demonstrate her preferences as a writer, either feminist or anti-feminist. He argues that Christie's female characters are often depicted using sexist stereotypes and sometimes portrayed as dependent on men. However, he highlights that Christie also created a range of female characters that go beyond anti-feminist stereotypes. She presents competent women in various fields traditionally considered non-traditional for women such as archaeology, medicine, science, finance and more. While acknowledging the presence of both feminist and anti-feminist elements in Christie's writing, the precise nature and extent of these elements remain inadequately explored, and need many examples and characters to understand Christie's portrayal of women.

As many researchers neglected the aspect of the influence on Christie's characters, concerned with her social milieu, this study attempted to scrutinise what specific aspects were involved. In order to gain an in-depth investigation into such area, this study sought to reveal this influence through answering these questions:

- 1- In what ways, was Agatha Christie influenced by women in her society? And how did this impact her portrayal of her strong women characters?
- 2- Did she create characters that are directly inspired by her female family members?
- 3- The contradictory opinions about Christie being feminist or anti-feminist leads this research to another question: What are the main writing features she used? And why?

The objective of this research is to shed light on the influence of the social milieu on Christie's writing, specifically, strong female characters. Additionally, this study aims to change the stereotypes of traditional gender roles in both literature and society by analyzing Agatha Christie's portrayal of strong and independent female characters in her detective fiction.

This research, in fact, adopts mixed-method approach which combines three methods. It utilizes biographical information to understand how Agatha Christie's experiences and background influenced her contribution to the creation of female characters. Additionally, a feminist perspective is incorporated to explore how gender and power dynamics may be at play through these characters. Also it conducts qualitative analysis through in-depth examination and close reading of various novel characters, extracting underlying meanings and themes, which provides a comprehensive understanding of Agatha Christie's portrayal of female nature.

This dissertation is divided to three chapters. The first one addresses Christie's biography and life experiences from her childhood to growing up in addition to her writing career and legacies. The second chapter attempts to explain both the detective genre and the evolution of women's role and the characteristics of "New Women" in this genre. The

last chapter, which is an analytical part of the work, it analyses Agatha Christie's selected characters from different novels as strong independent female characters.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Agatha Christie is a name that is synonymous with the mystery genre, but her personal life and social circle also played a significant role in her life. This chapter aims to provide a glimpse into the biography and social life of Agatha Christie, exploring the various people and events that shaped her in as an author and person. Through examining her relationships with her family, and people in her social life we can gain a deeper understanding of the woman behind the mystery novels.

1.1 Early Life and Education

Agatha Christie, “Queen of Mystery” or “Queen of Crime”, was a prominent English writer born on September 15, 1890. She had a life full of events that makes each moment she lived precious and contributed in building her personality from her childhood to her unique family. In addition to the educational way, which is going to be mentioned below, that affected her life in a positive way.

1.1.1 Childhood and Family Background

Agatha spent her formative years in a middle class household, reared by an English mother and an American father in Torquay, Devon. Christie was renowned for her detective fiction books and a writing style that was truly her own. Her extensive body of work, which comprised 68 detective novels, 19 plays, and over 100 short stories, has been translated into 44 languages. Her characters, such as Miss Marple and Monsieur Hiercule Poirot, have become household names. Dame Christie was notoriously press-shy and guarded her life private until the release of her memoir, *An Autobiography*, which offered a glimpse into her life. With worldwide sales of over two billion copies, only Shakespeare and the Bible have outsold her. The royalties for her works in the 19 years

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since her death continue to average in the millions annually. Christie became and remains the best-selling novelist of all time (Anilkumar, 2021, p.269).

Since her birth, Agatha Christie, Agatha was autonomous in learning helped by her mother Clarissa Margaret Boehmer and her father Fredrick Alvah Miller. Her family wanted her to enjoy her childhood, but she surprised them by teaching herself reading and writing at an early age. By that time, Christie was exposed to a wide range of cultures and influences, due in part to her parent's background. She was raised in a household that valued artistic pursuits. Thus, she was encouraged to follow her passion for her hobbies (The Home of Agatha Christie, para.2).

The early years of Agatha Christie were spent in an Ashfield mansion with her family. At age five, they moved to France and rented their house in order to save money. Agatha learned how to spell French with the aid of her nanny. In 1901, when Agatha was eleven, her family faced financial difficulties which resulted in the death of her father after a series of heart attacks. At this moment Agatha recognized that her childhood years came to ashes; she said: *"Life took on a completely different complexion after my father's death. I stepped out of my child's world, a world of security and thoughtlessness; to enter the fringes of the world of reality"*.(Christie, 1977, p9). Clara thought it would be a bad idea to keep living in Ashfield since the house is big and it might need some repairs in the future which is hard with a small income. So for the family benefit she thought of selling the house. But, she could not because it was a memorable place (The Home of Agatha Christie, para.4).

Christie came from a family that admire art, including imagination and myths. Her family was of four members, her parents, and two siblings. Her father, Fredrick Alvah Miller, was a businessman from New York. He was a casual but confident American, keen

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on amateur theatricals. He fully enjoyed his life, with disregard for his work, only to find himself losing most of his investments in the late years of his life. She said about him:

For my father was a very agreeable man. The quality of agreeableness is not much stressed nowadays..... He returned, in a cab, for lunch, and in the afternoon went back to the club, played whist all afternoon, and returned to the house in time to dress. During the season, he spent his days at the Cricket Club, of which he was President. He also occasionally got up amateur theatricals. He had enormous number of friends and loved entertaining them. (Christie, 1977, p.7)

Her mother Clarissa, known always as Clara, was unpredictable, enchanting, and said to be psychic. She was also prone to spiritual and intellectual recklessness. She described her by saying: *“My mother was entirely different. She was enigmatic and arresting personality -more forceful than my father- startlingly original in her ideas, shy and miserably different about herself, and at bottom, I think, with a natural melancholy”*(Christie, 1977, p.10).

Clara had a complicated childhood, full of a mixture of comfort and insecurity. After Clara's father passed away, she was sent to her aunt Margaret to raise her since her mother Mary Ann cannot raise four children at a time. Here Clara met Frederick, her cousin, with whom she fell in love with. She loved him devotedly and wrote many poems for him. Agatha admired their relationship as mentioned in her book: *“I am interested in my parents, not because they were my parents, but because they achieved that very rare production, a happy marriage”*. (Christie, 1977, p.9). All that Clara has experienced made her a possessive mother; this in turn fed Agatha's devotion, which for a time was to become obsessive (Morgan, 1984, p.18).

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Her parents had plans to make America their permanent home, where her father Frederick was originally from. They rapidly made themselves at home in the posh resort of Torquay. They had lavish dinner parties and social events. Miller joined the Royal Torbay Yacht Club on Beacon Hill by the harbour. He belonged to both the Torquay Natural History Society at the Torquay Museum and the Torquay Cricket Club. The museum presently features the only Agatha Christie-focused gallery in the UK (The Home of Agatha, para.2).

Among her siblings, according to Morgan, Agatha was the youngest. Her sister Madge was born a year after their parent's marriage. Agatha was amazed and delighted by her sister's exploits. Although her obsession with disguise irritated her professors and ultimately her husband, as well as her friends and guests. Agatha's brother, Monty, had a unique but related ability for calling for women's attraction. It is difficult to catch a glimpse of Agatha's brother because, as is indicated in the opening chapter concerning her youth, he essentially disappeared from her life (Morgan, 1984, p.23; Christie, 1977, p.76).

Agatha also shared a home with her two grandmothers, Mary Ann and Margaret. Clara's aunt and Fredrick's stepmother Margaret, also known as Auntie-Grannie, struck Agatha as being more outspoken and colourful than Mary Ann, their younger sister. Mary Ann, also known as Grannie B, never remarried after her husband passed away, and she continued to care for her three sons while also pursuing her interest in needling. Both of them, according to Agatha, were widowed and wore dark clothing. Agatha thought that they had a strong character. undoubtedly, Agatha's Autobiography had many allusions to the advice, commandments, and cautions given by her grandmothers (Morgan, 1984, p.27).

Christie was also influenced by her family's travels and she lived in various locations throughout England, including London the south coast, France and Egypt. These early experiences helped to shape her love of different cultures and her desire to explore the

world, which would later be reflected in her writing. In addition to her family background, Christie was also influenced by the social, cultural, and political milieu of her time. The early 20th century was a time of great change, with new technologies and social movements shaping the world in profound ways. These changes were reflected in the works of writers like Christie, who used their writing to explore the complexities of modern life and to comment on the world around them (p.27).

On the whole, Christie's childhood and family background helped to shape her as a writer and as a person. Her experiences played a significant role in shaping her worldview and her writing. By examining her family background and her early life experiences, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the woman behind the mystery novels and how her life and times influenced her writing.

1.1.2 Early Education and Schooling:

Agatha Christie did not receive a formal education beyond the age of 16. Instead, she was educated at home by her mother and governesses, who taught her a wide range of subjects, including literature, history, music, and art. Despite this lack of formal education, Christie was an avid reader from a young age and well-versed in the classics and other works of literature. That was common for women of her social class during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition to her education at home, Christie also travelled extensively with her family, which allowed her to experience different cultures and gain a deeper appreciation for the world around her. These experiences helped to broaden her horizons and to shape her love of different cultures, which would later be reflected in her writing (Morgan, 1984, p.33).

However, in 1901, Agatha enrolled in Miss Guyer's School in Torkay, but she was unable to complete her education there. After three years, in 1905, when Agatha was

fifteen years old, she benefited from several financial aids. Then, she learned music at a French musical school. However, it is noticeable that she was shy and had issues performing in public (p.44).

Despite her lack of formal education, Christie's natural talent for writing and her life experiences helped to make her one of the most successful and widely-read mystery writers of her time. By examining her education and her early life experiences, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which these experiences shaped her as a writer and influenced her style and subject matter.

1.2 Marriage and Personal Life

Christie's personal life experiences with love, marriage, and divorce played a significant role in shaping her life and literary works.

1.2.1 First Marriage and Personal Life

Agatha experienced both happy and unhappy marriages. She first met Archie Christie in 1912 at a dance held at Ugbrooke House by Lord and Lady Clifford. Archie worked as a lawyer for the Indian Civil Service and as a Royal Flying Corps commander. Agatha described him as a tall man with crispy curly hair, a little fascinating nose, and a self-assured person in her book *An Autobiography*. Archie and Agatha were wed on Christmas Eve in 1914. During the First World War, she worked as a nurse after completing her education. Agatha had training in the pharmacy industry as well, where she discovered poison. During that period, her husband relocated to France. Due to their obligations, they were unable to live as a typical couple. Archie completed his overseas tour and rose in the army, which was fortunate for the young couple. In 1918, Christie left the voluntary aid detachment (Morgan, 1984, p.60-67).

Rosalind, their sole child, was born on August 5, 1919, in Ashfield, Torquay. She was born the same year that her successful debut book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was published five years after their marriage. When Rosalind was around 7 years old, they moved into a home in Sunningdale that they called "Styles." Rosalind's maturity at a young age can be attributed to Agatha and her husband leaving their child with babysitters while they travelled extensively. Despite this, Agatha and her daughter had a wonderful relationship. After having her child, Agatha's attitude toward children altered. In her book *An Autobiography*, she wrote that the infant had hair, unlike other newborns that seemed pink and bald (Agatha Christie's Responsible daughter, 2023, para.5).

The pair was divorced in 1928. The Imperial Continental Gas Association secretary Nancy Nee, who is 25 years old, is the subject of Archie's confession to Agatha. Since her mother passed away just two years prior and she had not yet recovered from that trauma, the recent event caused Agatha another trauma. This shock and breakdown caused mental health issues for Agatha. She was nowhere to be seen for eleven days (Hack & Lewis, 2010, para.12).

After the First World War, a new type of woman emerged along with the societal transformation that took place. These women were referred to as surplus women, and they were unmarried older women who had chosen to remain single due to a shortage of male partners caused by the war or divorced females. Agatha Christie was one of them after the suffrage she faced in her life from the side of her first husband. (Anilkumar, 2021, p271).

1.2.2 Disappearance:

Her husband was the first suspect at the time since he was upset over her abduction. Agatha's disappearance quickly gained national attention. Her images could be seen everywhere at the time—in publications and on walls. Her car was discovered in a chalk

pit. She was already a well-known novelist, and even though hundreds of police officers were sent to look for her. Prominent authors like Dorothy L. Sayers and Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, volunteered to help. It was believed that their expertise would help locate the missing writer. After being located, because of her amnesia, Christie was taken to a hotel in Harrogate, but she was unable to remember what had happened or why she was there. She assumed the identity of Theresa Neele, her husband's mistress, to give the impression that she was acting undercover (The Mysterious Disappearance of Agatha Christie, 2014, para.2).

Throughout her personal life, Christie was known for her strong-willed personality. Despite the challenges she faced as a woman in the early 20th century, she remained dedicated to her writing. As she never really healed from Archie's betrayal, the murders and victims in her tales have odd sexual behaviour.

1.2.3 Remarriage and Personal Life:

Agatha met her true love, Max Mallowan, in 1930. He was 14 years younger. Following her absence, she left for Baghdad on the recommendation of a young navy officer named Commander to join an excavation team in the ancient city of Ur. She met Max there in March 1930, and they were married six months later. Agatha passed away in 1976. Two years later, in 1978, Max passed away and was interred next to her. Both enjoyed traveling to the East, as well as to Iraq and Syria. Despite the age difference, their marriage was successful. They had a strong and loving relationship throughout their 46 years of marriage. She was inspired by the locations she visited with him and wrote numerous novels about them.

Christie described Max as a quiet, young, slender, and dark man who was successful at controlling others. In her book *An Autobiography*. Agatha devoted an entire chapter to her relationship with her husband Max. She discussed their travels, honeymoon, everyday

lives, and how he treated her. She was also supportive of Mallowan's career and was a frequent collaborator on his digs, often serving as his secretary. Her experiences on these expeditions inspired some of her most famous works, including *The Murder on The Orient Express*, *Death on The Nile*, *The ABC Murders*, *Five Little Pigs*, and *Murder in Mesopotamia* (Christie, 1977, p.372- 501).

In the main, Christie's second marriage was a significant turning point in her personal life. She tried to express her love by dedicating some of her works to him, an example of that, is in her novel *Postscript to Fate*, she dedicated it to Max by writing, "For Max, who likes archaeology, gardening, and me". In addition to that, many of her characters were inspired by her husband's character.

1.2.4 Interests and Hobbies

Christie had several hobbies and interests throughout her life. Writing of course was her main passion in life. She was a good listener to her mother and grandmother which gave her this insight to imagine and write. She wrote several plays, novels ,and romance novels. In addition to writing, she was an accomplished pianist and was also interested in singing and composing. Moreover, Agatha was interested in plants and flowers. Her home was full of them, she even used such acknowledgement of plants and flowers in her writing (Christie, 1977, p.15).

Agatha adored travelling; she was particularly interested in visiting exotic locations. She accompanied her husband, archaeologist Max, on many of his expeditions as mentioned above. Through her husband, Christie developed an interest in archaeology and was involved in several digs as she used it in her books. In addition to photography, she was an accomplished photographer and enjoyed taking pictures on her travels (Nuttall, 2022).

These hobbies and interests helped to enrich Christie's life and inform her writing. She was a multi-talented and curious person who was always seeking new experiences and learning new things.

1.3 Career as a Writer

Many authors have been turned down in their first attempt to publish. When a writer spends all his time and effort creating a piece that is truly original and personal to them only to have it rejected in the end, it can be painful. Agatha's first novel was never published, like many other writers, she had numerous rejections. Before it was finally published, her second novel was likewise frequently denied.

1.3.1 Early Writing Efforts and Attempts at Publication

Agatha had attempted a detective novel for the first time during the war while serving as a nurse. Her mother and sister used to write, so this was nothing new in her family. Agatha's adulthood played a significant role in her accomplishment. She was enjoying herself by reading many novels that also helped her develop her writing skills, like writing short stories, some of which were released in the 1930s. For her writing career, Agatha's friend Eden Phillpotts, an English poet and author, gave sage and helpful guidance to her. Six rejections later, Agatha's book was ultimately published after four years of effort. Eden Philpots connected her with his literary agency. The firm rejected her piece but suggested she write a follow-up. She finally agreed to change the conclusion before this book could be released after much struggle. This was based on her debut composition, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, which was released in 1920 (Osborne, 1982, p.14,15).

Publishing her first work encouraged her to go further. Dicken's *Bleak House* and *The Women in White* and *The Moonstone*, two detective novels by Wilkie Collin, were among the books Agatha Christie read as a kid. She had shared her enjoyment of Conan Doyle's early Sherlock Holmes tales with Madge, and at the age of eight, she had been captivated by Madge's reading aloud of *The Leavenworth Case*, a mystery written by Anna Katharine Green. Madge had challenged Agatha to write one of these detective stories while they were discussing another. When Agatha's dispensary work started to get boring, she thought about this notion in the back of her head and decided to give it a shot. She wanted a detective like Rouletabille, a detective of a type that had never been used before, after she came up with a new approach to write a new narrative, strange types of murders for a very unusual motivation. She ultimately decided that he should be a refugee from Belgium because, as she noted in a poignant passage from her autobiography, Torquay was teeming with confused and wary Belgian refugees who just wanted to be left alone. The investigator was expected to be astute and diligent, have a prestigious name, and have some familiarity with crime and criminals. By doing so, she introduced the egotistic Belgian investigator known as Hercule Poirot. Approximately 25 novels and numerous short tales used the Poirot character (Morgan, 1984, p.77-79).

1.3.2 First Published Works and Early Success

After publishing her first literary long work, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in 1920, Agatha was 30 years old. The book was well received by readers and was the first in a long line of successful mystery novels featuring her famous detective Hercule Poirot. Later on, another book came to light, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, another important piece she produced in 1926, gave her much more fame and money. *A Murder Is Announced*, And

Then There Were None, *Murder in the Calais Coach*, *Easy to Kill*, and *Black coffee* were some of her other well-known novels (Literary devices, para.10).

Slowly but surely, Agatha's fame grew, and improved her standing. Even the Inland Revenue was showing interest in publishing her work, in addition to newspapers and magazine editors. After some thought, she made the decision to adopt a more professional demeanour and entrust a professional counsel with handling her affairs. This, together with the knowledge she had gained from reading Society of Authors publications, brought her back to Hughes Massie, the literary agency Eden Philpotts had earlier suggested she contact. Agatha was considerably more required by the Bodley Head publishing house after that success than she was at the time. Popular middle-class tastes were shifting toward the type of work she was experimenting with: novels with a straight forward structure, a small cast of characters, brief chapters, and no long, complicated sentences, with a focus on the mechanics of solutions and significant weight placed on Psychology (Osborne, 1982, p.25,39).

Her early success was largely due to her unique style, which combined elements of traditional mystery novels with new and innovative plot twists. Her novels well-potted, suspenseful, and filled with unexpected twists and turns they also featured a cast of memorable characters, including Hercule Poirot, who quickly became one of the most popular and recognizable detective in the genre (Havlickova, 2005, p.15).

1.4 Literary Achievements and Awards

Agatha Christie was widely recognized for her contributions to the mystery genre, for which she received numerous awards and honours throughout her career. Some of her most notable literary achievements and awards were: The Best Foreign Play in America in 1955, The Grand Master Award and the Edgar Award from the New York Drama Critics,

which was the highest honour given to mystery writers. She twice received the prestigious Anthony Award, and the Diamond Jubilee Award which is granted to the best mystery authors of the previous ten years. The Bouchercon World Mystery Convention hosts it, and the attendees freely choose the winners. Christie was recognized by Guinness World Records in 1974 as the world's best-selling author of all time. She also got The Diamond Dagger Award in 1984, which was given in recognition of lifetime's achievement in crime writing. She got numerous other honours, and as a result of her achievements, she was dubbed the Queen of Crime. She received the Order of the British Empire's Commander designation in 1956 from Queen Elizabeth in recognition of her remarkable literary achievement (Awards and winners, n.d)

These awards and honours serves as testament to her exceptional talent as a writer, her contribution to the mystery genre, and her enduring popularity with readers around the world.

1.4.1 Critical Reception and Impact on The Mystery Genre

Agatha's books has received both praise and criticism from literary experts and the general public over the years, After reviewing some websites, newspaper articles and books, it appears that some critics have praised her mystery works, her intricate and carefully crafted plots, and her memorable characters, such as Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. As Guddah stated that many have noted her strong sense of place, her use of psychological suspense, and her ability to create a sense of unease and uncertainty in the reader, while others have criticized her for relying too heavily on formulaic writing and predictable twists (Gulddah, 2016, p.3-5)

Her impact on the mystery genre has also been the subject of much debate. Christie's novels are known for their clever twists and turns, and for keeping readers guessing until

the very end. Her influence was much seen in other mystery writers in their works, many criticise her with popularizing the genre and setting the standard for many of the elements that are now considered staples of the mystery genre, such as the amateur detective, the closed-circle mystery, and the use of the red herrings. And as Linda Stratmann confirmed, who is the author of *Frances Doughty*, by saying:

“ I love a good puzzle mystery and agatha Christie is a huge inspiration to my writing. She is a brilliant exponent of the art of misdirection and disguise, but never cheats the reader. All the information needed to solve the murder is provided through elegant plotting and deftly placed clues. Deceptively easy to read, her stories contain a wealth of fine detail and insights into human nature, and the final revelation dovetails all the pieces into a perfect solution. Her books remain classics of the genre. She, like myself, was once a chemist’s dispenser, and I especially admire her realistic use of poisons” (The history press, n.d).

The critical reception of Christie’s work and her impact on the mystery genre demonstrate her enduring legacy as a writer and her lasting influence on the genre as a whole.

1.5 Later Life and Legacy

As most of the great authors, Christie was rich enough to mark the twentieth century literature. Especially, her final years built up her literary legacy. This body of writing constitutes a great impact on the literary arena. In the following part we attempt to highlight such effect.

1.5.1 Later Years and Final Works:

Agatha Christie's later years were characterized by her continuous dedication to writing as well as her involvement with numerous groups and charities. According to Morgan, She performed a number of significant tasks during this time, such as leading a group of British mystery authors known as the Detection Club and being named a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1971. Morgan mentioned that in the book, *An Autobiography*, Christie describes how she spent her later years mostly in her home in Devon, England, with occasional travels to different countries for research purposes. Agatha also talks about her involvement with the theatre and her charity work (Morgan, 1984, p.311).

Christie's later writings showed off her talent as a mystery author. In her final book, *Postern of Fate* (1973), a married couple served as the detectives. Osborne saw that Despite the book's unfavourable reviews, fans enjoyed it and it showed that Christie still had a devoted following (Osborne, 2014, p.343).

In addition to her literary accomplishments, Christie will be remembered for the enduring appeal of her books and the multiple times they have been adapted for the stage, screen, and television. Her lasting legacy has solidified her position as one of the most significant and influential authors of the 20th century, and her effect on the mystery genre is still felt today.

1.5.2 Adaptation and Media Representation

Agatha Christie's works have been adapted into a variety of formats, including film, television, stage, and radio. The adaptations began in the early 20th century, and Christie herself was often involved in the adaptation process. One of the earliest adaptations was the silent film, *The Passing of Mr. Quin* (1928). Many of her works have been adapted into

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films, including some of her most famous works like *Murder on the Orient Express*, *Death on the Nile*, and *And Then There Were None*. The adaptations continued on television, some of them produced in UK and US. One of the most notable TV adaptations was the long-running play Agatha Christie's Poirot, which starred David Suchet as the iconic detective. Another famous TV adaptation is Miss Marple, which was portrayed by multiple actresses over the years. Christie's works have also been adapted for the stage, including the famous play "The Mousetrap," which is the longest-running play in history. Additionally, her works have been adapted for radio dramas and audio books, allowing her stories to reach audiences in a variety of formats. Christie's legacy has continued on in modern adaptations, with recent films like *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017) and *Death on the Nile* (2022) continuing to bring her stories to new audiences (Aldridge, 2016).

Conclusion

To sum up, the biography and social life of Agatha Christie provide a unique glimpse into the life of an extraordinary author and woman. Her contributions to literature and society are immeasurable, and her legacy continues to inspire and captivate readers around the world.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

Generally, literature is a broad and diverse art form that encompasses many different genres, styles, and themes. Authors have the ability to transport readers to different worlds and introduce them to new ideas and perspectives with their style.

One of the most lasting and well-liked literary genres is the detective genre. With its complex puzzles, fascinating characters, and thrilling plot twists, this genre has captivated readers for more than a century. Although this genre has traditionally been associated with male writers, many talented female authors have also significantly contributed to it. With its unique style, the detective genre reached its zenith in the mid-twentieth century.

2.1 Definition of the Detective genre :

The detective genre, or “the mystery genre” is one of the main genres of work in modern English literature. As with any literary works, mystery fiction also features by a protagonist, typically a detective or investigator, who solves crimes through careful observation, deduction, and often intuition. As it is known, in detective work, a crime is followed from the very first moment it happens until it is solved. It involves a puzzle or mystery that the reader is motivated to try to solve along with the detective, with clues and red herrings scattered throughout the narrative. The focus is on the process of investigation, the gathering of evidence, and the unraveling of the mystery, rather than on action or violence (Tebba, 2016, p.7).

This genre also has an informal name, “the whodunit” which is an alternative to who done it. This type of literature is so popular that it can be found in film, television, and other forms of popular media (The freedictionary.com).

P.D. James in his book *Talking about Detective Fiction* define the detective genre as:

“what we can expect is a central mysterious crime, usually murder; a closed circle of suspects each with motive, means, and opportunity for the crime; a detective, either amateur or professional, who comes in like a an avenging deity to solve it; and by the end of the book, a solution which the reader should be able to arrive at by logical deduction from clues inserted in the novel with deceptive cunning but essential fairness (James, 2009, p.15).

According to Charles J. Rzepka, in his literary work *The Detective Fiction: Cultural History of Literature*, he identifies four key elements that play a role in constructing detective fiction. The first component is the detective, either amateur or professional, who carries out the investigation throughout the plot. The second component is an unsolved mystery, which does not always need to be a crime. An investigation is the third component that should take place with the motive of solving the mystery or the problem. A fourth element emerged into prominence. The puzzle element in modern detective fiction adds thrill and intensity to the work by involving and engaging the reader’s reasoning and logic to figure out the solution to the ongoing problem (Rzepka, 2005, p.10).

2.2History of the Detective Genre:

The roots of the detective genre can be traced back to the 19th century, with the works of Edgar Allan Poe and his detective, C.Auguste Dupin. However, divergent views emerged regarding the origins of the detective novel. Starting with the story of Susanna and the Elders in the book of Prophet Daniel, it is considered one of the first tales about detecting a criminal act. The story portrays a woman who is falsely accused of adultery and executed, but Daniel intervenes and exposes the inaccuracies in the witnesses ‘testimonies’

revealing the truth. (Lasine, p257) The story highlights the importance of not blindly accepting the testimony of witnesses based on their rank and reputation. It also showcases the characteristics of a modern detective story with its focus on the investigation, analytical approach, and presentation of facts to reveal the truth (Veselska, 2014, p.7).

In addition to what Veselska mentioned about the history of this genre, the Arabic tales of *One Thousand and One Night*, written around the 18th century AD, contain stories with elements of the detective genre. *The Three Apples* is a prime example, in which Caliph Harun al-Rashid orders one of his viziers¹ to solve the murder of an unknown woman within three days. The vizier's investigation is initially unsuccessful, but as the deadline approaches, he unexpectedly solves the crime. This story includes common features of the detective genre, such as a higher authority demanding the punishment of the murderer and a man tasked with gathering clues and untangling the mystery (p.7).

The story of Hamlet by William Shakespeare is often considered to have some features of detective fiction. According to Scaggs, Hamlet sets out to uncover the truth about his father's death, gathering clues and interrogating suspects, much like a detective in a mystery novel. The play also includes a process of collecting and interpreting clues, culminating in Hamlet's realisation of the truth and his quest for justice, which align with the conventions of detective fiction. While Hamlet is a complex work of literature that sets itself apart from more traditional mystery stories, its underlying structure and themes still make it an important precursor to the genre (Scaggs, 2005, p.12).

P.D James stated that T.S.Eliot claimed in his essay *Wilkie Collin and Dickens* (1927) that the novel that is widely regarded as the first example of a detective novel was *Wilkie Collin's The Moonstone* (1868). The story revolved around the theft of a large

¹ Vizier: a high executive officer of various Muslim countries and especially of the Ottoman Empire

diamond, and the crime was solved by an amateur detective. The story had a crime that needs to be solved, suspects with motives and opportunities, and a detective who is tasked with unravelling the mystery. In addition to the red herrings, false leads, and unexpected twists that have become the standard in the genre (James, 2009, p.23).

Edgar Allan Poe's work, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), was considered the first detective story, which set a standard for crime and detective tales. He also viewed the detective story as a sophisticated piece of literature, with its psychology and descriptions, not only of crimes but also of characters and their thinking (Taibi, 2019, p.6).

It was not until the late 19th and early 20th centuries that the genre really took off, with the creation of famous detective characters like Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot.

With much contradiction, Conan Doyle was famous for his creation of the memorable character Sherlock Holmes, a character created in the story of *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) as Worthington described him in his book, "*he is the archetypal detective whose influence can still be seen in modern crime fiction, and his representation is the culmination of the development of the crime fiction genre over the nineteenth century*". Doyle's writing style was characterised by his attention to details and his ability to construct complex plots (Worthington, 2011, p.26).

The twentieth century saw a rise in the popularity of the detective story with works such as Mary Roberts Rinehart's *The Circular Staircase* and G.K Chesterton's *The Innocent of Father Brown* (1911). As the genre gained fame in the 1920s, fictional detectives became household names, including Inspector French in *The Cask* by Freeman Wills Crofts, Hercule Poirot in Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affaire at Styles*(1920),

Miss Marple in *Murder at the Vicarage* (1930), Lord Peter Wimsey in Dorothy L. Sayer's *Whose Body?* (1923), and Albert Campion in Margery Allingham's *The Crime at Black Dudley Murder* (1929). These detectives were beloved by fans of the mystery genre (Tebba, 2016, p.5).

2.2.1 Types of Detective Genre

The detective genre has evolved over the years to include a wide range of subgenres, such as hardboiled detective fiction, cozy mysteries, and police procedurals. Hardboiled detective fiction, which emerged in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s, typically features a tough, cynical private detective who operates outside the law and solves crimes through his wits and toughness. This subgenre is known for its gritty realism, fast-paced action, and dark themes. According to Lee Horsley in his book *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2005), hardboiled detective fiction reflects the anxieties and uncertainties of its time and portrays a world where morality is ambiguous and justice is often elusive. An important figure in this genre was Raymond Chandler, whose novels *The Big Sleep* and *Farewell, My Lovely* (Horsley, 2005, p.65-83).

On the other hand, cozy mystery is a subgenre that emphasises a light-hearted tone, likeable amateur detectives, and a lack of graphic violence or sex. As Phyllis A. Whitney notes in her book *Guide to Writing Fiction* (2001), cozy mysteries often feature a small town or village setting where the amateur detective uses their knowledge of human nature and connections to solve crimes. Cozy mysteries are perfect for readers who want to escape into a charming world where good triumphs over evil and justice is served. A perfect example of this genre is Agatha Christie, whose novels featuring Miss Marple are considered classics of the genre. As Whitney said: “*Miss Marple was the epitome of the*

cozy mystery sleuth –kind, nosy, and always one step ahead of the police” (Phyllis, 2001, p.131).

Finally, police procedural is a subgenre that focuses on the investigative process of law enforcement officers in solving crimes. As Michael J. Carlson notes in his book *The Mystery Francier* (1988), police procedurals emphasise accuracy and authenticity in their depiction of law enforcement investigations, featuring realistic depictions of law police work including interviews, interrogations, evidence collection, and forensic analysis. The *87th Precinct* series of Ed McBain is considered a classic of the genre. The series features a group of police officers who work together to solve crimes in the fictional city of Isola. The novels are known for their attention to detail and realistic portrayal of police work. Police procedurals offer readers a chance to get an inside look at the investigative process and the men and women who work tirelessly to solve crimes and bring criminals to justice. Each subgenre of detective fiction offers its own unique take on the genre, and readers can choose based on their preferences and interests (Cambell, n.d, p.15).

2.3 Feminism in Detective Fiction by Female Authors

Feminism has had a significant impact on the detective fiction genre, particularly in the works of female authors. The use of feminist themes in detective fiction can be traced back to the early 20th century, writers such as Agatha Christie, Sue Grafton, Sara Paretsky and other female writers.

In the Victorian era, women writers of detective fiction faced the difficult task of balancing audience expectations with their own beliefs about women's capabilities. According to Dirrim, Dr. Carla Kungl suggests that while these writers were influenced by stereotypical images of women, they also expressed dissatisfaction and subversiveness by problematizing these conventions. Anna Katharine Green was one such writer who had to

use traditional roles and stereotypes to subvert expectations and establish authority for her female detective. Women writers of detective fiction had to gradually establish themselves as legitimate authors by creating powerful and professional female detectives. By adhering to the genre's narrative structure while also developing characters and placing female detectives at the forefront, these writers were able to negotiate and claim narrative authority for women (Dirrim, 2021, p.11).

Maureen T. Reddy has observed the development of crime fiction for a long time. The narrative of this genre was dominated by male writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Dashiell Hammett. However, in the late 1980s, feminist critics like Kathleen Gregory Klein, Gill Plain, Sally R. Munt, Glenwood Irons, Priscilla Walton, and Manina Jones challenged this limited perspective by uncovering the works of women writers from the past. This rediscovery of women's contributions to crime fiction revealed that they had been an integral part of the genre since its inception and had a long history of writing and investigating crime alongside their male counterparts (Patnaik, 2016, p.138).

The Golden Age of detective fiction, which is commonly considered to be the period between the two World Wars, witnessed a significant shift in the socio-cultural landscape of society. The aftermath of World War I resulted in a reduced male population and an increased presence of women in society. This shift was reflected in the emergence of female writers dominating the genre, including Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, P.D. James, and Ruth Rendell, who all featured male detectives in their stories. According to Patnaik, these writers' works focused on the application of common sense and the observation of minute details, such as changes in household routines, diets, or children's behaviour, which led to the development of intuitive and psychological detectives in the 20th century. These detectives are often referred to as "cosy" murder

mystery detectives and represent an extension of women's traditional strengths in the domestic novel (p.140).

Agatha Christie, one of the most celebrated authors of the 20th century, has often been criticised for being anti-feminist in her works. However, upon closer inspection of her, she was, in fact, a feminist. In her books, she created strong and independent female characters who defied societal expectations and traditional gender roles. She also tackled issues of domestic violence and abuse, which were not commonly discussed at the time. Agatha began to challenge traditional gender roles through her female characters (Anilkumar, 2021, p.269).

During the Golden Age of detective fiction, Dorothy L. Sayers introduced Harriet Vane as a significant female sleuth. Vane, a writer of detective stories who studied at Oxford and valued her independence, struggled with the idea of marriage to Sayers's male series detective, Lord Peter Wimsey. Sayers believed that work was an essential aspect of a woman's life and highlighted the challenges women faced in balancing professional and personal aspirations through her novels featuring Vane. Additionally, the emergence of teenage sleuths during the 1920s and 1930s, such as Carolyn Keene's Nancy Drew and Margaret Sutton's Judy Bolton, provided young schoolgirls with a refreshing alternative to romantic heroines whose sole aim was love and marriage or male heroes who sought endless thrills and adventures. The influence of these female detectives was evident in the subsequent generations of women writers of detective fiction who rose to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s (Patnaik, 2016, p.140).

Dirrim suggested that despite societal norms that restricted women's behaviour, female writers still produced fictional literature that featured crime narratives. This allowed them to explore deviant behaviour without actually engaging in it. However, these writers

faced criticism and were attacked for deviating from proper gender roles. Critics often attributed the deviant behaviour depicted in their characters to the women writers themselves, which subjected them to social consequences. This is a recurring theme throughout history and underscores the importance of studying and understanding the experiences of women writers (Dirrim, 2021, p.25).

These feminist detective novels were groundbreaking not only in terms of their subject matter, but also in their representation of women. Female characters were no longer relegated to the role of love interest or damsel in distress, but were fully-realised, complex individuals with agency and power. In addition, these novels often explored issues of intersectionality, examining how race, class, and sexuality intersected with gender to shape women's experiences.

2.4 New Women in Detective Novels

During the Victorian era in England, women were expected to adhere to rigid societal conventions that prescribed their responsibilities as spouses and mothers. Women were not permitted to question the class and gender divisions that were in place at the time due to these prohibitions' extreme rigidity. They were indeed regarded with such disdain that change was inescapable. The patriarchal system was questioned, and the idea of gender equality gained traction around the end of the Victorian era, which saw a change in ideas towards gender relations. A number of topics came up for discussion, including female suffrage, property rights, parenting rights, education options for women, and marriage and divorce legislation. In literature, the advent of the "New Woman" showed the impact of sociocultural pressures, new science, technology, education, and trends towards liberalisation (Mahajan & Randhawa, 2016, p.2).

The various economic, social, and political factors led to the emergence of the New Woman in the 19th century. The term was first coined by Sarah Grand in her article “The New Aspect of the Women’s Question” 1894 (p.4). For the detective genre, literary works have long been a staple of popular fiction, and while male detectives have traditionally dominated the genre, powerful women have also played a significant role in shaping these stories. Under this title, we will explore the portrayal of strong, complex female characters, with particular focus on two key subheadings.

2.4.1 Femme Fatales: Female Characters as Suspects or Villains

The “Femme Fatal” is a term used to describe female characters in literature or film who is often depicted as alluring, seductive, and ultimately dangerous. This archetype has a long and storied history in detective fiction, beginning with characters like Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play and continuing through to modern works like Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl*. According to an article in the journal of popular culture, the femme fatale archetype was popularised in the 1940s and 1950s by film noir, a genre of movies that often featured male protagonists falling under the spell of cunning and manipulative women (Hassan 2015, p.85-87).

One notable example of a femme fatale, as mentioned by Camble in detective fiction, is Brigid O’shaughnessy, the female lead in Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon*. Brigid is a master of manipulation, using her wit and charm to gain the trust of private detective Sam Spade and his partner. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Brigid is not to be trusted; she is willing to do whatever it takes to get her hands on the eponymous Maltese Falcon, including murder. Despite her villainous actions, Brigid

remains a compelling and complex character, challenging traditional genre roles and expectations (Campbell, n.d, p.6-8).

Indeed, one of the ways “femme fatale” challenged the traditional roles was by using their intelligence and sexuality to outsmart male protagonists. In a thesis by scholar Mary Amanda Stewart, she noted that these characters often “present themselves as objects of male desire, but they ultimately reject the patriarchy’s control and subvert gendered power structures.” The “femme fatale” represents a figure who is simultaneously dangerous and desirable, subverting traditional expectations of how women should behave (Tabassum, 2023).

Over time, the femme fatale has become a cultural touchstone, with countless examples appearing in popular media from film to television to literature. As attitudes toward gender and power have evolved, many portrayed female as suspects and villains in detective novels. As we can find in modern works, they have moved away from the simplistic depiction of women as either angels or devils, instead presenting more complex and nuanced characters who defy easy categorization (Ostberg, 2022, para. 2-4).

2.4.2 Female Detectives as Protagonists

Detective fiction is not often considered social criticism, but scholars have pointed out the increasing number of feminist detective stories in the 1970s. However, it is important to recognise that the origins of the genre are often overlooked in terms of social commentary. Other literary traditions, such as Gothic and Sensation fiction, frequently feature female protagonists who exhibit progressive feminist behaviour. In *Jane Eyre*, for example, the heroine investigates the mysteries of her employer’s home, past, and intentions before making her own choices in life. This includes rejecting the possibility of becoming his mistress, as she declares herself to be a “free human being with an

independent will.” This idea was radical at the time, as women were legally considered non-entities (Renee, 2016, p.40).

According to Beth Scholenfeld, women have played a significant role in the evolution of mystery fiction as both authors and creators of successful female detective characters. As early as 1897, Anna Katherine Green’s character of Amelia Butterworth established an archetype for future female detectives, characterised by a sustained rivalry with the police and an obstinate, opinionated personality. Green also introduced two conventions that have become standard in women’s detective fiction: portraying crime investigation as a battle between the sexes and contrasting the indifferent professional (usually the police) with the intuitively smart amateur (Scholenfeld, 2008, p.836).

The hardboiled subgenre of detective fiction, which features tough male private investigations in urban settings, was dominant in America during the early 20th century. However, in the late 1970s, female authors like Sara Paretsky, Linda Barnes, and Sue Grafton began to modify this tradition and attract readers with their own take on the genre. These women writers used the established formula to explore not only a particular crime, but also larger societal issues, especially those related to the patriarchal power structure of contemporary society. As a result, a new subgenre of mystery fiction emerged featuring female protagonists who are concerned with women’s issues. These authors have created a new voice that reflects a woman’s perspective and does not fit neatly into any one category. Examples of such contemporary female amateur investigators in American mystery fiction include those who not only solve crimes but also grapple with the demands of modern society, projecting the issues and realities of middle-class America from which the authors themselves come (p.837).

2.5 The Evolution of Women's Role in Detective Novels

The emergence of female crime writers and sleuths in the nineteenth century challenged societal expectations about women's writing and female characters. However, they were not merely reacting to a male-dominated genre, but were integral to the history of crime writing. From Victorian originators to contemporary writers like Sara Paretsky and Patricia Cornwell, a feminist perspective on crime has become the norm. The proliferation of diverse styles of female crime writing since the 1980s illustrates the continued innovation and success of the female tradition in detective fiction, which has evolved and flourished over time (Gavin, 2010, p.258).

Adding to that, Samuel Saundress argued that during the Victorian era, social expectations limited women's roles to the domestic sphere. However, in detective fiction, female characters are depicted as occupying both the internal and external spheres, which was considered abnormal at the time. An example given by Saundress in his dissertation is Catherine Crowe's *"The Adventures of Susan Hopley"* in which the protagonist is pushed out of her domestic world into the world of detection (Saundress, 2014, p.11).

Rohan Maitzen discusses the historical portrayal of female characters in crime fiction. Up until 1982, according to Maitzen, female characters were often limited to being spinsters, dames, victims, or femme fatales. While there were some expectations, such as for Miss Marple and Cordelia Gray, these characters were not the norm. In noir fiction, female characters were often portrayed as projections of male desire, with their only strength being their sexual allure, which both tempted and threatened the male detectives. Maitzen argues that these portrayals were a reflection of the historical lack of room for women in crime fiction. (Maitzen, 2013, para.2).

2.5.1 From Victims to Victors: The Rise of Powerful Women in Crime Fiction

In contrast to the limited role and often sexist portrayal of female characters in traditional crime fiction, the novels of Dick Francis offer a refreshing perspective. Despite featuring male protagonists and being told exclusively from a male perspective, Francis's novels present strong and unapologetic heroines who challenge traditional gender roles. As a former jockey, Francis's novels are centred on the world of horse racing and are typical thrillers, filled with suspense and violence. His ability to create complex and realistic female characters is unexpected, given the genre's historical limitations on women's roles. Additionally, Francis tackles the complementary problem of rewriting male characters, a challenge that feminist writers such as Grafton and Paretsky have found difficult. By retelling and reinventing traditional narratives, Francis contributes to the project of creating new and empowering fictions (Maitzen, 2013, para.4).

In an article written by Brian Klems, he tackled the evolution of women from victim roles to victors. Raymond Chandler's classic definition of a heroic detective describes a man who is brave, honest, and unblemished, and who is motivated by a desire to uncover the truth. However, in the world of Chandler's hardboiled fiction, women were typically relegated to the roles of victims or seductresses, with little room for strong, intelligent female characters who could solve crimes on their own terms. Fortunately, times have changed, and female sleuths like Kinsey Millhone and V.I. Warshawski have emerged as powerful and complex protagonists in their own right. These women often excel in psychological thrillers, where emotional violence is as important as physical danger. By proving themselves to be as tough and determined as any male hero, these female

protagonists have paved the way for a new era of crime fiction, where women take center stage as spies, detectives, and private eyes (Klems, 2017, para 3).

Conclusion

In conclusion, detective fiction has a rich and complex history that has evolved over time to reflect changing societal attitudes towards crime, justice, and gender roles. While the genre's early origins were dominated by male authors and male protagonists, feminist writers and readers have pushed back against these limitations, demanding stronger and more nuanced portrayals of female characters. This has led to a gradual but significant shift in the genre, as female detectives and other powerful women have taken centre stage, challenging traditional gender roles and representing more complex and multifaceted narratives. As this chapter has demonstrated, the evolution of women's role in detective fiction is ongoing, and the genre continues to be a site of contestation and experimentation as writers and readers explore new possibilities for representation and empowerment.

CHAPTER THREE

Introduction

As we get deeper into the world of Agatha Christie's detective novels, we discover the unique and intriguing characters she has created. However, what makes them even more fascinating is the extent to which they were influenced by the social milieu of Christie's time. This chapter explores how Christie's family and societal context shaped her portrayal of female characters, particularly the "New Woman" archetype. In addition to the ways in which these characters challenge traditional gender roles and embody feminist themes, they reflect the changing landscape of women during the early 20th century.

3.1 Social and Cultural influence on Christie's Characters

Agatha Christie's literary works have captivated readers for generations, and her female characters in particular, have been the subject of much analysis and discussion. One of the key factors that influenced Christie's portrayal of women was her social milieu, which shaped her understanding of gender roles, societal expectations, and cultural norms. Living in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, women's positions started to change, and it granted them more freedom and power to face society.

3.1.1 The Cultural and Societal Position of Women in the 20th century

The position of women in the early years varied depending on the culture and time period. In many societies, women were seen as inferior to men and were expected to be submissive, with limited roles primarily centred on household duties. However, over time, women's position started to change, as they started to fight for their basic rights as human beings, such as access to work, education, and freedom of opinion. These changes started to occur in the late 19th century.

Agatha Christie lived in such transformative times and grew up in a middle class family that held a general respect for women. Additionally, her exposure to diverse cultures provided her with new ideas and thoughts, which shaped her personality as a woman. Despite, her informal education, she was driven by her curiosity and became well-educated and cultivated.

The limited number of women who attended separate women's colleges at Oxford and Cambridge in the 19th century were not allowed to receive degrees. However, middle-class women began to fight for equal rights, including the right to vote in national elections. This group, known as the suffragettes, gained notoriety for their extreme methods of activism in demanding their rights. Despite some politicians initially agreeing with their goals, many were put off by their methods and withdrew their support (McDowel, 1989, p.162).

With the onset of World War I, women's lives changed dramatically. The higher number of men who died during the war led to a radical shift in women's lives. The need for workers to run for businesses, for nurses, and for teachers was highly demanded due to the shortage of working hands. This period became a turning point in the fight for women's rights, as society began to accept women in all fields and aspects of life.

3.1.2 Christie's version of the New Woman

In her works, one can find a wide array of female characters ranging from submissive wives, compassionate mothers, naive young women, and intelligent sleuths to ambitious career women, inquisitive spinsters, modern flappers, unmarried mothers, charming mistresses, and malicious murderers (Anilkumar, 2021, p.269). Agatha Christie attempted to incorporate some of these traits of the "New Woman" in her novels. In *A Murder is Announced* (1950), Christie introduced the character of Miss Blacklog, a strong,

independent, single woman who fiercely protects her friends and family. She is financially independent, besides being the owner of the Little Paddocks house. The story begins with a mysterious advertisement appearing in a local journal, announcing a murder at 6.30 at Little Paddocks. Out of curiosity, several friends of the family and neighbours came to know about this news, believing it to be a mere joke made up by a member of the family. When the clock strikes 6.30, the lights go out, and a masked intruder bursts into the room, shooting Letitia. The events unfold, and Miss Marple takes the case to uncover the story behind this announcement. The story took place after the Second World War, when women began to redefine their positions in society.

Through the novel, we can observe that despite the danger she faced, Miss Blacklock remains calm and resourceful, working alongside Miss Marple to uncover the truth behind the murder and bring the killer to justice. From the beginning, Miss Blacklog is depicted as a caring and compassionate person who holds full authority in the house, Agatha described her in the novel by saying: "*Miss Blacklog, a woman of sixty odd, the owner of the house, sat at the head of the table...*".(p.20)

Additionally, while everyone was wondering and worrying about who made this announcement, Miss Blacklog remained calm and wise enough to keep her family under control, ensuring that no one would panic due to this mysterious and unknown announcement, "*she was not quite sure what to say to Dora Bunner. Bunny, she knew, mustn't be worried or upset. She was silent for a moment or two, thinking.*"(p.30)

Even in the face of danger surrounding women at that time, Christie portrayed through this character that women are capable of handling such situations. It is worth noting that in the novel, Miss Blacklog has a servant named Mitzi, who is a refugee with a story behind her. This announcement might be targeting Mitzi, but Miss Blacklog tried her

best to calm her servant and help her get through her panic attacks. This demonstrates that our character is not only wise and intelligent but also capable of managing such moments, not just during this specific time but consistently.

All in all, Miss Blacklog represents a departure from the traditional gender roles of the early twentieth century. Although she is still subject to certain limitations and expectations due to her gender, such as being a suspect in the case, despite being the target, she is a strong, emancipated, and confident character who challenges conventional notions of womanhood during this time period.

Moreover, Agatha utilized the character of Mitzi, the servant of Miss Blacklog, to represent the portrayal of weak women, as mentioned earlier. During that period of time, women were often depicted as weak and dependent on men. They were expected to be submissive and obedient, with their roles primarily confined to the domestic sphere. Mitzi, as a domestic working servant, she was afraid and she ran away from her homeland during the war and worked for the English lady as a servant. However, through the novel, Mitzi always helped herself to get out of trouble through her bravery and willingness to stand up for herself, particularly when it came to her mistreatment by certain male characters, and with her intelligence helped within the mystery.

In the novel *The Mysterious Affairs at Styles*, Agatha Christie's first novel, the character of Cynthia represents a new type of working woman for the time period. Unlike traditional portrayals of women, Cynthia is educated, brave, and witty. She is natural in her interactions with men and is not afraid to speak her mind.

Cynthia's job as a pharmacist in a hospital gives her access to both medicines and poisons, but she is still able to joke about her work. This shows that she is able to maintain

a sense of humour even in a serious and sometimes dangerous profession. Additionally, her ability to joke about her work may also suggest that she is not afraid to confront difficult or uncomfortable situations (Blazkova, 2006, p.12).

We were detained under suspicion by the hospital porter, until Cynthia appeared to vouch for us, looking very cool and sweet in her long white overall. She took us up to her sanctum, and introduced us to her fellow dispenser, a rather awe-inspiring individual, whom Cynthia cheerily addressed as "Nibs." "What a lot of bottles!" I exclaimed, as my eye travelled round the small room. "Do you really know what's in them all?" "Say something original," groaned Cynthia. "Every single person who comes up here says that. We are really thinking of bestowing a prize on the first individual who does not say: 'What a lot of bottles!' And I know the next thing you're going to say is: 'How many people have you poisoned?' (p.97)

Moreover, One aspect of the society that influences Cynthia is the expectation placed on women, Cynthia is portrayed as a compassionate nurse who plays a traditional role that is normally assigned to women. Her line of work exemplifies the social norms that women should be nurturing and compassionate. This portrayal is consistent with the gender roles that were common at the time, when women were frequently expected to perform household and caring duties.

Due to her brilliance, resilience, independent thinking, courage, and initiative, Cynthia Murdoch makes a powerful character in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. She has excellent observational abilities and offers helpful insight for the research because she is a nurse. Cynthia shows flexibility and maintains her composure in difficult situations. She

questions conventional standards, uses her own judgment, and demonstrates empathy for others. She contributed to solving the mystery with her courage and active involvement, making her a strong and engaging character.

After the end of World War I, a new type of woman emerged, known as the "New Woman." This woman was often unmarried or divorced, much like Agatha Christie herself, who chose to remain single and avoid the disappointment and betrayals often associated with relationships with men. The New Woman was intelligent, wise, and an exceptional type of woman who shocked men with her strength and independence. Despite this, she was respected for her position and opinions. It was during this time that Agatha Christie was inspired to create the character of Miss Marple, a lonely and intelligent character who became a representative figure of these social changes. Miss Marple, like the New Woman, was a strong and independent character who challenged traditional gender roles and became an inspiration for many women during this period of societal change.

Additionally, in Agatha Christie's works, there are several examples of "new women" who are adventurous and free-spirited, and unwilling to conform to the expectations of conservative society. They enjoy driving cars, embarking on adventures alone, they are depicted as intelligent and courageous. As Anilkumar stated for Christie's Lady Eileen "Bundle Brent", Ann Beddingfield and Henrietta Savarnake are some of the feminist characters that challenged the traditional norms. With such characters, Agatha tried to celebrate the autonomy of women, who have the right to choose their own paths and make decisions based on their own values and desires rather than conforming to societal norms that may not align with their personal goals or aspirations. It also acknowledges the challenges that these women may face in a society that may not always

be accepting of their choices, and promotes the idea of individuality and self-expression (Anilkumar, 2021, p.270).

3.2 The Role of Christie's Family in Shaping Her View on Women

Agatha Christie's family had a significant influence on her female characters. Christie came from a well-educated and affluent family, and her upbringing provided her with a unique perspective on the role of women in society.

3.2.1 Clara, Madge, and Antie-Grannie's Personalities

Agatha met a lot of women in her life, and through this analysis, we tend to focus precisely on three main female family members that shaped her personality and inspired her writing and view on women.

Christie's mother, Clara Boehmer, was a strong-willed and independent woman, especially after her husband's death, when she took on all the responsibility of raising her children. Clara's personality and attitude towards her daughter encouraged her to pursue her interests and education. Additionally, Clara's interest in psychology inspired Agatha in her portrayal of the human mind in her novels, without forgetting Clara's obsession with being a possessive person, particularly with Agatha and her husband Fredrick, where Agatha talked a lot about their love in her book *An Autobiography*.

Moreover, Christie's older sister, Madge, was known for her intelligence, being a hardworking person, and having a joyful character full of surprises since her childhood. Madge had a close relationship with her sister, Agatha, and her support for her writing career shows how she was a caring and supportive person.

Additionally, it is well known that Agatha Christie's grandmother, Mary Ann, had a tremendous influence on both her life and her writing. She was a pioneering individual

who had a strong sense of self and independence. She was said to have instilled in her granddaughter a love of exploration and a spirit of independence. She was well-travelled, intelligent, and multilingual. Christie's passion for writing and storytelling is thought to have been influenced by Mary Ann, who was also a skilled storyteller. She spent a lot of time as a child listening to her grandmother's stories and was probably inspired by the vivid and thrilling tales she heard (Morgan, 1984, p.27).

3.2.2 The Influence of Clara, Madge and Antie-Grannie on Christie's Female Characters

In *Death on The Nile*, 1937, Agatha Christie created the character of Jacqueline. In the novel, Jacqueline was the fiancée of Simon, who was kind of broke. she had a rich friend called Linnet, and she begged her to find a job for her poor lover Simon. After he was hired, his relationship with Linnet developed into marriage. Here, Jacqueline was feeling jalousie and in shock; she kept stalking and tended to kill Linnet, whom she could not kill at the end. However, Linnet was killed by someone else when they were all in a luxury boat travelling down the Nile River in Egypt. By coincidence, Hercule Poirot, the private detective, was there, and he helped to solve the case. As the investigation progresses, he uncovers a complex love triangle involving Linnet, her former best friend Jacqueline de Bellefort, and Jacqueline's fiancé, Simon Doyle. He also discovers that several other passengers on the boat have a connection to Linnet and a potential motive for her murder.

Agatha Christie had personal experience with romantic relationships and the emotions that come with them. She had experienced a sad love story with Archie Christie, who broke her heart. In addition to that, Christie's experiences with love and heartbreak influenced her writing, as she often incorporated themes of love, betrayal, and emotional

turmoil into her novels. Through Jacqueline's personality, we may make a connection with Agatha's first love experience and Clara's devoted love to her husband, Fredrick.

Jackie, do you mean- "yes, darling, I'm engaged!" "so that's it! I though you were looking particularly alive somehow. You always do, of course, but even more than usual." "that's just what I feel like." "tell me about him." "his name's Simon Doyle. He's big and square and incredibly simple and boyish and utterly adorable! He's poor-got no money. He's you call 'country' all right-but very impoverished country—a younger son and all that. His people come from Devonshire. He loves country and country things. And for the last five years he's been in the city in a stuffy office. And now they're cutting down and he's out of a job. Linnet, I shall die if I can't marry him! I shall die, I shall die ..." "don't be ridiculous, Jackie" "I shall die, I tell you! I'm crazy about him. He's crazy about me. We can't live without each other" (p.5).

Through this passage and based on the dialogue, Jackie seems to be a young woman who is deeply in love and highly emotional. She is described as 'particularly alive' and feeling 'crazy' about Simon. Her language and behaviour suggest that she is highly passionate and impulsive, and she seems to be experiencing intense emotions that are difficult for her to control. And in Agatha Christie book *An Autobiography*, she mentions her parents love relationship, she writes that her mother's love was devoted to her father and that they remained close throughout their lives. Besides that, Agatha notes, her father's death was a devastating blow to her mother, who never fully recovered from the loss, just

as Jacqueline did after she lost Simon, to the point where she thought she would kill Linnet to restore her fiancé.

“As Jacqueline stood on the deck of the riverboat, her gaze fixed on the horizon, a mixture of grief and determination coursed through her veins. The loss of Simon, her beloved fiancé, has shattered her world, leaving her heartbroken and vulnerable, a flicker of resolve ignited within her. She refused to be consumed by despair. Determined to seek justice for Simon’s untimely demise, she vowed to uncover the truth.”(p.108)

After the murder of her fiancé, Jacqueline initially appears emotionally fragile after her loss of Simon Mostyn. She mourns his loss and expressed deep sadness and longing. But, as the plot develops and the mystery is revealed, she demonstrates inner fortitude and shows herself to be a strong and resolute character. Her determination to learn the truth about Simon’s death is fuelled by her grief, which motivates her to take an active role in the inquiry. Her journey highlights her emotional fortitude and tenacity as she develops from a mourning woman to a brave and strong person.

Ariadne Oliver is another fictional character created by Agatha Christie who has appeared in several novels. Ariadne was a successful, enigmatic figure known for her eccentric personality and love of art. She was also described as intelligent and perceptive, and she was close to Hercule Poirot, often assisting him in solving cases. She has also been described as a feisty, quick-to-judgment feminist woman who believes Scotland Yard is best run by women. She appears in six works, *Cards on The Table* (1936), *Mrs McGinty’s Dead* (1952), *Dead Man’s Folly* (1956), *Third Girl* (1966), *Hallowe’en Party* (1969), *Elephants Can Remember* (1972), and her full appearance

without Poirot was in *The Pale Horse* (1961). Despite her eccentricities, Ariadne proves to be a valuable asset in the investigation, and her presence adds a layer of humour and levity to the novel. For instance, in *Dead Man's Folly*, she said about herself.

'Now, don't laugh at my woman's intuition. Haven't I always spotted the murderer right away?'

'Poirot was gallantly silent. Otherwise he might have replied, 'At the fifth attempt, perhaps, and not always then!' (p.17)

Ariadne's personality, writing hobby, and love of art might be more related to Christie herself than to her sister. Madge was a successful woman who was known to have a good sense of humour and enjoy life since her childhood, besides being a serious person at work. Agatha took those characteristics from her sister and became the person everyone knows as an imaginative and joyful person. Agatha was so attracted by her sister's personality that, in the book of Morgan, in her description of Madge, she said:

Madge adored Jokes, pranks and disguise and Agatha awed and delighted by her sister's exploits. She talked with amazed pride of the time when Madge dressed up as a Greek priest to meet someone at the station.... (Morgan, 1984, p.23)

Moving on to the great detective Miss Jane Marple, the famous character created by Agatha Christie, Miss Marple was not just a representation of Christie's own memories and experiences but also a reflection of her grandmother and the British character. Also, she embodied certain values and traits associated with the British people. As her grandmother was an example of a strong woman who stood alone in life, raising her children and being responsible to them, she loved knitting and riddles, as did Miss Marple.

For instance, in the *Tuesday Night Club*, the first appearance of Miss Marple showed her shrewd attention to small things around her, just like Agatha's grandmother. Even if it seems like she is somehow not focusing on what's around her, she was the stereotypical spinster, like in the scene while she was sitting in a room with her nephew and some guests.

... Miss Marple wore a black brocade dress, very much pinched in round the waist. Mechlin lace was arranged in a cascade down the front of the bodice. She had on black lace mittens, and a black lace cap surmounted the piled-up masses of her snowy hair. She was knitting- something white and soft ... Miss Marple gave a brief moment of attention to all these people and returned to her knitting with a gentle smile upon her lips. (p.10)

Through this character, Agatha showed her concern to her grandmother. She said about her:

Miss Marple was not in any way the picture of my grandmother... but one thing she did have in common with her – though a cheerful person, she always expected the worst of everyone and everything, and was with the most frightening accuracy, usually proved right. (Christie, 1977, p.70)

3.3 The Portrayal of Feminist features and Gender Roles in Christie's Novels

Christie's novels are a rich source of analysis for feminism and gender roles, they reflect the social and historical context of her time and her own personal experiences. As

mentioned in many articles, Christie's novels contain female characters that are as independent and ambitious as Agatha Christie herself, who was a successful writer, a divorcee, a traveller, and an archaeologist.

3.3.1 The Feminist Shades: Anne Beddingfild, Women's

Independence and Empowerment

In *The Man in the Brown Suit*, Agatha Christie crafted the character of Anne Beddingfild as both the protagonist and the narrator of the story. As a witness to a man's murder, Anne is determined to uncover the truth behind his death, despite it being ruled a suicide. She is a courageous and adventurous character who, after her father's death, decides to seek employment and embarks on a journey to South Africa. Throughout her journey, Anne is faced with numerous challenges, including encounters with murderers and thieves. However, her persistence in following the clues to solve the mystery demonstrates her resourcefulness and intelligence. Despite her bravery, Anne's impulsiveness sometimes leads her into dangerous situations. Anne Beddingfild is a well-rounded and dynamic character who drives the plot forward with her tenacity and quick thinking.

I listened and contained myself with difficulty. Most of these women were rich. The whole wide beautiful world was theirs to wander in and they deliberately stayed in dirty dull London and talked about milkmen and servants! I think now, looking back, that I was perhaps a shade intolerant. But they were stupid—stupid even at their chosen job: most of them kept the most extraordinarily inadequate and muddled housekeeping accounts. (p.19)

From the given excerpt, Anne Beddingfeld appears to be a character who is ambitious, curious, and adventurous. She yearns for excitement, love, and romance and finds the mundane life in the village unfulfilling. She also seems to be quite critical and intolerant towards other women who are content with their domestic lives and do not share her aspirations. All in all, Anne is depicted as a strong-willed and independent woman who seeks to live a life beyond the conventional gender roles assigned to women in her time.

3.3.2 The Evolving Gender Roles: Tuppence Beresford

Tuppence is a significant character in Christie's works, as she represents the modern woman who seeks equal partnership with her husband. This partnership, which emerged after World War I, challenged traditional gender roles and allowed women to assert themselves in new ways. In contrast to Tommy, who is portrayed as an ordinary man, Tuppence, in *The Secret Adversary*, is portrayed as energetic and feminine, emphasizing her character's agency and strength. Together, their partnership represents a shift away from traditional, heroic masculinity and reflects a more equal approach to detective work, one that values and incorporates traditionally feminine traits. Critics have noted the importance of Tuppence's character in reflecting these social changes and portraying a new, more empowered vision of women in detective fiction.

Sarnelli analyzed Tuppence as the fearless and determined protagonist who challenges traditional gender roles and the limited scope of women's domestic sphere. She firmly believes that motherhood is not the only occupation for women and constantly questions the relationship between the private and public realms. Tuppence's character is a reflection of Christie's preoccupation with female agency during the interwar period. Her restless spirit is evident throughout the series as she finds herself dissatisfied with the mundane routines of domestic life. In her quest for adventure and excitement, Tuppence

shows that professional work and motherhood are not mutually exclusive. She refuses to be defined by her gender or age and constantly strives for self-realization. In the final Beresford novel, *Postern of Fate*, Tuppence's thirst for adventure leads her to discover a long-buried secret that unlocks a new chapter in her life. Her unwavering spirit and determination to break free from the monotony of domesticity serve as an inspiration for women to embrace their aspirations and realize their true potential (Sarnelli, 2003, p.204).

Through these themes, it became clear that Christie wanted to change society's view of women and encourage them to break the chains that limit them to their freedom.

3.4 Christie's Iconic Female characters

Among Christie's many strengths as a writer, her ability to create strong and complex female characters, often defying the stereotypes of her time, from Miss Marple, the shrewd and sharp-witted amateur detective, to Tuppence Beresford, the fearless and adventurous sleuth. Christie's female characters were not only compelling and entertaining, but also trailblazers for the representation of women in literature.

3.4.1 Miss Marple

Agatha Christie's works frequently feature a recurring and beloved character archetype: the spinster, with Miss Marple as a notable example. These unmarried, mature women make appearances in nearly all of Christie's books, but unlike in other literature, they are not burdened with negative connotations. Christie adeptly avoids portraying these women as scorned or mistreated, or as if they are of lesser value because they never married. She instead portrays them as endearing and worthy characters, dispelling the often-held notion of unmarried women as humorously pitiful "old maids".

Miss Marple is an iconic character created by Agatha Christie, an astute elderly detective who has appeared in numerous novels and short stories. She is famous for her

ability to connect seemingly insignificant events that occur in small villages to more significant and serious problems. Through her ability to see patterns and connections, she is able to shed light on these bigger issues and help solve them. It implies that her attention to detail and ability to see the bigger picture are what set her apart as a skilled detective. As she was described in *The Body in the Library*, 1942, “*For Miss Marple had attained fame by her ability to link up trivial village happenings with graver problems in such a way as to throw light upon the latter*” (p.19).

Although Miss Marple is now known for her open-mindedness and worldly sophistication, it is worth noting that this was not always the case. As Ramsey suggests, this aspect of her character has evolved gradually over time, since her introduction in 1910. Miss Marple’s transformation from a more sheltered and conservative individual to a more worldly and accepting one is a testament to her growth as a character, and to the way in which Agatha Christie’s writing has matured and developed over the years (Fritzer, 1979, p.6).

*“There sits an old lady with a sweet, placid, spinsterish face,
and a mind that has plumbed the depths of human iniquity and
taken it all in the day’s work... and where crimes in concerned
she is the goods”* (p.11).

This character represents a significant shift in traditional characters in literature and represents the wise old females that are capable of thinking intelligently. Besides that, Agatha tended to create such characters to be intelligent and skilled female detective, an independent woman who has never married, and a free woman who enjoys her life and controls it as she wants.

3.4.2 Tuppence Beresford

In addition to Miss Marple, Tuppence Beresford is another typical high-spirited girl that appeared in Agatha Christie's works; her first appearance was in *The Secret Adversary*. Tuppence is a fiercely independent woman who has traveled to London to contribute to the war effort. Despite her background as a vicar's daughter, Tuppence is determined to forge her own path and avoid a traditional life.

In *The Secret Adversary*, 1922, Tuppence stands out as a strong example of the "New Women", who defy convention by pursuing a cutting-edge and unusual profession. Her brave and interesting choice to pursue a career that was historically male-dominated and not frequently sought after by women reflects her desire for an interesting and adventurous existence. Tuppence acts as a potent emblem of a shifting social landscape in which women are no longer constrained by traditional gender norms by personifying this progressive spirit.

They were an essentially modern-looking couple as they sat there. Tuppence had no claim to beauty, but there was character and charm in the elfin lines of her little face. (p.6)

Moreover, Tuppence is a dynamic and enthusiastic woman who takes great pleasure in solving mysteries with her partner, Tommy. Tuppence was against the idea of being confined to domestic life and strives for equality in her relationship with Tommy, which is proved in their dialogue in *The Secret Adversary*:

"Of course," resumed Tuppence, "marriage is my best chance. I made up my mind to marry money when I was quite young. Any thinking girl would! I'm not sentimental, you know." She

paused. "Come now, you can't say I'm sentimental," she added sharply.

"Certainly not," agreed Tommy hastily. "No one would ever think of sentiment in connection with you." (p.16)

Tuppence is a determined and strong willed woman who rejects the notion of male superiority; this allows her to break free from the traditional gender roles of detective couples and often takes the lead in their investigations, contributing her own unique set of skills and quick wit. Through their collaboration, they complement each other and work as a team to solve cases, rather than competing for power. Their partnership is a refreshing departure from the norm.

Agatha Christie's Miss Marple and Tuppence Beresford are two iconic female characters who challenged the traditional roles of women in literature. Both women are strong-willed, independent, and not afraid to take on the role of a detective. Miss Marple, the spinster detective, brings her unique perspective to the investigation, while Tuppence, the modern career woman, complements her partner Tommy with her spontaneous and quick-witted nature. Christie's portrayal of these women as equals to their male counterparts was ahead of its time and continues to be an inspiration to women writers today.

Conclusion

To sum up, this analytical chapter focused on selected characters from Agatha Christie's novels and showed how strong these characters were and how they depicted the characteristics of the "New Women" that appeared in the early twentieth century. Through our analysis, we have demonstrated Agatha Christie's own personality as a strong woman,

showcasing her ability to create empowering and independent female characters within her works. These characters serve as a reflection of Christie's own strength and resilience, as well as her recognition of the changing roles and aspirations of women during that era. By portraying these characters, Christie not only entertained her readers but also contributed to the representation and empowerment of women in literature.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

General Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation provides a glimpse into Agatha Christie's biographical background and life experiences, in addition to exploring the detective genre and women as significant participants in this genre in supporting female existence in literary work. Moreover, it investigated the ways in which such influences appeared through her characters.

Upon analysing the characters in Agatha Christie's works, we can arrive at a conclusive insight into the positive impact of society and diverse cultures on her writing. Christie shows the strong and weak women, as well as the intelligent and naive females that she encountered in her surroundings. Her works often depicted such personalities, with a particular focus on the "New Woman" archetype, which emerged after World War I. As women were afforded new forms of freedom and liberty, Agatha's female characters, such as Miss Blacklog, Cynthia, and Anne, embodied strength, intelligence, adventurousness, fearlessness, and a willingness to break traditional gender roles. These portrayals of women in her works reflect the changing roles and expectations of women in her society. Overall, Agatha Christie's writing was heavily shaped by her social experiences and the diverse cultures that she coexisted with.

However, it was difficult to find a direct influence of her family on creating her characters. Her relationship and experiences with her family gave her the chance to build her own personality, and based on that, she created such amazing characters as Ariadne Oliver, Jacqueline, and Miss Marple. Each of these characters took few characteristics from her mother, her sister, and her grandmother. Agatha herself dismissed the idea that her characters are a full representation of her family or people from real life and her

surroundings, but those few found characteristics she may not focus on, are included in her family influence.

Moreover, through the use of the feminist features Agatha tended to show that women deserve a good position in society starting with her literary works through the use of empowerment themes and independence. Agatha passed through a hard life that helped her stand up again as a strong woman, especially after the betrayal of her husband and the death of her father at an early age, where she built a strong personality to face her society and the difficulties in her life. She wanted to create characters that passed through the same journey and got up again stronger and more capable to face life's difficulties.

One challenge encountered in this research is the limited availability of sources that provide valuable information and analysis about each female member of her family. Despite examining various biographical books, including her autobiography, it became clear that the book mainly focused on her adventures, events, and professional life rather than providing detailed insights into her family relationships. This limitation restricted the analysis of how her female family members influenced her literary creations and character development. As a result, the research had to rely on the available sources to gain a better understanding of how Agatha Christie portrayed female characters in her work in relation to her family.

Finally, by accomplishing the work, this research aimed to shed light on Agatha Christie's work in general and her characters in specific, and whether they are fully influenced by her environment or not. Yet, what is considerably more significant is the benefit from this research; in fact, we have learned what makes Agatha Christie's works special and attract millions of readers by using such characters. Future studies can build upon these findings by exploring additional sources and incorporating diverse perspectives

about her family's influence to further enrich our understanding of Christie's contribution to the field.

This research expands the current knowledge of Agatha Christie's work and provides a foundation for future studies to explore further the complexities of her writing and its relevance in the literary and feminist context.

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الأطروحة إلى استكشاف تأثير البيئة الاجتماعية لأغانا كريستي على تصويرها للشخصيات النسائية القوية. وقد استُخدمت في هذه الدراسة قراءة دقيقة لشخصياتها النسائية الأيقونية وغير الأيقونية على حد سواء. ويكشف هذا الأخير الأثر الكبير لمجتمع كريستي على تطور شخصيتها، ولا سيما فيما يتعلق بتمكين المرأة واستقلالها. وكان لأفراد أسرتها الإناث تأثير على شخصيتها، مما جعلها امرأة قوية. وهكذا فإن شخصيتها، ككاتبة، تعكس جوانب من نفسها، بما في ذلك قيمها ومعتقداتها. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، تدمج كريستي ببراعة مفهوم "المرأة الجديدة"، وتقدم لمحة عن الوضع المثالي للمرأة في أعمالها الأدبية. وبتصوير شخصيات نسائية تتحدى توقعات المجتمع وتحتضن وكالاتها، حاولت تسليط الضوء على أهمية المرأة في اصطلاحها بأدوار مختلفة. وتبين كريستي، من خلال رواياتها، أهمية المرأة بوصفها شخصية محورية، وتحدي الأدوار التقليدية للجنسين، والدعوة إلى مشاركتها النشطة في المجتمع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أغانا كريستي، الوسط الاجتماعي، الشخصيات النسائية القوية، روايات بوليسية، المرأة الجديدة، الأدوار التقليدية.

Résumé

Cette thèse vise à explorer l'influence de l'environnement social d'Agatha Christie sur sa représentation de personnages féminins forts. Incorporant des perspectives biographiques et féministes, une lecture approfondie de ses personnages féminins emblématiques et non-iconiques a été utilisée dans cette étude. Ce dernier révèle l'impact significatif de la société de Christie sur le développement de son caractère, en particulier en ce qui concerne l'autonomisation et l'indépendance des femmes. Ses membres de la famille féminine ont eu un impact sur sa personnalité, en la rendant une femme puissante. Ainsi, en tant qu'écrivain, ses personnages reflètent des aspects d'elle-même, y compris ses propres valeurs et croyances. En outre, Christie intègre habilement le concept de «Nouvelle Femme», offrant un aperçu de la position idéalisée des femmes dans ses œuvres littéraires. En décrivant des personnages féminins qui défient les attentes de la société et embrassent leur agence, elle a essayé de mettre en évidence l'importance des femmes dans leurs rôles. Par ses récits, Christie démontre l'importance des femmes en tant que personnalités centrales, défiant les rôles traditionnels de genre et plaidant pour leur participation active à la société.

Mots clés : Agatha Christie, environnement social, personnages féminins forts, romans de détective, nouvelle femme, rôles de genre.